



“Wrong” Ladies First

CARA recently announced a shift in its adoption policy to award preference to aspiring single moms planning to adopt. According to sources, single mothers were perceived to be a group requiring enablement in adoption. With due credit to the empathy CARA may have towards single mothers, the decision smacks of a populist move to garner some brownie points in projecting a modern outlook on adoption. While feminists may celebrate and bake those brownies for CARA, here is why it is not such a good idea – more because of the underlying data that even CARA cannot refute – and not because of the pink tissues:

- 1) There are close to 16,000 parents registered for adoption with CARA. About 80% of these want to adopt a healthy child below 2 years of age. Though CARA has not officially released the number of single women out of the 16,000 parents, even a modest guestimate of 1% pegs that number at 160. A simple math bleaches the color off the brownie CARA may be trying to score. CARA has fewer than 60 healthy children below 2 years of age, all over India. So if CARA were to start placing children with single Moms, others can forget getting any referral at all, for months to come!
- 2) CARA had very recently changed its referral policy to offer profile of one child at a time to each parent, as against the previous policy of showing 3 profiles per parent. This was primarily done to discourage the “choose-a-child” tendency amongst parents, service parents faster and allow an opportunity to get counseled if a parent rejected a referral. The initiative was just beginning to move the queue faster (as CARA could reach out to 3 times more parents with the same pool of children), when the traffic will get stopped for a VIP beacon in pink – that too riding solo.
- 3) The decision to place children with single moms *preferably* and *as a policy* over Mom-and-Dad families does not auger too well, because most of the “adoptable” pool with CARA i.e. healthy children under 2 yrs of age will now end up with single Mom families. Is CARA bent upon having only children with special needs in the institutions pre-adoption (that proportion is a whopping 70% as of May 2017), and children with less than ideal families, post adoption – through its legal system? How can it ever complain of illegal adoptions, when it chooses to create not so normal constituencies before and after adoption – in the legal eco-system? It appears that in enabling the parent, CARA has disabled the child yet again – sadly purposefully.
- 4) If there were indeed a choice to accord preference to any particular segment of parents from the 16,000 waiting, several others would readily qualify on genuine humane grounds alone (it would

be unreal to expect a data driven approach from CARA) than the financially capable single moms favored under the policy. Examples would include elderly parents who just lost their only child and intend to adopt another child in their sunset years, young widows who have single status thrust upon them (such as victims of war, civil unrest, natural calamity), or medical cases where childlessness could turn into a life threatening situation.

- 5) Being a single Mom represents a lifestyle choice. It is not a disability, not a vulnerability, not a gender discrimination. There can hardly be a business case for cutting the wait time for adopting a child. There is no life threatening situation. In fact, the woman is free to enter into a live-in relationship or marriage after adoption. So what is the real deal? Can these committed, passionate, headstrong women not endure just the wait in adopting a child – when their counterparts in marriage carry their pregnancy to full terms – often repeatedly?

Being under the sponsorship of Ministry of Women and Child Development, CARA would better know that most children enter the adoption cycle because Indian society does not take kindly to unwed mothers. Most single mothers are forced to relinquish their own children because of social stigma attached to single motherhood. If CARA were truly concerned about the well-being of single moms, they would better support single “biological” moms over single “adoptive” moms so that their children would remain with them. These are the Moms who are truly vulnerable. They suffer abuse. They suffer ignominy. They are at risk of elimination. Their children are indeed “thrown-out” of the social ecosystem – facing discrimination again when trying to re-enter through adoption. Most Indians do not adopt a child ascribing the tag of “being an illegitimate child” virtually shutting all doors to lead a life with dignity and respect. So vehemently are they ostracized that the WCD Ministry actually offers them anonymous cradles to drop their children, instead of counselling them, supporting them and being by their side in one of their possibly darkest hours. There is no voice for these ladies.

And who does the WCD Ministry raise the deibels for? Single women who are financially capable. Rarely at risk. Rarely subject of abuse. Rarely impacted by rural idiosyncrasies. Rarely needing empowerment. On the contrary, these women embody empowerment. They are role models. Each one of them is indeed a legend in their own might.

I guess there is significant merit in supporting single women. Guess what, CARA just ended up supporting the wrong lady!