

Red Bindi and Black Greed

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Introduction

The Mumbai skyline, a glittering tapestry of ambition and disparity, twinkles with deceptive promise as we meet Ashwini Siddhi. She is a woman sculpted by observation: the muted greys of her mother's domestic toil, the stark, tragic black of her sister's fate under marital pressure, and the vibrant, often harsh, colors of her own burgeoning desires for a life of ease, independence, and unwavering support. Her matrimony profile, less a matrimonial plea and more a fiery red manifesto, lays bare her terms for partnership – a life funded, staffed, and emotionally buttressed, a stark departure from the sacrifices she's witnessed.

"Red Bindi and Black Greed" charts Ashwini's tumultuous journey as she navigates the complex terrain of modern relationships, financial independence, and the potent, often perilous, landscape of India's marital laws. Haunted and inspired by the sensational case of Devina Rohatgi and Mohan Nilekani – a saga painted in the lurid reds of alleged extortion and the grim greys of suicide – Ashwini wields Section 498A and the DVA as both shield and sword. Her quest for a "chore-free, relaxed life" morphs into an escalating series of demands, each victory and each confrontation illuminated by the harsh lights of social media scrutiny and the increasingly somber tones of her personal relationships.

Through a world rendered in vivid sensory detail – from the sterile beige of courtrooms and the defiant crimson of Ashwini's attire to the angry roar of online trolls and the quiet hum of a Singaporean dawn – we witness her evolution. This is not just a story of one woman's fight, but an exploration of the ever-shifting spectrum of feminist ideals, the seductive allure of power, and the often-blinding pursuit of a dream, a dream that begins as a beacon

of white light but threatens to descend into a consuming, dark obsession. Ashwini's path is a tightrope walk between empowerment and entitlement, liberation and coercion, as she grapples with a legacy she is determined to rewrite, one demand, one legal filing, one X post at a time.

Chapter 1: Matrimony Profile

Ashwini Siddhi sat at her sleek, glass-topped desk, the cool surface reflecting the muted fluorescent lights of the private bank branch on Marine Drive. Outside, the relentless honk and muted roar of Mumbai's evening traffic hummed a familiar, oppressive tune through the sealed windows, a symphony of a city that never slept, painted in hues of grey exhaust and fading sunlight. A faint scent of industrial cleaner and old paper files hung in the air-conditioned chill. At 32, an Assistant Branch Manager with an MBA from Symbiosis, her 6-lakh salary felt like a thin, fraying thread against the vibrant tapestry of her dreams—a life splashed with the azure of distant seas, the gold of leisurely afternoons, and the stark white of independence. Her crimson bindi glowed like a defiant ember against her brow, a small, bright assertion of tradition amidst a storm of modern ambition. The insistent buzz of her phone vibrated against the polished dark wood of the desk drawer. "No WhatsApp chats," she muttered, the words a low hiss, her gaze flicking to the bright, demanding screen before she consciously ignored it, recalling her matrimony profile, launched like a digital flare into the ether that morning:

"Seeking an upper-income partner earning more than me, providing mental support, hiring house staff for cleaning and cooking—I work and want a relaxed life. No loyalty if you can't deliver. Struggling financially, no interest in childbirth or cooking. Need a friend-first partner, open to living anywhere. Father: retired SBI Branch Manager. Mother: homemaker. Brother: SBI

Class 1 Manager. Late sister: left two sons. Sister-in-law: Zilla Parishad employee. Must own house, modern thinking, fund trips, hotels, clothes. Good financial condition mandatory.”

Ashwini leaned back, her navy blue blazer creasing with a soft rustle. The profile was raw, a stark black and white declaration shaped by the grey monotony of her mother’s domestic grind, the shadow of her sister’s death under marriage’s suffocating weight, and the bright, hopeful faces of her nephews. Her father’s voice—a low, concerned rumble in her memory, “Marry sensibly”—clashed with the sharp, clear chime of her resolve. Money was freedom, a vibrant spectrum of choices, not just dull comfort.

Neha, her colleague, peeked in, her own face framed by brightly colored, patterned fabric. “Matrimonial site again?” she teased, her voice a playful lilt. The office around them was a low murmur of keyboards clicking and phones ringing softly.

“It’s a manifesto,” Ashwini said, her voice firm, cutting through the office hum. “A partner who respects my career, not a patriarch wanting the saffron and turmeric hues of curry and the rosy picture of kids.”

Neha grinned, a flash of white teeth. “No loyalty clause? Bold. That’ll make some profiles glow red with indignation.”

“Let them talk,” Ashwini replied, the click of her pen decisive. “My mother slaved under the dim light of duty; I won’t.” She refreshed matrimony —the screen flashed white, then settled. Three responses. Two men, their messages tinged with the dull tones of expectation, asked about cooking or kids; deleted with a swift tap. The third, Joyjit Guha, a 35-year-old Bangalore tech entrepreneur earning 20 lakhs, intrigued: “Loved your honesty. I’m modern, have a housekeeper, enjoy travel. Coffee in Mumbai?” His words seemed to carry a different, more promising hue.