The young urban Indian man is work in progress. Stand by, he will need some space.

Photograph: NARENDRA BISHT; Model: JOGI / GLITZ MODELLING

by **Shefalee Vasudev**

IF Saif Ali Khan, the two male Bachchans, eleven cricketers, one Mr India, a clutch of fashion designers and top ten billionaires on a business magazine's annual list are our idea of urban manhood, it's time to challenge the story. Publicity, the tyrannous image manager of our everyday fascinations, is the villain of this piece. To cross its neon-lit path and manufacture consent (as Noam Chomsky would say) for the Beta Male may not be easy. Whether we learn this in school or in the newsroom, one of the criteria of what constitutes a writeable idea is significance. Significance which denotes bigness, muchness or success. So in news, ten deaths are more important than one; Shahrukh Khan is more important than P. Chidambaram; the booze sponsor of a party is more important than the celebration itself. And who cares about NGO workers in any case.

So caught up is ambitious urban India with publicity-powered personalities and their bubble reputations that it forgets to clap for small but lasting stories. In the media, few of us say these things fearing no one will hear them. We are obsessed with variations of the Alpha male and his numerous conquests. They are hothouse plants that flower only in the limelight by hanging out in the open their gigantic engagement rings, marriages, divorces, holidays, charities and live-in relationships.

But who says a man must be on the cover of a magazine or on some A-list for being the most sexy, most divorced, most rich, most kissed or kissable to be a part of the new Indian manhood debate? What about the rest—Tom, Daniyal and Hari, the regular guys? The miserly neighbour with a silly grin. The cute piano tutor with an old-style moustache. The friend of friend whose curtains have oil stains on them. Someone who has never shopped for sex at Las Vegas, for suits at Browns, owned an Armani watch or handled a cigar. Whose girlfriend is not an Oxford-returned, modern, conscious Bharatiya patriot. Who doesn't care that sushi must be eaten with wasabi and soya sauce with a pair of chopsticks. Who is intelligent, suave, sexy, tall, committed and well placed but doesn't send out press releases on every bracelet he gifts his wife.

Who says a man must be on some A-list to be part of the new Indian manhood debate?

Let's make way for the Beta Male. Not as a runner-up to the Alpha Male but as the real man, the young urban Indian with ambition and passion but without a publicity manager. Work in progress. A Maoist, a jholawalla, a feminist, a failed actor, a badly dressed guy, an unshaven nobody who just earns enough to keep the homefires burning. A man who is meaningful but not mighty. Who can bake a cake and eat it too. Actor Om Puri recently said that when he first came to Bombay, he had no takers as he looked like nothing: neither a hero, a villain nor even a comedian. That's our Beta guy.

The most powerful insights come from small stories. Here are some in these pages. A Refusenik—not a draft dodger—but someone who says no to Blackberry and Twitter and no to dyeing his hair or shaving his chest; men who cry in public; villains who have lost their plot in cinema because the hero has become the very bad guy; middle-class men who buy cheap handycams to star in their own porn films; a male Bharatanatyam dancer who has eroticised maleness but put off the macho switch in his brain forever; the ponderings of a queer writer seeking a world beyond gay parties; the best bikini babes of one of India's top fashion photographers; and the unedited pet hates of an adman.

Is the Beta Male then our new leading man? Well, the idea is to shift the gaze away from the hero and see if supporting actors can open up possibilities of thought, humour, wonder and debate that leading men cannot. A hero is limited by the pressure of always getting it right and so becomes predictable, anti-risk, even unimaginative with his know-it-all sense of external control. But the Beta Male as work in progress isn't stressed out about goofing up. If he falls, he picks himself up and runs again. What do we want? Men who are at it to survive and thrive or men at illusionary destinations of success who give TV bites on the philosophy of a Rs 3 crore diamond ring?

The young Indian Beta Male, self-centred, teary-eyed, a little too blase, a little bit of a braggart is nevertheless the son, the moon and the star in his own life.

Let's at least give him the best debut of the year award. ◘

OUTLOOK MOODS SEX SURVEY

I, Me, Mine

Because the young, urban male has finally learnt how to play

THE findings of the *Outlook*-Moods Opinion Poll 2009 on the sexual mindsets of urban Indian men in the 24-34 years age group have scored a goal. The word 'change', optimistically tossed around in the playground of sex surveys for years, is now officially the captain of the game. Acceptance of male-female equality has coupled with the male ego to give birth to the Beta Male. Not the dominating, growling, impatient bedroom partner but a clever young man, quickly aroused and usually satiated. He now understands that sex, like anger, politics or the handling of a TV remote control needs some strategy, some fair play. When needed, he can be the indulgent son, the amused boyfriend, the tolerant spouse, the experimental lover.

If this new 'men'tality sounds like an underrated aside of master strategist Lord Krishna, then, well, you are beginning to get the picture. He is a player, not a loser. He likes his women "Western with Indian values", and while monogamous, intimate relationships fuel him most, he is open to one-night stands too. His girlfriends should be emotionally and financially independent, but they shouldn't be impatient about dropping their panties. He will sleep with his female boss for promotions but is still obsessed with his woman's virginity. In this Bond Age, our protagonist is having fun in a three-some fantasy titled I, Me, Mine.

(Survey conducted by MDRA in Gurgaon, Chandigarh, Lucknow, Ahmedabad, Patna, Nagpur, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Kochi from November 14 to 23. Sample size: 1,088 adult males in 24-34 age group. Figures have been rounded off, so percentages may not add up to 100.)

If given a chance, for which of the following reasons would you sleep with a female boss?

33 Professional gains (promotion or better salary etc)
14 Feeling of power
31 Just for fun
4 Show off your influence among peers
18 Won't sleep with a female boss

What do you think of women who quickly agree to sex for pleasure without hang-ups?

22 I prefer those who show some restraint
22 I see them as having low character
21 I get turned on by them
12 I'm not turned on by such women
21 They want to satisfy themselves

All figures in percentage

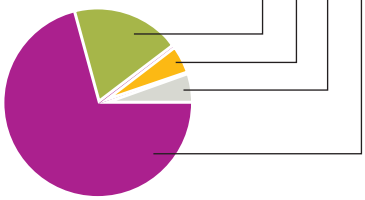
50%

men in Nagpur wear the latest fashion, 25% prefer one-night stands, 92% insist on contraceptives during sex and 82% believe free communication on sexual issues indicates a perfect sexual relationship.

Graphics by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

What kind of sexual relationships do you look forward most to?

71 Monogamous and intimate
19 One-night stands
5 Orgies
5 Partner-swapping



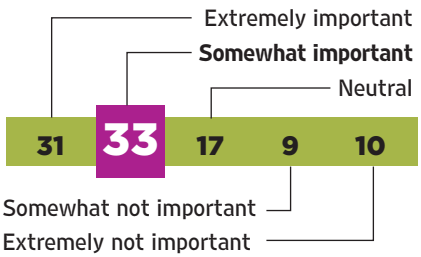
What do you think women find most attractive in men?

24 Money and power
18 Good height and physique
16 Confidence, communication abilities
7 Machismo
9 Polite behaviour
15 Successful career
5 Intelligence
7 Good sense of humour

What kind of women do you find sexually most attractive?

59 Modern but with Indian values
26 Westernised and independent attitude
16 Conservative with Indian traditions

How important is oral sex to you during an encounter?



NARENDRA BISHT

32%

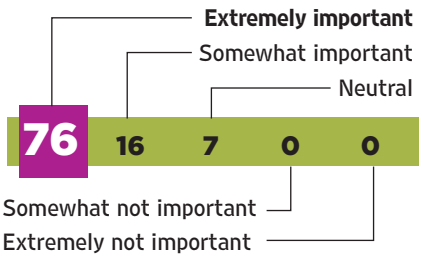
Lucknow men said they were sexually attracted to Westernised women with an independent attitude.

All figures in percentage

What is a perfect sexual relationship? (multiple response)

64 Both partners satisfying each other
35 Frequent sex
35 Experimentation, sexual creativity
42 Freely communicating on sex

How important is it to satisfy your sexual partner?



What differences do you perceive between women of your generation and of one generation ago?

29 **Now, girls are independent and have few emotional problems**

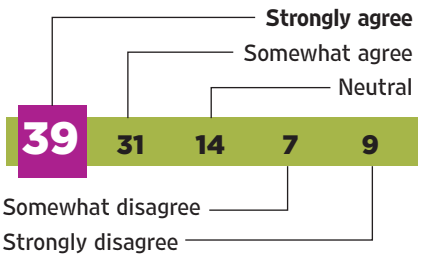
26 Now, girls are aggressive, demanding

23 Now, they are sexually very open and initiate sex

9 Now, girls think they know everything, that's a big turn-off for me

12 All of the above

Do you agree that a woman's virginity has nothing to do with a sexual relationship and it is time we stopped making a big deal out of it?



What is the most important reason for masturbating?

53 **The absence of a sexual partner**

9 Does not require as much physical effort as sex

5 Don't find partner attractive anymore

5 Partner not sexually interested

13 Safer than having paid sex

16 Helps to relieve stress

Do you think men and women should have the same sexual rights and freedom?

60 **Yes, they should have equal sexual freedom**

19 No, we can never be equal and women should remember this

10 Men should have more freedom

11 Depends on the kind of woman she is

CORBIS

37%

Chandigarh men and 26% from Patna said they masturbated because it helped them relieve stress!

All figures in percentage

What do you most fantasise about when having sex with your partner?

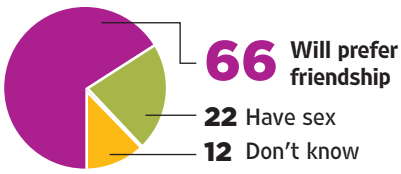
54 **I don't fantasise about anything during sex**

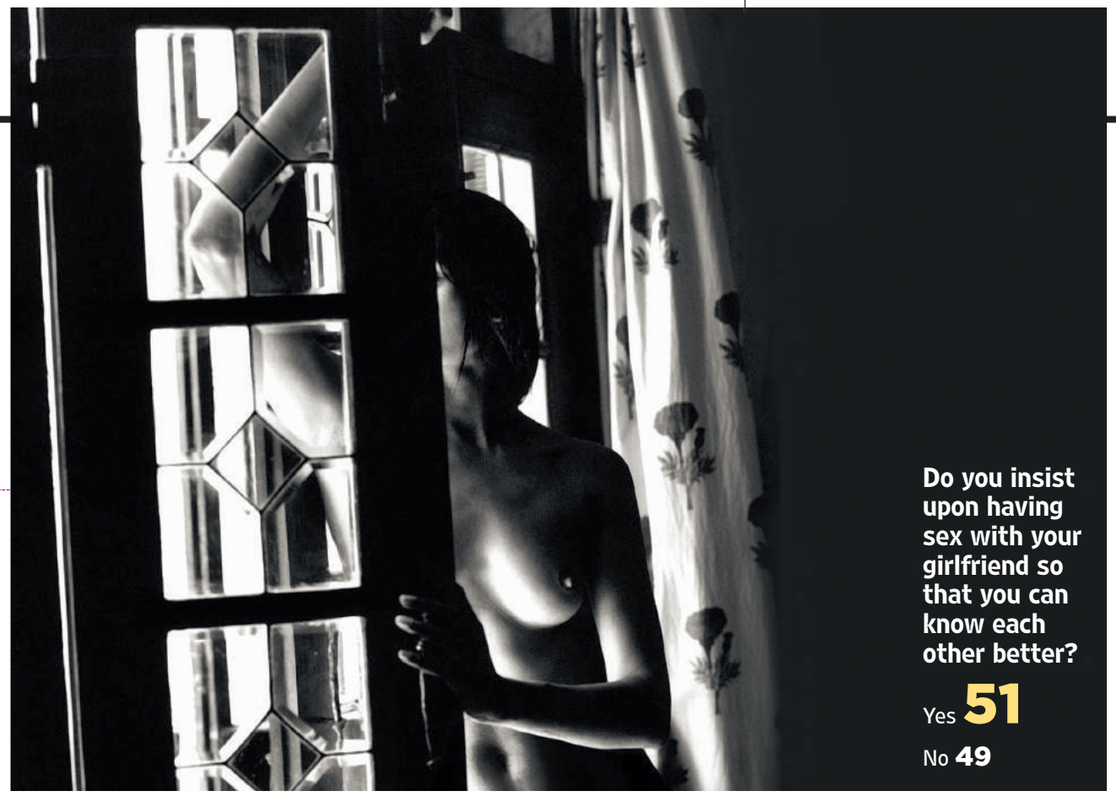
14 About any other woman

6 About group sex or such kinky scenario

26 I try to remember better sexual encounters with my partner

If you had a chance to have sex with a woman but at the cost of losing the friendship of a good friend, would you?





What do you do to have an interesting sexual life?

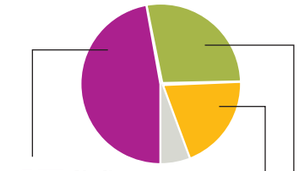
58 **Try different role-plays and positions with the same partner**

17 Try to have multiple partners

5 Use sex toys

20 Change locations

Can a marriage survive even if there is unsatisfactory sex between the couple?



47 **No it cannot**

27 Yes, it can

20 If other adjustments are good, it does not matter

5 Don't know/Can't say

What would you do to improve sexual performance?

62 **Maintain physical fitness**

10 Take sexual performance pills

20 Improve knowledge about my partner's sexual preferences

8 Reading books/audio/visuals for performance tips

Which factor in your girlfriend/wife turns you off?

28 **Extreme possessiveness**

16 Financial independence

16 Wearing revealing clothes

16 Emotional cribbing and crying

10 Excessive aggression

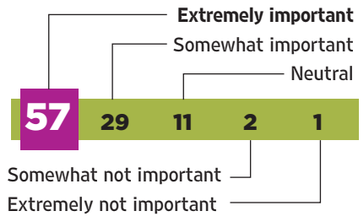
15 Interference in my life and nagging

87%

Bangalore men admitted to having had paid sex at least 1-2 times whereas the 10-city average was only 27 per cent!

All figures in percentage

Rate the importance of sex in your life



Which physical characteristic in women attracts you most?

38 **Shapely figure**

31 Prominent breasts

11 Prominent butt

12 Fair skin

3 Navel

5 Big eyes

Do you insist upon having sex with your girlfriend so that you can know each other better?

Yes **51**

No **49**

61%

of Bangalore men admitted to premarital sex, having 1-2 partners before marriage.

METHODOLOGY

The *Outlook*-Moods Sex Survey was done by Marketing and Development Research Associates (MDRA). A randomly chosen sample of total 1,088 adult males in the age group of 24–34 years were surveyed in ten Indian cities—Gurgaon, Chandigarh, Lucknow, Ahmedabad, Patna, Nagpur, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Kochi.

A structured questionnaire was administered to the respondents by trained investigators of MDRA in a one-to-one interview. The field survey was conducted between November 14 and November 23, 2009. The socio-economic class of the sample size was SEC A1, A2 and B1. A total number of 713 men surveyed lived in nuclear families while 375 belonged to joint families. Out of these 532 were married and living with spouse; 41 were married but living without spouse. A total number of 193 were unmarried but in a committed relationship whereas 322 were neither married nor in a committed relationship.

All images used for representation purposes only, and have no connection with the Outlook-Moods sex survey or its findings.

"I'VE SAVED SO MANY MARR IAGES PRESCRIBING VIAGRA"

Photograph by APOORVA SALKADE

WHEN it comes to sex (and what else can it come to?), you could call ***Dr Prakash Kothari*** *an early bloomer. He set up India's first department of sexual medicine at Mumbai's* KEM *Hospital, and has been a sexologist for 36 years. That's more than the upper age of the Indian men studied in our sex survey. Prakashbhai is an enthusiastic conversationalist. Anecdotal, straight-faced funny but surprisingly still interested in answering good old boring questions. Every interview with him is like the familiar sexual act. Foreplay, wham bam, thank you doctor etc. This may be no different, he warns. "People have been asking me the same questions for years," he says affably. His answers are now salted with words like "it's changing", but the essential rhythm remains the same. "For men, sex is an indoor sport and its success is based on performance and victory," he asserts. Besides being a front-row viewer of the fallouts of this sport—especially when the score is not love all—he has, for the last 30 years been a collector of erotica. It began 30 years back when Mulk Raj Anand gifted him some 18th-century Kangra miniatures. His book* Erotica, The Art of Loving, *to be released later this month, reproduces this rare collection of personal letters, sculptures, objets d'art, paintings, stamps and knick-knacks from all the world. "These pieces have helped me to understand the passions that drive men and women to experience the heights of their sexuality and express who they are," writes Dr Kothari. Here, he talks to* **Shefalee Vasudev** *about male sexuality—history, hearsay and hype.*

What does a sexologist actually do for a living?

A sexologist can be a professionally skilled individual or he could be an explosive quack! As a clinical consultant in sexual health, dealing with sexual dysfunctions is my area of expertise. This includes disorders of sexual desire, erectile dysfunctions and orgasmic dysfunctions in men and disorders of lubrication and orgasm in women.

Do you really believe that people are honest in sex surveys?

No, I don't think so. A lot of people find it difficult to be honest not only because of the kind of questions asked but also because of the way they are asked.

What do men share most with you? Conflicts in sex or inabilities?

Essentially, inabilities. Inability to perform.

Men are known to brag about sexual conquests they have never had. Is it true that they turn their fantasies into boastfulness?

You mean men would rather be labelled as rapists than impotent? Yes, it is true to some extent. However, most of the time couples are referred to me as clients. So even if the man is boasting, I have the objective evidence from the other partner.

It is said that out of passion, commitment and intimacy, the three basic principles of great sex, even if two are active at a moment, it is fine for men. Is that true?

Yes.

Has your practice revealed to you what love means to men? And what sex means to them?

It appears that most men feel they are in love when they are passionate about sex or when they want someone physically. Sex for most men is like an indoor sport where performance and victory play a major role, not mutual satisfaction.

What do men think about sharing women? Do young urban men toler-

ARTIFACTS FROM THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF DR KOTHARI

"These pieces have helped me understand the passions that drive men and women to experience the heights of sexuality and express who they are."

ate emotional infidelity? Or can they handle physical disloyalty better?
Whether men or women, sharing partners can lead to insane jealousy if they're emotionally involved with each other. This is true even for emotional infidelity. However, those who are only seeking physical gratification don't feel jealous.

Do straight men have gay fantasies?
Only those who have bisexual traits.

There seems to be a continuing obsession with virginity among Indian men. Does it come up as a recurrent subject in your practice?
Yes. People fly in from abroad to confirm the virginity of their wives if they didn't bleed during the first attempt at sexual intercourse. Virginity still remains a big issue over a small tissue.

Men are historically known to be more sexually conservative than women. In bedrooms, they play the game of dominance if it is the wife and that of the playboy if it is the girlfriend. Is that changing?
This pattern is changing because most women in urban areas are now aware that sex is their basic human right and it needs to be respected.

Can men really keep up the vow of celibacy or is it mostly a sham?
An average human being is incapable of celibacy, a permanent or even an extended abstinence. People only claim that they observe celibacy. But the true meaning of brahmacharya is a 'soul in search of'. According to Jains (except sadhus), marriage is, in fact, the first step towards brahmacharya.

What's the biggest sexual letdown for a man? An adulterous partner, the inability to perform in bed, impotence? Or something else?
Impotence, the inability to attain or maintain an erection of adequate quality and thus not being able to perform is the biggest letdown for a male.

Do men need women or do they just want them?
That depends on how the man bonds with a woman. Need will be dominant if there is love and want will be dominant if there is only lust.

Accounts of sex workers reveal that quite a few men pay for sex where they want to enact roles of victims; they like to be dominated and beaten up. Does this hold true even among young Indian men?
There is a very small segment whose preference lies in this kind of sexual practice.

Do men derive emotional fulfilment from sex?
For most men, physical fulfilment can be psychologically fulfilling, so in that sense, yes.

That terrible cliche: "men are only after one thing." Is it true?
Yes! Every man's goal is to seek ultimate pleasure so that "one thing" will enable him to experience the zenith of ecstasy. However, a man has the capability of turning that terrible truism into a terrific experience by turning mechanical sex into holistic lovemaking. Feasting on foreplay, discussing their partners' likes, dislikes and erogenous zones, respecting their partner in bed.

Such a big deal is made about female orgasms. But do men have an orgasm every time they have sex?
No, of course not! Ten per cent of men have never experienced an orgasm in their conscious stage. Sleep emissions are like salivating, they cannot be counted as orgasms.

Is Viagra really the wonder drug it is made out to be?
It is even better. It is one of the most commonly used drugs and I must have saved many marriages by prescribing it. If someone has the desire, he should have the means to do something about it. The desi Viagra costs just Rs 10-15 for one tablet—cheap and best. ◘

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