

Appendix 1

Preliminary Random Observations on the Courting Behaviour of Undergraduates in a Residential University in Sri Lanka

by *S.Sri Kantha*

[Presented at the 35th Annual Meeting of Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Sciences -Section F; Social Sciences, Colombo, Dec.18, 1979 - Tuesday]

Introduction

Investigation of sexual habits and practices is a relatively recent development in science. Scientific observations and studies in this interesting field are few, especially in this country. The pioneers in this field of study are Kinsey et al.(1948, 1953), Schofield (1965) and Masters and Johnson (1966). Kinsey relied much on verbal evidence: he talked endlessly to the men and women who came forward (or were induced in some way) to tell all. Two criticisms of this approach were, (i) Were the people interviewed a reasonably random sample of the population? (ii) Do they tell the truth? On both points, much scepticism has been expressed (for e.g. Maslow and Sakoda, 1955) and no doubt such scepticism is right and proper. Later, Masters and Johnson had the courage to go a step further. They were permitted to observe people making love and in this way were given an opportunity of checking not only what they said they did, but also whether they described matters correctly. Their study material consisted of approximately 700 people of whom a couple of hundreds or so were married couples.

Studies on sexual habits among the college and university students of America had been reported by Robinson et al.(1968), Davis (1969), Kaats and Davis (1970) and Bell and Chaskes (1970). As far as Peradeniya undergrads are concerned, their sexual behavior pattern have yet to be studied in detail. An attempt is made here, just to note some relevant features of the residential undergrads' courtship behaviour.

Study Population and Methods

Study Population: Undergraduates of the University of Peradeniya. Almost all of them stay in the halls of residence.

Method: Mosser and Kalton (1971) had classified the methods of obtaining data about a group of people as follows: (a) documentary sources - personal documents like diaries, letters and autobiographies, (b) direct observation, (c) questionnaire, (d) interviewing. Of these, it was felt by the author that for a study of this nature, observation method can only be adopted, when taking into consideration all the conservative tendencies of a typical Sri Lankan society. [Note: One like to express at this juncture that, facts and data alone do not make a science, especially in a virgin field like this. We also need theories, postulates, unification and generalisations.]

Time of Observation: Mainly in the afternoon, evening, twilight hours to late in the night.

Places of Observation: Vicinity of the Girls' Halls of Residence, corridors of lecture blocks, library and the surroundings, corners, Gymnasium building and the adjacent locations, canteens, sports pavilion, riverbank, roads leading to the places of worship, Arts theatre (especially when films are shown), Open air blocks - summer houses.

Observation and Comments

(1)*Con-sessions*: A con-session is a conversation between two or more undergrads (can be with same sex or with opposite sex) which takes place in a relatively stationary situation. It should be noted that the topic of a con-session need not be serious or weighty in nature. Episodes of humorous exchange, logical argument or the exchange of personal experiences may also properly constitute con-sessions.

Many con-sessions come about as a result of the attempts of individual participants to enhance their prestige rather than any deeply felt commitment that they have about a specific issue. It is these con-sessions which boosts the image of partners, who are 'getting hitched', or 'going steady'. Though dating may occupy only a small segment of a student's time, talk about dating is of immense importance for many undergrads, especially girls.

(2)*Partner selection*: When it comes to choice of a mate, the 'choice' is not of course, a deliberate one at all, but is conditioned by circumstances about which, we don't know much enough to be entirely specific but which include the interplay of so many factors. Anyway, I'll try to generalise them in the following manner.

The 'seniors' spend the least amount of time with their own sex, while the freshers have the most such time. It is difficult to tell, the undergrads of which faculty have ample time, to spend in the company of the opposite sex, because their courses of study and the time taken for it varies. But generally the students in the Arts-based courses, spend more time in the company of the opposite sex than any other category of undergrads. This is because they have to attend only a handful hours of lectures per week. Barring this short period of occupation, they've to 'kill' the time in a satisfying manner; and they do so by partner selection and getting hitched.

Those undergrads following a science-based discipline (Medicine, Dentistry, Agriculture, Veterinary Science and Pure science) have to attend practicals, dissections, field work etc. in addition to following the lectures. And it is not wrong to say that, boys get to know more about girls, and about their behaviour during these practical sessions. These sessions provide flexible opportunity in that boys can attend to their work and at the same time they can roam around the laboratory or field doing a bit of 'eve-teasing', and of course the girls retaliate with 'adam-teasing', if it can be called like that.

It is probably traditional in the campus, for the undergrads (boys) to select their partners from among the fellow students of the batch, in the second year. Fresher girls are the chief objects of attention of the senior boys (mainly 2nd years). In the guise of ragging, a senior attaches himself to his beloved 'selection' and get to know all the details about the girl, her background, education, family status etc. (Very personal details also are not spared.) And it is very common to see the senior boys in Peradeniya chaperoning the fresher girls to their halls of residence in the first two weeks of the academic year, which is the normal duration of the ragging period. The tradition had come down, that during ragging period, freshers should appear in white-and-white; so, any senior can have a try at a fresher, who have to nod her head, or answer in positive, to all the teasing questions. At the end of this ordeal (I mean, for ignorant fresher girl students), a certain proportion of the boys become successful in getting 'hitched'.

Senior girls initiating a partnership with junior boys are relatively uncommon, in almost all the disciplines of study. There may occur a few exceptional cases.

(3)*Initiation of Pairing*: In accordance with the normal trends, the initiation stimulus is usually provided by the boy. The hints and messages are taken and passed on to the girl concerned, by her close friends and/or by room mates. For some boys the search for a mate is a highly self-conscious one. For others, it follows so effortlessly from the fun of dating that no conscious decisions are made at all.

Mutual lending and borrowing is a sign of close friendship; hence, books and notes may also serve the purpose of initiation of pairing. Offering practical assistance, one way or another, may also little by little, leads to initiation of pairing. A batch trip, an active interest in one particular extracurricular activity (for e.g. sports, drama, societies) and even ragging also serve as catalysts for the actual initiation to occur.

(4)*Campus dates*: Two major kinds of campus dates can be recognized. One is the formal party or dinner type date, often on a large group followed by dancing, much good fun, and a return to the hall in the small hours of the morning. The batch dinner, hall 'socials', faculty 'nights', going-down dances, farewell parties, 'hitch' parties or even birthday parties provide occasion for this sort of date. This kind of date is supposed to characterise the community life of residential university students.

The second kind of date is the soulful date of the single couple, perhaps starting with evening stroll in the park or roadway, or even in the library but having its core in moonlit romance, placed in a nook or corner. The couple, though seated in a common place, like a canteen, library, theatre or [play]grounds, remain unattached with the rest of the population. Their dating episode doesn't directly involve other people. The hour or two, they spend together is filled mostly on satisfying personal and physical emotions. In a corner they sit under a hidid triangle, thereby evading direct exposure to a third person's eye. For about an hour or two they spend on talking, necking and petting. It is presumed that the only topic of discussion revolve mainly around private and personal affairs between them. This sort of conversation is only an accompaniment of erotic play.

(5)*Erotic play*: The erotic play varies in intensity from pulling, pressing, hugging and kissing and also petting to extreme. As usual, the male partner dominates the scene with the female partner responding passively. The male partner surveys the female anatomy in four stages of petting sequence; outside above the waist, outside below the waist, inside above the waist and inside below the waist. Of course the last two stages are carried out in strict privacy in connivance with the darkness and around the pillars of the Arts theatre, Gymnasium and the corridors of lecture halls. These enormous numbers of building corners serve to explore freely the intimacies of sex, away from the prying eyes of batch mates and security guards. Even when the security officers happen to arrive at the scene, they tend to turn a blind eye.

(6)*Inter-racial and Inter-religious pairing*: The family life in Sri Lanka, strongly disapproves of mixed pairing. This is particularly so in inter-racial bonding than in inter-religious bonding. The final sanction upon a boy or a girl, who enters into a mixed affair, is 'outcasting'. Therefore it is not surprising that most undergrads conform to the norm of avoiding mixed affairs. Nevertheless, mixed affairs do occur even if rarely.

Who are the deviants? The majority of these are with Tamil boys and Sinhala girls; and if lesser number, with Sinhala boys and Tamil girls. (Muslims who speak Tamil mainly are included in the Tamil category, for the sake of convenience.) It is common inference that, the majority who are

involved in mixed affairs have a knowledge of English. Any sustained relationship with another racial link is impossible for the partners otherwise. Although there is hostility to inter-racial affairs in a typical Sri Lankan society, when it comes to the residential campus background, it is tolerated since it can more easily be broken off, after the partners had received their quota of sexual satisfaction.

The process of the initiation of an inter-racial affair is gradual, and in the majority of the cases, it blooms only around the 2nd year or 3rd year of the couples' residential life. It occurs mainly among the batch mates or body-mates (in pre-clinical years of the Medical Faculty) or group mates (in lab classes). A couple who carry on an inter-racial love affair have to accept drastic cultural changes. Of the two, one can no longer move closely with his/her friends, as often as he/she used to. One of the two, can integrate only through an acceptance of the other's culture, in personal behaviour. He (she) must also establish new interpersonal relationships with other undergrads.

Compared to inter-racial pairing, an inter-religious pairing is more tolerated in our society, if the partners belong to the same race; hence, the frequency of the occurrence of inter-religious pairing is more (Hindu-Christian and Buddhist-Christian) than that of an inter-racial pairing.

(7) *Reasons for Pairing at the Campus:* The following can be cited as the main reasons, for the occurrence of pairing.

(a) Bandwagon effect: Pairing (or getting 'hitched') has become 'the thing to do'. Not only have this pairing become quite acceptable to the majority of the residential student population but the junior students are often directly or indirectly encouraged by the hitched seniors. Pairing of a friend or a room mate or a batch mate encourages and contributes to another and soon the feeling spreads that 'Everybody is doing it, so why not try?'

(b) The two-some nature of campus life: Not only is there a casual bandwagon effect, but there are subtle 'pressures' working to make paired life appear more comfortable and practical. The social life in a residential university, is a two-some experience. Generally speaking, such affairs as parties, dinners, socials, dances, art-festivals and film shows are considered as two-some experiences.

(c) Insecurity of our 'time': The general insecurity of our 'time' is often thought by some as encouraging campus pairing. Anxieties concerning possible impending national disasters and closure of campus (for trivial reasons, during the major part of this decade) generate in undergrads a need to develop deep attachments with someone in order to achieve sexual satisfaction. For many undergrads who are free from the vigilant, prying eyes of their parents or guardians, the ideal time for experiencing sexual relief is the three-year period they spend in the campus. Flitching, they trust, is the type of relationship that will give them, some sort of excitement (or 'go') in the basic human instinct.

(d) Stimulation of sexual attitudes: We are living in a period of sex age. The mass media (cinema and the pulp magazines, novels in our island) must be held responsible for titillating and enticing an undergrad's sexual fantasies. The emphasis on sex appeal and the intense physical expression of love makes it difficult for undergrads to handle sexual arousals. This results in the unwillingness to defer sexual gratification until after marriage.

'Wherever we look and wherever we go there's something about sex. And it makes us look foolish not to find out about it ourselves.' is an explanation given regarding the background of predicament,

by a few 'hitched' undergrads. Another opinion is, 'There aren't really many places to go around in Peradeniya; only a park and a few theaters in Kandy. After you've seen all the movies (and in most of the theaters, the released Sinhalese films run for more than two months,) we simply don't know how to kill time; and this especially so in the weekends, and poya (full moon) days. So, the ideal pastime is to get hitched.' And 'if you are in love with opposite sex you know – that's it.'

(e)Economic buffer: There is also one extremely good reason (especially in the case of girls) for getting hitched. But under normal circumstances it is not divulged to anybody, even to the partner. For a girl coming from a rural village, there wouldn't be much cash in her handbag, to spend for pocket expenses. Hence an ideal alternative to cover the embarrassment is to 'get hitched' to a boy, who will look after her in his pocket money. The expenses incurred for snacks, short cats, stationery, traveling, cosmetics etc. are paid out from the partner's purse.

(f)Escapism: So many complexes arise for a newly arrived undergrad in Peradeniya set-up. Urban-rural complex, high caste-low caste complex, wealthy-poor complex, 'fluent english-bad english' complex and racial complex are a few which can be identified. In order to escape from the existing realities, the poor souls search for some sort of compassion and they obtain this by 'getting hitched', I suppose.

Discussion

In a typical rural village of Sri Lanka, whether at work or at leisure, whether inside the house or outside it, boy (girl) finds himself (herself) somehow surrounded by elders. This ensures not only the lack of privacy but also a constant supervision by a group of elders. Here, in Peradeniya, this constant vigilance factor is hardly present. And when left in a surrounding with a host of opportunity and time, the arrows of cupid easily penetrates the undergrad's heart.

The curiosity, excitement and the ever-present liberty from the prying eyes of guardians and society elders, climaxes in the profuse pairing at Peradeniya University. A lot of rural girls get caught into the whorl of free love, when they enter Peradeniya. I personally don't think that many girls in the campus, feel that being stroked by a boy is bad or dirty anymore.

There is accelerating evidence that pre-marital courting has become almost accepted among campus girls, as with campus boys. Perhaps one of the most important factor that prevents Sri Lankan girls from making friendships, when they are with parents, is the fact that the majority in them still find most of their companionship of their homes. They therefore may not feel the need for the friendship of their peers. However, when they move into a new residential campus environment, they are often separated from their families and relatives. The girls discover that they must find new friends who can share their problems and guide them through novel experiences; this security, they may find among peers who are going through the same period of transition. The intimacy of the campus environment keeps the undergrads together for nearly three years or more, which is a long enough period for them to build close relationships.

The established value of Oriental culture that pre-marital courting is wrong, is crumbling. But there seems to be conflict of opinion for a significant number of campus girls, who come from conservative background. These girls have to decide how far they can lean. If they are not permissive, they lose an ideal opportunity of mixing with opposite sex; yet, if they are too permissive, the news may leak to home sources and the consequences may upset the balance. But, even the campus girls from conservative background are much more open and free now, than their parents, with regard to sexual attitudes.

Conclusion

Living conditions at the University of Peradeniya are often far from easy living and this give rise to strain and stresses which contribute to the undergrad's heavy mood, resulting in his urge towards sexual fantasy. Anxiety, worry, social, educational and family pressures and the emotional imbalance of sexually immatured (but physically matured) students produce various sorts of sexual behavior, which need attention and study.

The campus student of today is too hurried, too badly housed with too little recreational facilities and working under too strenuous conditions. He/she needs psychological counseling, at least during certain periods of stress. In general, the mental climate of the University of Peradeniya is ill-suited to relieving sexual tensions which often reach breaking point. When steps are taken to bring in more students from poor homes, this problem may increase in scope and intensity.

References

- Bell,R.R. and J.B.Chaskes (1970). Premarital sexual experience among co-eds, 1958 and 1968. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 32: 81-84.
- Davis, K.E. (1969). *Sex on the Campus: Is there a Revolution?* Boulder, Colorado, Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado.
- Kaats, G.R. and K.E.Davis (1970). The dynamics of sexual behavior of college students. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 32: 390-399.
- Kinsey, A.C., W.B.Pomeroy and C.E.Martin (1948). *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Philadelphia, W.B.Saunders.
- Kinsey, A.C., W.B.Pomeroy, C.E.Martin and P.H.Gebhard (1953). *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, Philadelphia, W.B.Saunders.
- Maslow,A.H. and J.M.Sakoda (1955) Volunteer error in the Kinsey study. [in] J.Hmeloch and S.F.Fava, eds. *Sexual Behavior in American Society*, New York, Norton & Co.
- Masters,WH. and V.E.Johnson (1966). *Human Sexual Response*, London, Churchill.
- Mosser,C.A. and G.Kalton (1971). *Survey Methods in Social Investigation*, New York, Basic Books.
- Robinson,S.E., K.King, C.J.Dudley and F.J.Clune (1968). Change in sexual behavior and attitudes of college students. *The Family Coordinator*, 17: 119-123.
- Schofield,M. (1965). *The Sexual Behavior of Young People*, Boston, Little Brown & Co.