**Mid Life Drama in Urban India……….by Urmi Sheth Ohri**

Jay Z, says it somewhat spot on…’30 is the new 20’, when I first heard this phrase, I smiled, as I sat getting the grey strands of my hair coloured in the salon, happily settled in my 30’s, I thought, that there was definitely some truth in the statement even my hair colour was a crisp mocha brown if not red but definitely not some traditional ‘henna’ or ancient jet black colour. In the last few years, the urban Indian society has witnessed a massive change in ideologies from hair colour to infidelity. With everything happening later in life from marriages, careers, relationships, love and family, age 30 is no longer what it used to be, it is now living a life of dynamic 20’s. Adulthood has been redefined by the young and the restless generation in their 30, and this is a huge number (over 65% of 1.2 Billion people are below the age of 35 years) and for most of them living in urban Indian cities age is just another number.

Historically most people started living fully grown adult lives between their late teens and early twenties, so by the time they hit the 30 number they had stable lives, wives, kids, homes and safe investments in Kendriya Vikas Patra, the only elaborate plans they ever made were for retirement. Their lives were predictable and routine, personally I feel, life then stopped at ‘twenty five’ and moved at the same speed till they were buried at ‘seventy five’.

Today, it is a different ball game, life looks more promising and exciting in their 30’s then it was ever before. They have a great job, a great body and sizzle with even greater confidence. Marriage, career, or changing diapers is ‘btw’ another thing in their ‘Life’s to do list’. One evening over a drink I had an interesting discussion with an old colleague, and we agreed that the likes of us in 30’s are fortunately positioned in a perfect state at the perfect time amidst bountiful resources, and that the cultural lexicon of the Indian society has changed, new meanings and definitions have been added and the old modified. The truth is, when we were growing up, life was what the ‘parents ordered’ and ‘grandparents prescribed’ very few of us had the courage to walk the unknown and question the normal. Hence engineers, doctors and lawyers were churned out in dozens, but today as these individuals float in their late 30’s amidst a world of opportunities, many of them after ten years of meandering and leg work have courageously started all over again and re-defined their careers successful in doing something they didn’t formally qualify to do. India in the last few years has thus seen emergence of small business entrepreneurs, writers, politicians, corporate honchos and specialists in fields which were unheard of in 1980’s. These, I call are the new age mavericks independent in their thoughts and actions.

The other aspect of life which has seen a dramatic change is the concept of marriage. If you are an Indian and of the right age then it’s given that there’s no escaping marriage. The accepted right age, well, it could be anything from 18- 27 years depending on several factors, caste, religion, looks, sex, financial strength and all that you possess and whatever your uncles and aunts own. Historically it has been that complicated and marriage always came in a family pack, you get a partner and all the rest, the cousins, the uncles, the aunts, the nephews and nieces come free. Traditionally, once an Indian boy or an Indian girl was married, then it was a given fact that the fairer sex is in for a lifetime of karmic responsibility, ensuring everything worked from the toilet flush to her marriage, she was content and secure in her marriage, and there was no reason for her to have felt anything else, as the traditional Indian husband never left, they became too fat and lazy and were basically rendered undesirable. The women too perfectly complemented their husbands’ weight and resigned to spending their entire life navigating the distance from the bedroom to the kitchen.

However, in modern India, this is a typecast story of a ‘someone’ from ‘some’ district but not of the modern youth living in the metros. They may be facing a difficult conundrum which is exacerbated by the fact that they grow up with Indian values but are not willing to settle down in a compromised marriage and also circumvent the idea of marrying without love. The urban youth of India are either delaying marriage or if they are living together then they are delaying babies and if they do have babies then they are expunging any idea of ‘settling down’ or planning for retirement. In their 30’s this section of the society nurture the idea of adventurous romanticism and perfect companionship, settling down for good is no longer a ‘given and an obvious’ option. The women juggle their careers and families with equal élan. A 30 urban Indian woman in her prime hits the gym in full gear drinks horribly coloured health drink along with her low fat sandwich, all while closing major deals on her Blackberry. The men are fitter, sexier and are more than willing to actively ‘participate’ and ‘perform’ not only in the bedroom but even in the day to day chores. It is fast becoming an alliance of equal ‘give and take’. I happened to interview few of the ‘ married couples’ in India, and it wasn’t surprising to hear that almost all of them had a list of ‘ten things’ that they wanted to do before they were ‘forty five’, and retiring never featured as an option. The choices ranged from the first bungee jump, to an adventurous holiday, running the marathon, buying their first high end luxury car or even getting their first tattoo. Some even planned to study for a post graduate degree, whilst some wanted to pursue their long lost hobby. They are making sound and ambitious investments in their lives, properties, stocks and everything else with a massive appetite for risk. They are working hard towards a fatter bank balance, and even harder towards leading an exciting life. Hence it’s not surprising that in urban India marriages no longer come with a lifetime warranty. Marriage for them is not a matter of karmic destiny but a matter of how progressive life looks for each individual in their alliance of choice. If one partner does not work, someone else may work better and age is no longer a barrier to restart all over again in-fact as they reach their sexual peak in their 30’s the story takes a new twist. The ‘night club phase’ of life is far from over. Mid-life crisis has been replaced by mid-life drama.

Like everything in life, it is true that this new phenomenon too has its negatives, there is a substantial rise in the number of nuclear families, divorces, extra marital relationships, lower tolerance levels, greater stress levels and increased number of heart attacks and blood pressure problems at 35 but hey! I have chosen to focus on the positives after all every drama has its moments of climax and anti-climax.

In conclusion, I have to say that I agree with the statement but only in parts, as such I would never would like to be in my freaking 20’s, the decade was all about of anxiety, confusion, hard work, limited exposure, no direction and doing what we were asked to do but never what we wanted to? I can speak for most of us, who were missing the bulls eye in our 20’s, busy meandering between college, jobs and not so great relationships, on the other hand, the freedom to make choices, the passion, the fervour and the spirit to take risks doesn’t make being 30 any different from being 20. Being 30 is great, because we no longer dwell in what we do not have but invest in what we do, because we no longer have to mould ourselves to fit in but be goddam true to ourselves. We are less reckless, foolish, gullible or directionless. When we were 20 something years old, most of us sought the purpose of being on this earth, today at 37, after 11 years of being a part of the rat race which I could never outrun, I think, I know my purpose and that is…. to write and considering the fact that by 2020 the average age of an Indian will be 29 years, the world better watch out…’Picture to abhi baaki hai’…..