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[Back Magazine](#)

The best is yet to come...

SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

More and more people are getting married at an age considered ripe for retirement previously. And in most cases, love and marriage seem to work better the second time around.

Photos: Arunangs0u Roy Chowdhury, Joginder Chawla



The comfort of companionship:

Often marrying again is a better option than loneliness.

Yezi Tata was a little nervous. After all, it was his first time. But as soon as Tata, 75, saw his winsome 58-year-old bride, his jitters vanished. Although it had taken him time to make up his mind, he knew the decision to finally get married was right.

This was in 2000, eight years ago and neither Yezi (now 82) nor wife Aloo (now 66) have regretted a single moment. "For me, it was a second marriage. But the difference in our ages didn't matter then and it doesn't even today. Both of us

needed companionship and there is a deep bond of friendship and understanding between us. We are very happy together," says Aloo.

It is not merely the Tatas who have taken the plunge at an age considered by many as a time to retire from worldly pursuits. More and more people are beginning life anew after the age of 50. In fact, the number of registrations of people over the age of 50 at matrimonial bureaus has increased by 15-20 per cent over the last year.

Increasing numbers

According to A.M. Badal, chief executive officer of the marriage portal **Re-marriage.com**, over 4,000 persons over the age of 50 have registered at their matrimonial website. He says that since they started arranging marriages for senior citizens in 2002, there has been an increase of almost 20 per cent in membership. "Age is no bar here. They can be in their fifties or eighties. All that is needed is the will to remarry. Our motto is to bring back spring in the autumn of their lives," contends Badal.



In fact, when HelpAge India, an NGO working for the elderly, decided to survey matrimonial sites to study profiles of members registered, it was startled to find a sizeable number of older persons. This study in 2004 found that of the 14 matrimonial sites surveyed, about 12 per cent of persons registered were over the age of 50. Over half of these were over the age of 60. "Obviously, the belief that life doesn't end at 60 is growing. This is reflected by the fact that when this study was first undertaken, many matrimonial sites did not have age-groups above 55.

Today most go up to 99 years," points out Nidhi Raj Kapoor, Head of Communications, HelpAge India.

However, Jyotsna Sahai is happy that her friend Bishan didn't wait until he was 99 to propose marriage. But when the executive director of the Jay Engineering Works, Sriram group, finally did propose at the age of 60, it swept her off her feet. "When I asked him why he hadn't married for so long, he told me he had been waiting all his life for me," remembers a blushing Jyotsna.

Although she was 55 then, a gold medallist in Rabindra sangeet and already married once, Jyotsna felt extremely shy of talking about her remarriage to her children. Since daughter Nina was married and lived in Toronto, she decided to visit her son Saurav, then based in Mumbai, to tell him. "I was not seeking his permission but I wanted his consent. But somehow I couldn't tell him. I wrote a letter to him and returned to Kolkata. I passed some anxious hours till I received a call from him the same evening. He told me that he was really happy with my decision," recounts Jyotsna, now 75.

"I was very glad for my mother since I was unable to live with her for a large part of my life due to studies. Both my sister and I are proud of her brave efforts to raise us as she had to acquire a degree late in life to hold her job, educate and raise us when we had financial difficulties. Her first marriage broke up but it did not break her," says Saurav, corporate vice-president, HCL Technologies Ltd.

Daughter Nina, a medical doctor, adds that despite living so far away, they are all very close to each other. "I don't feel guilty at not being able to look after her, as I cannot think of a better person who cares for my mother's every need than Mr. Sahai. If children support their parents' decision regarding re-marriage, it creates a more harmonious relationship between families," she adds.

In fact, Jyotsna says that she was considered a trend-setter by her friends not just because she remarried at 55 but also because her daughter-in-law took over the responsibility of dressing the bride.

If it was not for the active encouragement and support from her three children, Aloo too would have probably continued to live in America even though she was lonely after the death of her husband. But when she realised that her feeling for her good friend Yezi had changed into something stronger, she decided that she wanted to marry him even if it meant returning to Delhi almost after 30 years. "It was Yezi who was apprehensive about whether I could adjust in India, not me. My children and even their spouses knew about my feelings and they were very happy when we finally married," says Aloo.

It was their children too who played a crucial role in bringing together publisher K.P. R. Nair and teacher Latha. Nair, who steadfastly turned down suggestions that he remarry after the death of his wife from cancer, finally tied the knot five years later when his three daughters and Latha's son gave the green signal. "I think it was destiny and the blessings of Mata Amritanandmayi that we married. I took the decision to remarry because I realised that my youngest daughter, then 13, needed more than a father. Having lost my mother when I was eight, I knew what it meant to be motherless. So when I decided to remarry, among the two proposals that I thought would be compatible, one was Latha's. But since her son was quite young, I was more inclined towards finalising the proposal with another lady. But at a critical juncture this lady's 15-year-old son expressed his opposition to his mother remarrying. So it fell through. This is how I decided to visit Latha in her home in Coimbatore," says Nair, 60.

Latha's son Vishnu was then just eight. "I don't know what it was about him that I liked. It could have been the red Ford car that he came in that tilted the balance in his favour," says Vishnu with a mischievous smile.

Important consideration

Whatever it was, by the end of the day, when Nair returned to Delhi, Vishnu asked his grandfather how soon he could address him as his father. "I had a bad first marriage and I didn't want another disaster. Although many proposals were coming I refused them because my son was against my remarriage. Even in this case, if my son had said no, I wouldn't have remarried," says Latha.

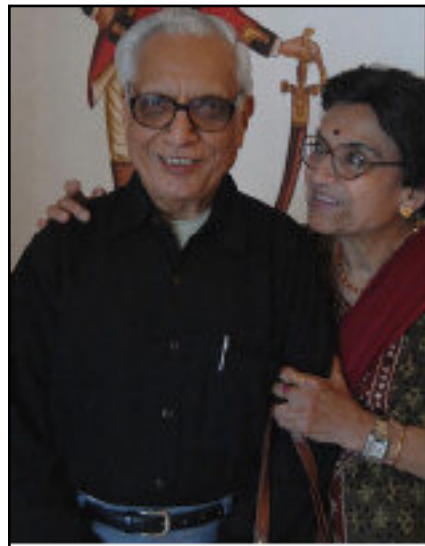


Even celebrities have embraced geriatric domesticity. Popular Tamil actor Gemini Ganesan's fourth marriage at 79 was not seen as unfashionable by his loving fans. When Ashok Jaitley, former chief secretary, Jammu and Kashmir, remarried soon after the high profile marriage of his daughter Aditi to cricketer Ajay Jadeja, it created as much a buzz on page three as did his daughter's. Jaitley, who was

earlier married to politician Jaya Jaitley, took the plunge at 60. Veteran journalist and editor-in-chief of *The Tribune*, H.K. Dua, went in for a registered ceremony when he was 64 years old. It took the former editor of *The Hindustan Times* nine years after the death of his wife to tie the knot for the second time.

More men in need

Although herbal queen Shahnaz Hussain was in her sixties when she wed a second time after the demise of her husband, it has been more men than women seeking companionship, if the numerous letters and requests that HelpAge has received is any indication. It has been elderly men who have been more persistent in seeking a second life partner after the passing of their first wife.



"The astrologer has said that I will live at least till 90 and I need someone to share the rest of my life with, so could HelpAge find a match?" wrote a 75-year-old. A 73-year-old U.S.-educated Punjabi widower from Delhi sent the details of the ad he placed so that HelpAge didn't have any difficulty in finding him a lady companion.

Of course, these enthusiasts are not depending entirely on one organisation to find a match. While some are registering with online marriage portals themselves, others are being registered by their children.

According to *BharatMatrimony*, a marriage portal mentioned in the *Limca Book of Records* for record number of documented marriages online, of the 3,750 profiles of persons above the age of 50, about 1,500 have been registered by their children.

A couple of years ago, the thought of love and remarriage after the age of 50 would have frowned upon and attracted societal ostracisation. Today, senior citizens are registering on marriage portals and placing matrimonial advertising in newspapers with the active encouragement of their children. Clearly, for all the "silvers" ***yeh dil maange more***

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