

Is Bill entitled to right to privacy?

BILL Clinton and Monica Lewinsky have occupied the centrestage across the globe for weeks together now. And why not? After all, the story has juice in it. It is about the involvement of the world's "most powerful man" with a girl half his age. It is also about morality in high places and the fact that the gold fish have no hiding place. No Head of State ever has had to bear the shame of a dalliance as Bill Clinton had to and continues to do as political rivals debate impeachment. On TV, he appears a hassled man with a hoarse voice and swollen eyes due to lack of sleep. Clearly, Monicagate has taken a heavy toll on "Slick Willy".

However, Clinton's is not an isolated case. Prince Charles and Camilla Parker-Bowles, Princess Diana and Dodi Al-Fayed, Robin Cook, Winnie Mandela, Mitterrand, or the great legend John F. Kennedy (read the Seymour Hersh account of JFK) have been named, followed, and hounded on these very counts. Perhaps more than financial scams, private lives are in focus.

But why? One could raise a spate of questions: Is sex not a natural biological necessity? How do societies across the

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In fact, the question of morality in politics has always been relevant in the history of the world and has had far-reaching consequences. Money-god has long been an icon of politics but the recent times have been the emergence of sex-god as a close accomplice of the former and the duo have played havoc with the ethos of political morality. The question before the people is: Has a crack appeared in our value system? Are we marching towards a

Politics and corruption, politics and ethics, and politics and morality are not merely topics for essays in examinations for students. Corruption and politics have become inseparable, says Suchita Malik

21st century which promises to be a web of sex, lies and videotapes?

Politics, as accepted generally, is a messy affair and a dirty game. The meaning ascribed to a politician has undergone a change over the time. A dictionary published in the 40s defines a politician as 'a statesman' but the one published in the nineties attributes negative connotations to the word. The shift in the dictionary meanings is indeed telling.

Let us for the time being confine ourselves to the subject of ethics and morality in politics. Ethics, in its conventional sense, is the study of human actions in respect to their being right or wrong. The actions of

national's interest. Sex is a biological necessity, no doubt. But the human being gave it the expression of love and spiritualism through its practice in a discreet and private fashion as compared with those of animals. Further, the element of piety gained strength through the institution of marriage wherein extra-marital relations were defined as adultery and perceived as a social taboo. People placed in high positions were expected to lead life which the general public could emulate in manners and morals. It is this definition of ethics and morality that has borne the impact of our fast-changing values. There has been an attitudinal transformation towards perception of sexual conduct the world over. Perhaps, the UK still continues to be the most conservative among the European nations. Germany, The Netherlands, Brussels and France are far ahead of other countries and the openness of sexual relations hardly evokes a negative response nowadays.

among the teenagers and divorce rates are high. If that be so, why does one find fault with Clinton for a couple of his flings? Perhaps,

in the Indian thought and action. However, the old value-system continues to dominate the psyche of the people. Its sanctions against extra-marital

relationships still hold good, notwithstanding the episodes of the likes of Suresh Ram and a few others.

The question is to what extent the people in high positions should be held accountable for their sexual misadventures? We are a very conservative society and cannot allow any such conduct on the part of any person that raises serious questions about the sacred vow called



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fidelity in the institution of marriage. And that is what it should be. But there are cir-

But why? One could raise a spate of questions: Is sex not a natural biological necessity? How do societies across the world perceive extra-marital relations? To what extent is adultery continuing to be an unpardonable offence? Is it unethical and immoral? Why is the Press obsessed with the private lives of people? Do the politicians in high places lose their right to privacy? If all eyes look below the belt, are we not going to furthermore discredit a political class already destabilised by financial scandals? Therefore, should all that they do be ignored as not worth the notice? The answers to these questions cannot be as straight and simple. It's a matter of social and individual perceptions.

Politics and corruption, politics and ethics, and politics and morality are not merely topics

Ethics, in its conventional sense, is the study of human actions in respect to their being right or wrong. The actions of individuals and social groups supply the subject matter of ethics. The terms ethics and morals are often used interchangeably. The philosophers, however, find a thin line of demarcation between the two. Ethics refers to the systematic general science of right and wrong conduct. Morals or morality refers to the actual patterns of conduct and the direct working rules of moral action. Without the latter, ethics would be an empty formal abstraction because philosophers base ethics upon a reflective analysis of moral experience.

The use of fair sex in politics has been justified even by Chanakya in his *Arthshastra* but his justification lies in the

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But why not in the USA and the UK? Well, it's an attitude of the Press. For example, in France, there is a tradition dating back to the monarchy whereby there are things which are tolerated there, which would never be in the USA. Problems at the edge of one's private life are treated totally differently in the two countries. In contrast to Britain and the USA, France traditionally draws a discreet veil over the private lives of its public figures. You won't ever know about the extra-marital flings of Mitterrand from the French Press.

The life-style in the USA is no less "advanced". You get to read of the worst cases of sexual perversions in that country. Dating is a normal way of life

the general American public is giving an approving nod to his misadventures when it says: What is so wrong about it if the President has indulged in these flings if he is a good administrator? They could be angry with him for being indiscreet and for telling a lie in the first instance. A common American feels that how can a person be trusted to keep his nation's secrets when he can't keep his own. Well, the political opposition is encasing on it and the Press is furious primarily because he lied about it or prevailed upon Monica Lewinsky to deny the relationship.

Depravity is not the forte of the West alone. Back home, we may not have had incidents of similar magnitude, yet moral turpitude on the part of politicians and leaders continues unabated. There is a lot of gap

vow called fidelity in the institution of marriage. And that is what it should be. But there are circumstances which lead to such "exploits". Acquiring proximity to a person holding a high position is a dream nurtured by many. And this proximity can best be achieved through physical intimacy. On the other hand, a person in high position may misuse his position to achieve illicit gratification.

The role of the woman as the sex-goddess in the late 20th century has once again come into the forefront. The Clinton-Lewinsky affair has opened the Pandora's box forcing the question of morality to stare us in our face. But the fact remains that every society, however advanced or promiscuous, draws for itself a *lakshmanrekha* which its leaders can cross at their own peril.