

Living

FAMILY MATTERS

Hankering after the “privacy” that all those who aren’t joint family fans clamour for, is all very well. But the rewards of a big fat extended family are often something else!

BY MEHER MARFATIA



I just changed my mind. It was another theme I’d planned for this column. The Editor’s column, titled *Gher ma ketla dustbins chhe?*, which appeared in this paper last Sunday, has made me switch tracks.

The article highlighted the tendency of community brides-to-be declining to stay with in-laws after their wedding. Without treading the dodgy turf of generalizations, ladies, I beg to differ. And add that domestic peace is less about avoidance, more to do with dunking pre-conceived notions and giving things a chance before trashing them.

I grew up in a joint family and married into one. Both blissful experiences I wouldn’t trade for any other. “You’ve been lucky”, it is argued. Maybe. Thankfully. But it does take two to tango. Compromise the delicate name of the game, a give and take is constant yet comforting.

As a kid, the entourage around my brother and me comprised several wonderfully spirited aunts. Years of daily closeness with them shaped our world view, tolerance threshold and sense of humour quite differently. Their background babble and mirth convinced me that ours was the coolest clan. Such fun roaring at droll alliterative phrases and expressive Gujarati jokes. We adored the books they read, the archly pomaded matinee heroes they worshipped and the hilarious theatre farces they watched. That was year-round thrill and thrall then, not simply restricted to

Navroze naatak nights.

We followed them with diligence and delight. I’d tiddle in pretty much past my bedtime to join the chatter. Far from disapproving frowns, I was greeted by four pairs of *eau de cologne* scented arms other than my mum’s. Quicker than the rest, one would reach down, pick up and perch me on her lap with a warm hug. She was the aunt who, to our infinite amusement, routinely popped a pill to



A CROSS-GENERATIONAL PARSİ JOINT FAMILY OF YORE

soothe stomach gripes seizing her mid-performance at plays, as she literally bellyached from giggling. I distinctly recollect handing her water with a tablet halfway through *Lafra Sadan*, that 1975 madcap caper adapted from *Uproar in the House*. She gasped, “*Garvaanu ne paachhu hasvaanu*” – swallow and keep laughing again.

How we long to pass on good times to our dearest. Parenthood must be the biggest propeller ever. I hoped to retain at least a little magic of those days for my own children. That prayer was answered. Hankering after the “privacy” those who aren’t joint family fans clamour for, is all very well. But the rewards of a big fat extended family are often something else.

Ask the kids. It’s been an endless romp for mine who revel in being with grandparents at home, not to mention aunts and uncles dropping in regularly. In-laws respecting my independence and actually proud of what I love doing, afford me the privilege of writing over demanding hours with immense peace of mind. Secure in the knowledge that each step of the way, from their terrible twos to teenage angst, children from large families are cushioned from the hard hit and hurt of normal growing up. Not in a spoilt way, on the contrary, with enough discipline to turn out tolerant and more accepting of people.

The usual ups and downs rock us, as they will. With the afternoon cakes baked companionably and evening concerts attended en famille, we hear a fair exchange of hormonal angst pitched at levels from “Leave me alone” to “You don’t understand me!”

Still, advantage can edge out disadvantage. Besides the lasting bond its oldest share with its youngest, middle members of the family could enjoy carefree time apart. To build a better marriage, the relationship held steadier with short holidays—alone. As we’ve done, travelling together right from our firstborn’s second birthday.

Nothing ventured, nothing won. Give it a shot, girls.