Humour

Lovely kitchen, my darling

We both worked: she with her mouth, issuing instructions, and I through my limbs, putting the kitchen in an orderly state. **by D.P. Sabharwal**

Though I have only one, yet I can make this bold statement with quite a bit of certainty: "Most wives do not like the presence of their husbands in the kitchen."

However, what I cannot say with an equal amount of certainty is the reason for this. It could either be to prevent him from having a scrutinizing look at the disorganized state of the kitchen or due to fear of his proving to be a better cook than herself.

There could also be some other secretive reason which wives have taken great care to hide and have been quite successful in doing so (a remarkable achievement on their part in that case!).

Well, whatever it may be, I really do not know how to prove these points, if asked to do so in a court of law for contempt of housewives.

All the same, authenticity of these could be judged and gauged from the fact that in the charter of demands, prepared by the fairer sex during the International Year of Women, there was no place for the demand that "husbands should assist their wives in the kitchen."

"Household runs on two rails, one being the husband and the other the wife," so was I informed by elders at the time of my marriage.

"That is why they never meet at a common point in their life," I had wanted to say, but did not do so because of respect for the elders at that time.

And now, after a decade of married life, I do not have the courage to do so. Thus, the train of married life is carrying on with cooperation from my side and directions from her! It is basically because I am a lover of peace, in particular at home, and she is an ardent advocate of women's lib and rights.

Though we have well-defined and clearly-laid-down duties and responsibilities, yet like a truly loving and made-for-each-other couple, we do help each other.

She helps me in saving time from reading newspapers, magazines and, in fact, anything in print, by removing and hiding them even God does not know where!

Another field where she renders me help is to keep me from getting bored. Quite often, she thrusts children along with their books and note-books on to my lap to assist them in doing their homework.

Not only that, she also assists me in developing a good character. She instigates and forces me to be nice and decent enough to return her obligations. Thus, in turn, I help her in what she calls dignified jobs.

I have to set up the dining table. Cleaning it up after the meals, of course, goes with it! I have also to prepare the morning bed-tea. This, according to her, is in my own interest because a good cup of tea, first thing in the morning, would keep me cheerful throughout the day.

Now, for these jobs, I am not allowed to enter the kitchen. For the first one, I have to make use of the service-window, which, thank God, saves me a lot of harassment because, otherwise, I would be required to say, once in a while, a few words of appreciation despite the messy state of the kitchen.

And for the second job, I have an electric kettle and rest of the paraphernalia in the bedroom itself.

Thus, under such clearly-laid-down conditions and strictly-enforced restriction, I was really surprised when, on a Sunday morning, my son came up to me and said, "Mama wants you in the kitchen in the working dress."

While relaxing, I normally do not like to be disturbed. But then, it was a different situation on two counts. Firstly, it was a call from her which could not be ignored! Secondly, it had something to do with the kitchen, my week point, thus worth listening to.

Before going to the kitchen, I pondered over these two aspects. Well,

Quite often she thrusts the children on me...



to see. The prestige of our army has suffered a serious blow. Instead of just brushing aside the Tamil resistance, it has taken Indian army 15 days to capture a small town.

In this war, our casualties have been very high. The officer-men ratio in the casualty figures was higher than in any previous war. This shows the kind of operations Indian soldiers had to undertake, where officers were forced to lead all the time. Any other force undertaking a similar operation would have razed the town to the ground rather than risked a single casualty to its men. Here the life of Tamils seems to be more important than that of trained Indian soldiers.

Apart from the misery caused to our soldiers, we have lost a large number of trained officers, JCO's and other ranks. In one operation we lost all the 80 para-commandos air-dropped, and also the men of the rescue mission, undertaken on foot, without the fulfilment of the objective. Whether it was a tactical blunder on the part of senior military officers or limitations imposed on them by a political authority, the Indian Army was poorer by over 150 highly trained soldiers.

Ridiculous argument

To say that Indian army had to go in, otherwise Pakistani army would have gone there, is ridiculous in the extreme. If Pakistani army had been called, the Sri Lankan Government would have paid for it. The pay and rations of men, the ammunition fired by them and the petrol and diesel consumed by their vehicles would have been charged from the Sri Lankans. Our army, on the other hand, is doing all the dirty work free of cost!

Not only are we doing it free of cost, but at maximum human cost to ourselves. We have, in addition, undertaken to repair all the damage caused to their buildings. We cannot build houses for our own homeless, but we are going to repair an entire city in Sri Lanka! Our people may or may not get food or medical aid, but we have enough to spare for the Tamil refugees, who may be harbouring LTTE insurgents amongst them.

Some national interest the Indian Prime Minister is looking after! □□

MOUNTAINS OUT OF MOLEHILLS

Most of the misunderstandings in the family stem out of trifles. Eliminate the trivial irritants and life flows smoothly.

by I.M. Soni

I know a couple who should by every standard of compatibility be considered made for each other. But there are occasional bouts of friction and temper between them, which result in misery. Often these result in both of them fencing off vital areas of communication.

Most of their misunderstandings stem from trifles. Their troubles can be traced to their inability to carefully watch each other and mark the differences in habit.

I myself am no exception. I want my newspaper to be neatly folded and returned to me if someone else in the family uses it first. It irritates me if a member of the family puts away all the pages in disorder, for I have to spend 10 minutes in putting it in order before I can begin reading it.

Another irritant is my family members' inability to put shoes, sandals and chappals at a fixed place. Everything in its place and a place for everything—is none of their virtues. My wife also knits her eyebrows if our children leave the cupboard or drawers open after they have taken something out of them.

Many irritants of daily life could be eliminated and life could flow much more evenly for people if they disciplined themselves to avoid doing the many trivial things that annoy their spouses and others in the family.

I have taken an inventory of what I think are irritants in the family life. The readers can make their own list and try to smoothen the flow of their life.

- Keep the newspaper neatly in order, page-wise, so that others may read it without difficulty.
- Do not leave the cupboard open. Nor leave the drawers unshut.
- Do not leave the oil bottle uncaped. Nor leave the toothpaste tube uncapped. Do not squeeze it from the top.
- Do not leave the shaving kit unwashed in the bathroom for your wife to do it. Nor leave razor blades lying around in the house.
- Do not leave the water tap open at night so that someone has to get up to close it when the noise of the running water causes headache.
- After taking out a bottle of water from the fridge, always replace it and if it is empty, fill it first and then put it back.
- Always take the soiled dishes to the sink without depending on any other member of the family to do it for you.
- Do not leave an empty cup or glass of tea on the floor in the room, especially the drawing-room, lest someone should stumble against it, breaking it or spoiling the covering of the floor.
- If a guest comes to the house, do not leave the ashtray to be emptied and washed by your wife. Do it yourself immediately after the guest departs.
- Do not put wet glasses or cups or other pieces of crockery on tables where these can leave stains and cause unnecessary strain on family members.
- After locking a door, place the key at a specific place and inform others in the house about its location.
- Close the door softly so that no one in the family is disturbed.
- Switch off lights every time you go out of the house. Do the same with fans, coolers, etc, avoiding wastage of power.

Compliance with this or a similar list, drawn by your own self, may not ensure a constant flow of happiness in the family, but certainly it will lessen the chances of flashes of temper which blight the smoothness of the family life in general.

R.L. Stevenson says, "Marriage is a long conversation, chequered by disputes." Surely, there are ways to lessen, if not eliminate, disputes. □□

r household is established on a mocratic pattern. My position is hat of the head of the family, whereas she is the boss,—a relationship similar to the equation prevailing between the President and the Prime Minister of our country!

Thus, to expect a "request" from her would have been something like a wish to land on the moon. On the contrary, I was happy that I was not "ordered" to join her within such and such time.

The second point, which made me think, was the working dress and the kitchen angle. On this my heart missed a beat. This aspect of the message gave me visions of likely chances of showing off my talents as a cook, and I was elated.

I thought, maybe, she is convinced that if I could give her good tea, day-in and day-out, for years together, I could perhaps be entrusted with something more as regards kitchen cooking work. After all, she would be the gainer, I reasoned.

My happy state of mind, however, lasted only for a short distance—up to the kitchen door.

There she was, standing with her hands on the hip, her *salwar* tucked up, shirt tied at the waist, her long hair converted into a *joora* instead of a normal plait, a determined look on her face and shine in the eyes.

Till then, I had not seen Ma Kali or Durga Mata in their demon-killing pose. But, believe me, at that time she made me feel as if I were seeing one of the two goddesses.

For a change, understanding and sensing well in time that I was heading for a shock, she was quick to say, "Hey, why are you turning pale? Don't worry. I have no plans to have 'karate' with you."

"But the way you are..." I could not complete the sentence. I was too dazed.

"Oh that," she burst out laughing. When she stopped, she pinched me on the cheek and asked politely, "Did I frighten you, dear?"

"Not exactly. But I was almost shocked to see you in this outfit," I said regaining my colour and courage.

"But you have not asked me as to what I am planning to do?"

"You will tell me yourself," I said, "won't you?"

"You are learning to know me, darling! I am really happy at that. Now you see there is so much work in the kitchen. I cannot cope up with it alone. And you have offered your help many times in the past. So, I thought of letting you in the kitchen today."

"So my earlier thoughts were right," so thinking, I felt happy. At the same time, fearing that she might change her mind, I said, "I am always available to help you, Kanu dear. Tell me what can I do for you?"

"I knew, I could count on you, darling. You see I have decided to clean and arrange the kitchen today. It has really been in bad shape. You have been telling me that. And I know that in this type of work, you are definitely more experienced than I. So I....."

I was crestfallen. Somehow, I managed to utter, "Sorry, Madam, I cannot do that type of work."

"Look, darling, do not disappoint me. In any case, I am not asking you to clean and wipe these *dabbas* and boxes. All you have to do is go up there on the loft to sort out and arrange the muck there," said Kanu, pointing to the small folding ladder, resting on the so-called loft, which was full of, God alone knew, what all!

"I cannot climb there," I said,



As soon as I reached the loft, she removed the ladder.

Our household is established on a democratic pattern. My position is that of the head of the family, whereas she is the boss—a relationship similar to the equation prevailing between the President and the Prime Minister of our country!

offering a semblance of resistance.

"Come on, my dearest darling," she said emphasising a particular word which appeared to convey a meaning to me as if she had many darlings but I was the dearest amongst them!

Adding further, she said, "Now, don't be modest. I know you were really a good athlete before marriage. In the NCC also, you were an under-officer.

"Moreover, you have done basic mountaineering course as well."

Trying to score her point and win me over, she suddenly remembered all my virtues.

Seeing a perplexed look on my face, she added, "You see I could have done it myself, but I am afraid of climbing that high."

"Madam, if you can climb on my head every now and then without any support and without an iota of fear and get on my nerves for no rhyme or reason, how can you be afraid of climbing anywhere?

"Moreover, the use of a ladder would broaden your horizon," I wanted to tell her. But then it was wishful thinking, for, which intelligent person would like to arouse a sleeping tigress?

Feeling helpless and seeing no way out of the muck in which I had landed myself, I put my foot on the ladder and started climbing.

Before I could make room for myself on the loft, she removed the ladder and, like a typical autocratic boss, said, "I will put it back as soon as you finish your work."

So long as I was up there, she was absconding from the kitchen. Due to heat, dust and dirt my throat went dry. All my limbs were arched up and paining due to the crouching position I had been having over there.

I badly wanted to get down. As I was about to call her, the door bell rang. From the faint voices and soft giggles, I could make out that it was Renu, a friend of hers and our next-door neighbour.

Knowing one of her qualities that she gets stuck like a leech, I started praying for her early departure.

After waiting hopefully and patiently for what appeared to be a decade, I could not hold myself any longer. I started calling my wife, but it all turned out to be a futile effort. She did not turn up.

I had a feeling that Kanu did hear me but ignored my calls. Why she did so, could be explained from 2 angles. Either she had a score to settle with me (after all, such things do happen between loving husbands and wives!) or she fell in love with my mercy-toned calls.

Whatever it was, the fact remained that I was up there and did not know what to do. Frankly speaking, I did think of jumping down—after all, it was only about 10 feet above the floor.

The prospect of getting hurt and subsequently being attended to, while lying in bed, was also tempting and fascinating. But the scene that she would have created, with me lying injured on the floor, dampened my spirit.

At that time, I was not afraid of the injury, but, let me admit, I was afraid of her sweet tongue, and scared of the honey-coated words of advice and wisdom that she would have showered on me! Thus, abandoning the idea of jumping, I stopped issuing mercy-calls. Instead, I intensified praying.

I do not recollect whether it was frustration, anger or an aching body that compelled me to yell for her. Even the fear, that the children might see their brave and hero-like papa in the most comic situation, did not daunt me.

Had I known that the response would be so fast, I would have resorted to it much earlier. She virtually came running with the ladder and an apologetic (or was it teasing!) smile on her face and said:

"Why did you not call me earlier, darling? I had been wondering all along as to what was holding you up there. By the by, have you finished, darling?

Probably, for the first time since marriage, I was not listening to what she was saying. Jumping from halfway through the ladder, I ran for the toilet.

As if I had not had enough already, I received yet another dose. I heard Renu tell her, "Kanu, why don't you teach your husband to be as tidy as you are in keeping and maintaining the house."

I presume she had followed Kanu to the kitchen and was referring to the pile of empty paper-bags and cardboard boxes I had thrown on the kitchen-floor before bolting for the bathroom.

After Renu left, she came to me. Holding my hand, she said, "Come dear, let us go to the kitchen and finish the work."

"I have finished my work and I presume the kitchen is, once again, out of bounds for me," I said, trying to kill the issue. But I was mistaken, for my words boomeranged on me.

"Who gave you that notion, darling? I never said so. And to prove you wrong, I am going to take you to the kitchen," saying so, she virtually dragged me there.

What followed was a nightmare. We both worked and worked. She, through her mouth, issuing instructions and I, through my limbs, putting the kitchen back to an orderly state. At the end of the day, I did not know what was paining more, body or the eardrums!

That was the day when I realized and understood the real meaning of Voltaire's saying, "Is there anyone so wise as to learn by the experiences of others?" Then I saw my folly.

Friends and relatives of my sex sailing in similar boats, had been telling me their experiences and had been advising me not to interfere in the Lady of the House's affairs.

A few months after the incident, when the kitchen went back to the initial state, she called me there and wanted my opinion. Well, I had learnt from my mistake and had experience (a euphemistic name).

"It is looking perfectly fine and in order," was my only answer.

Ever since, any mention of the kitchen by her anywhere, activates my brain-cells at a supersonic speed and, within a micro-second, my lips utter in a most profound, respectful and humble manner:

"Your kitchen is lovely, my darling." □□

Be wiser than other people if you can, but do not tell them so.

An injury is much sooner forgotten than an insult.

Take the tone of the company you are in.

(Earl of Chesterfield, 1694—1773)