

BROWN BRIDGET JONES

Afsheen Shaikh talks to three Asian women fighting the eternal battle of 'finding the one'

For every thirty-something Bridget Jones, spare a thought for the British-Asian woman who is struggling to find Mr Right. Three Asian Woman readers reveal why their search for 'the one' hasn't quite been a bed of roses.

KAVITA SOHANTA

Age:
28

Occupation:
Human Resources Officer

Location:
Coventry, Warwickshire

Kavita is also studying part-time for a postgraduate degree while juggling her main interests as a professional singer song-writer and an author/poet. Even though she is constantly on the lookout for her soul mate, she feels her career and achievements are scaring men off.



"When my older sister got married three years ago, everyone turned to me and asked, 'When will it be your time?' I'm very different to my sister. She met her husband at a family wedding and is happily settled as a wife and mother whereas I am more ambitious.

I lived away from home when I went to university and after moving back, I got my own place after a year. It was more of a necessity because of the location of my job but I am also used to my independence and fortunately my mum understood that.

I realise I'm at an age where settling down is the next step forward but it's a case of finding the right person who can take on board everything about me. I write poetry and I'm a published author but I have to dumb myself down because many Asian men can't deal with an Asian girl who's smart and assertive; it's almost a threat. I find Asian guys want somebody who fits their lifestyle and unfortunately there is a general lack in wanting to understand the other person. They don't consider you're an individual with a wealth of information and experience that you can bring into a relationship. There are some decent guys out there but they are in very short supply.

I gave speed dating a shot but I found it controlling and exhausting. You only have a few minutes to explain yourself and although it was fun, it was in a fabricated environment and didn't feel natural to me. I've also been to social network gatherings but going through friends is the primary method for me. I have a wide social group of friends so I've met quite a few people through that.

I know a lot of girls who have married early, believing it was the right thing to do but they're not happy and it's soul destroying. They've realised they made the decision too early in life and some are cheating on their partners which is awful. It's the fear of not wanting to be left behind or perhaps they don't have these goals within themselves to be something more than what they are. I want to continue to write and do more things but for some girls, their ambitions are to get married, have kids and have a cosy life. It's great if it works for them but not for me.

"MANY ASIAN MEN CAN'T DEAL WITH AN ASIAN GIRL WHO'S SMART AND ASSERTIVE"

I was actually going to get married three years ago but felt it wasn't the right thing to do at the time. Had I settled down then, I would never have been in this job, I would not be doing my masters and more importantly I'd have never continued with my music and writing. It would have been a loving and supportive marriage but it wouldn't have developed me as a human being.

My friends have suggested my standards are too high but I argue women like us spend a long time building who we are and to have that disregarded in any way is cheating ourselves. You want your partner to respect you for ▶

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what you are and not what you're hiding. I am not looking for someone who is loaded, drives a nice car and dresses really well. What concerns me the most is if that person completes me but so far, the ones I've met are intimidated and that is very annoying.

We are becoming more career minded and as women we have these aspirations and dreams that we know we can fulfil and we can see the potential in ourselves. As long as you've got the support from your immediate peers and families, it's easy to deal with. It took me years to convince my mum what I am doing is the right thing and eventually she agreed.

If I fall in love with someone from outside my community, my family would be fine about it but I do want that understanding of my culture too. It doesn't matter if Mr Perfect is standing in front of me with the ideal job and car. If I can't relate to him and don't have that chemistry, there's no point."

IMRANA QURAISHI

Age:
34

Occupation:
Commercial Manager

Location:
Hayes, Middlesex

As a Muslim woman, Imrana's pick of the bunch is restricted by religious limits but having tried a variety of methods, she hasn't got any closer to the end result.

"I am one of four siblings and the only one who isn't married. I started looking at the same time as my younger brother but while he was lucky to get married within a year of meeting his wife, I personally found that no matter how much effort I put into looking for a suitable partner, I wasn't seeing the same level of commitment in return.

I've been to speed dating events where the ratio of single women to single men is higher so the organisers have pulled men off the street for free to make up the numbers. That is quite insulting as I've turned up with the right intentions only to be met by someone who's only tagged along because of his mates. I've tried Muslim-only events and again there were more women than men present. The organisers suggested women should consider polygamous marriages! The internet works well but it's time consuming and emotionally draining with constant emailing, exchanging of photos and deciding whether you like them enough to want to speak on the phone and eventually meet.

I've allowed my parents to introduce me to people as well and had a matrimonial matchmaker pop round with just one proposal before telling me she didn't have anyone suitable because I'm overqualified. Your qualifications should be celebrated and just because these goals have been achieved without a husband, doesn't mean we're not looking for one. Too much education doesn't mean someone is going to be arrogant or stuck-up. Saying that, I have male friends who find women they meet are very status orientated.

You meet people who want someone intelligent, articulate and educated to a degree level while the parents don't want a girl who's too modern, too western and too educated. If she possesses all these traits, she's got a mind of her own and won't listen to them. That kind of prejudice needs to be dispelled.

It sounds awful but within Asian societies, especially for women, you're expected to put your life on hold until you've found a husband. After a while, you just sit there and think, 'I have my health, I have a good job, I have a loving, supporting family and I have friends so why not be grateful for what I have and celebrate that?' That's not to say I have moments where I sit and



"YOU'RE EXPECTED TO PUT YOUR LIFE ON HOLD UNTIL YOU'VE FOUND A HUSBAND"

contemplate but I don't regret anything I've do in my life. If anything, I am glad I have had t opportunity to go travelling on my own whi has helped make me the person that I am today

I'm not sure where to start if I were to loo outside the community. My main concern is th as long as the person's Muslim, I don't mind. try to keep an open mind but there are certa things I can't compromise on. I won't acce someone who doesn't respect the faith or doesn have good morals. I've also realised that thing change. You can be in a situation where you a in a good job and have everything else goin for you but the next minute you could be mad redundant. You've got to have that strength character to get through such a difficult time an it doesn't make someone any less of a perso not to have such materialistic possessio like a fancy car and big house. As lo as they can respect themselves, respe me, respect the religion and respect th culture, anything else life throws at yo isn't going to be a struggle."

SINGLED OUT

According to the UK 2001 Census:

- **There are an estimated six million single women in the UK.**
- **British Asian males (Pakistanis and Bangladeshis) were twice as likely to marry outside their community as British Asian females.**
- **Only 6% of Indians, 4% of Pakistanis, and 3% of Bangladeshis had married soçmeone outside the Asian group.**

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CAROLINE FREDERICK

Age:
45

Occupation:
Nurse

Location:
London

Caroline has been involved in the Territorial Army as a part-time nurse for 17 years. As she has got older and with her demanding schedule, her priorities have shifted and she no longer regards finding a suitable partner the most important aspect of her life.

"I have always wanted to pursue other things in life like having the freedom to travel. I've also managed to get a degree while training to be a nurse. Coming to the UK from Singapore on my own and establishing a career has been my proudest achievement. I've also bought my own house. At first my family weren't very happy when I travelled this far to do my nursing but they have since happily accepted things. I didn't see marriage as a priority and I don't regret it even though I haven't met anybody. It's a choice I've made but I am sometimes conscious of it. Every time people ask me how many children I have, I tell them I am not married, nor do I have a family. It's still a taboo in our society that all Indian girls should be married or there is something wrong with them despite living in a Western society.

Having said that, one of my friends is married and wishes she could change places with me. While I am unwinding on a Friday night after a hard day's work, listening to my classical music, she's complaining that she's running around after her kids, the house is a tip and everything is falling apart. I always tell my married friends it's a gift for them to have children and it's a gift for me to be where I am in my life. I have met a few people but didn't see the point of carrying on for the sake of things so I put a stop to it. I know some girls like to hang around and hope the person will marry them. It seems they're afraid to be on their own because of what others will say and for that reason they hang onto a relationship which is not necessarily good or healthy.

When you're young, you just want to be with someone because everyone else is paired up but as you get older, your standards are higher and you're looking for a long lasting relationship that you will be happy in. Put it this way, I won't settle for second best. I like a man who is independent, intellectual, hard-working, self-sufficient and polite. He doesn't have to be perfect or handsome, just someone to have a lovely time with.
My mum is more liberal now but she used to nag, asking me what I was waiting for. Her friends would put pressure on her and ask why her daughters weren't married but now she understands we're sensible and as long as we're happy, that's the most important thing.

Looking back I'd have missed out on travelling, education and just life in general. I am sure that I would not have done all those things had I got married and raised a family but I wouldn't have changed them for anything if I had had the opportunity. I adore my niece and nephew so I am grateful to have them in my life. Besides I wouldn't want to have children without a husband. Unfortunately that isn't an option any more but I can always adopt should I meet the right person tomorrow.

There are nice guys out there who appreciate girls like us but I don't think I'll ever lower my standards. It's either this or nothing. If I don't find what I want, I'm happy being the way that I am."



ATTRACTION EXPLAINED

www.attractionexplained.com is the UK's first dating school, run by dating expert Adam Lyons. He offers his advice on finding love:

"Fifty percent of my male clients are Asian men. They come along because they want to learn how to be fun, how to talk to women properly and how to make the whole thing work. When they've grown up, they've had their mums telling them they are the prize and in Western society where the women are lawyers, doctors or have other professional careers suddenly this dude is not the prize. He is struggling to understand why he can't talk to a beautiful girl who is intelligent by being boisterous and telling her that he likes her. In this culture women have the power. They are very driven and feel they've got a lot to prove, but they are not spending any time on working out their love lives.

The irony of women who feel their success intimidates men is true but it doesn't have to be the case. A big *mistake girls make is to quite quickly* talk about their achievements and career in a conversation. Your job is something you're doing at the moment - it's not *part of you. If you quit your job, it's not* going to be part of you at all.

Professional single women are really driven in their careers but the energy they are putting into their careers is completely disproportionate to the amount of energy they are putting into their love lives. It's almost as if they are hiding it. The only way to tackle the situation is to talk to everybody and get used to being sociable whether it's ordering your lunch in the restaurant queue or on the train. The more people you meet, the more you get used to talking to others and the easier it will be to meet the right person."

What IS the problem with Asian men? Why is it so difficult to find 'the one'? Share your thoughts: editorial2@asianwomanmag.com