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Change in adoption law helps singles

SWATI VISHNOI

THE ASIAN AGE

Adoption just got easier for singles. According to the Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Act, 2000, the court has stated to "allow an orphaned child to be given to a single parent for adoption within five months". The statement has brought a smile on the faces of many singles in the city, who are now willing to opt for adoption.

Says Gunjan Kapur, a media professional, "This trend has surfaced in recent years, and not only for women but also for men, simply because they are financially independent now. I feel it's just a change everyone should get used to instead of being shocked by independent women who wish to become single mothers. Since laws are open now, I might prefer adopting a child in the future."

And the trend which was unheard of until a few years back, is now gaining steam. According to adoption agencies, after this statement by the court, queries for adoption from single parents have increased by 15-20 per cent.

Informs Neena Macedo, president of Delhi Council for Child Welfare (Palna), "We have at least 20-25 such applications coming to the agency every three months. Earlier, queries would come from people who were above 40, but now even young singletons or 20 somethings are willing to adopt. But as per our conditions, we have set the age of 35+ for adoption keeping strong family support and financial conditions of the applicant a pre-requisite."

Neha Sharma, a law student says, "It's good for women as many get married because they ultimately want to have children. Adoption laws are being simplified like in the West. As I enjoy my freedom, being single, I would love adopt a daughter."

By adopting two girls, Sushmita Sen has set a trend. Now many youngsters opt to be single parents



"I ENJOY BEING SINGLE AND WOULD LOVE TO ADOPT A DAUGHTER"

Watch out, workplace Casanovas!

A new Bill empowers working women to lodge a complaint against sexual harassment. But is it a cause of concern for men?

SAUMYA BHATIA

THE ASIAN AGE

With the Union Cabinet giving a nod to the Protection of Women Against Sexual Harassment at Workplace Bill 2010, do men have a reason to worry about an off-the-cuff remark like "Are you free for coffee?"

Devika Singh, senior associate with Kochhar & Co. points out, "There is a huge difference between what the bill is attempting to keep out of the workplace and casual phrases like a coffee demand. The bill is not out to demonise normal conversation and casual banter between men and women. Of course, if the coffee invite were to be accompanied with a suggestive wink, a lecherous stare or if it is repeated again and again to the point of badgering, it would be objectionable and could amount to sexual harassment."

Devika says that every working man needs to fear or worry about charges of sexual harassment against him only as much as a man who walks into a business meeting with his boss and a client in shorts and tennis shoes. She adds, "The only thing that a man needs to guard against is insensitivity. And the only thing that will ensure this is common sense and professionalism. It's best to remember that all women are not out to accuse every man of sexual harassment just like all men are not out to sexually harass every woman they work with."



Women are now on guard and look out for tell-tale signs of sexual innuendos at office. But some feel that this Bill could also be misused.

Interestingly, men are happy that the bill has been cleared. Sudip Bhattacharya, an MNC employee avers, "Some men think that they can get away with anything."

It's these men who need to watch out, as there's much more at stake than just their reputation. Asha Nayar Basu, partner, S. Jalan & Co., Attorneys, says, "A person found guilty of sexual harassment is likely to face financial penalties besides loss of employment and, in case of a graver offence, a police complaint. Women can complain against harassment ranging from physical contact, demand or requests for sexual favours, sexually coloured remarks or showing pornography. The point is to check if the phrase is 'sexually coloured'. Impartial counselling is important."

The Bill provides protection to any woman who enters the workplace as a client, customer, apprentice, and daily wage worker or in ad-hoc capacity. Students, research scholars in colleges/university and patients in hospitals have also been covered. However, there's a flipside as well: an innocent man could also be wrongly implicated and what if he's not

able to prove himself right.

Sunil Kalra, sports filmmaker, says the law empowers women, but it can also prove to be a bane. "Take the recent example of hockey coach M.K. Kaushik, who guided the Indian women's hockey team to bag a gold at the Commonwealth Games in Manchester 2002. Now, he finds himself embroiled in a scandal. He may or may not be able to prove himself innocent. And if proven guilty, perhaps, Indian women's sports will never have a male coach." But doesn't the law make it easy for a woman to accuse a man? Asha says, "The Bill mandates that women subjected to sexual advances — verbal or physical — are within their right to complain against their colleague. And any person giving a false complaint or evidence will be liable to be punished under the service rules."

Devika says that it's possible that a man can be wrongly implicated. However, under the due process of the law, the complaint would go to an enquiry committee that would look into the matter thoroughly. A man can prove his innocence by establishing an alibi and his credentials.



"SOME MEN THINK THEY CAN GET AWAY WITH ANYTHING"

SUDIP BHATTACHARYA