

Lets Talk About Sex in Sri Lanka

It is about bloody time we started talking about sex. Honestly, the way people approach the subject of sex in Sri Lanka, even on the blogosphere which we can safely assume to be a more educated liberated sample, is laden with coyness and guilt. It is no secret that to outsiders, especially Westerners, Sri Lankans appear sexually repressed. We do not talk about it openly without guilt or shame, and the resulting shyness and misplaced humour that it evokes makes it obvious that we do not accept sex as a normal human need that should be fulfilled irrespective of marital status.

We never get taught sex education in school. Even though there was a chapter on the sexual reproduction system in my GCE ordinary Level Science textbook in school, this topic was successfully ignored by the teacher. I just thought he was skipping it because he feared the dynamite laden questions the horny and curious 15 year-olds in his class had for him. However, one of the reasons he said he was skipping it was because it hardly got any questions set on it in the exam. He was right – no questions about sex in my O/L year, even though it was an official part of the syllabus. Contrast this reluctance to address the issue of sex education, with the UK’s sex education system where it is common for girls of thirteen to be taught in class how to put a condom on a dummy penis.

While Sri Lankans may have had a sexually open culture in the times of Sigiriya’s topless lathas, it appears to me that the prudishness of Victorian England seems to have given us a splitting colonial hangover. It is almost like we in Sri Lanka think, “Oh my god, I can’t teach my kids about birth control because that means they are going to do it, and then what will Loku Nanda and Sybil Aunty next door and the dobi’s cousin-in-law-twice-removed say?” Well, the harsh truth is, the kids are going to grow up and have sex anyway, and if they have not been taught the importance of contraception they are a less likely to use any, and then they are going to get pregnant. And then, they are going to feel so afraid of society’s reaction that they are going to go to a dingy little abortion clinic and have their reproductive organs messed up beyond repair by some ill-equipped and unsanitary quack.

One statistic I’ve heard being bandied around says that there are approximately one thousand illegal abortions conducted in Sri Lanka every day. I am sure this number can be reduced if we just chilled out a little bit, faced the fact that our puthas and duwas and nangis and mallis are doing some serious bonking, and accepted that everybody would be much better off if they knew about condoms, the pill and the Morning After – what it is, how to use it, and where to get it.

The large number of abortions are not even the worst symptom of our refusal to talk about sex. When normal sex is not accepted as normal, then abnormal sex seems to come to the fore. People don’t seem able to tell the difference. Have you seen the papers lately? It’s full of rape, and underrage sex, and all types of abuse. I read this article about some man in Moratuwa who had molested a nine-month year old baby. He was beaten senseless by the cops, but the point is: there is a sick world out there, and it has an address in Sri Lanka. Eve teasing in Sri Lanka is commonplace. Men touching you on the bus is commonplace, as most women users of public transport will confirm. Hell, even I’ve been felt up in the bus, and I’m a guy! I beleieve this is because the option of a “normal” outlet is not readily open.

It is because of this general reluctance to talk about sex that I was so pleased to read the post entitled “Condom Shopping” on the Dragons of Eden blog. Apart from it being hilarious, it is also the first blog post I have seen featured on kottu.org which is about sex. I could have been wrong (after all, it’s not like I check kottu.org everyday), so I ran a search for the word “sex” on the kottu search bar. And these are the first six posts that came up: a philosophical rumination on why pubic hair exists, an unhealthy obsessive ode to Pizza (no, not as a sex aid), a techy in love with a piece of software, a call for Buddhist fundamentalism in Sri Lanka, a second techy in love with a programming language, and a review of a documentary about a place called Jesus Camp. None of those posts were even vaguely about sex, except of course for “Condom Shopping”, which now heads the list. So congratulations to Dragons of Eden for deflowering our virginal blogosphere. It was long overdue.

It’s going to take a lot to change Sri Lankan attitudes about sex. America was puritanical, and changed its attitudes only because of the reasearch of people like Masters and Johnson, Kinsey and Nancy Friday. They showed the West that everybody has a sex life (active or otherwise), and that everybody was normal. I look forward to the day that this belief is shared widely in Sri Lanka.

By Ravana Blog