

Ms, Miss, Mrs or Mx?



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Samhita Barooah 7 March 2018 34823 views

In a recent incident of writing my name, a receptionist at the hospital asked for my name in full. After haggling with the convoluted spelling of my name, she reconfirmed Miss or Mrs? I said just write 'Ms'. She seemed very confused. Her male colleague beside her smirked with a side glance while changing the spelling of my name on the file he was preparing. All other people in the queue who were male looked at me and the receptionist with many questions in their minds. I clarified to the receptionist who seemed like a newly trained hospital staff, about the 'Ms' part. Since marital status is not revealed in Mr, why should women reveal their marital status through Miss or Mrs. Then she said, "Actually it is mandatory for us to ask the patient for their marital status otherwise doctors shout at us." I asked does the same rule apply to male patients as well. The receptionist replied, "No, that is not needed for men." I asked her why rules should be separate for women. She could not answer. I was in pain especially for my ear and I rushed to pay the registration fees. But the incident reminded me of many issues which are attached to the context of women's access to public, community and essential services. A woman's marital status defines her character, social class, health status and many other issues like alliances and assurances.

Suddenly the lens of judgement and stigma about a woman's reproductive and sexual health becomes extremely relevant even to assess an ear pain. Many people ignore such queries and [follow](#) the procedure to get hassle free treatment but such issues remain forms of patriarchal control [over](#) women's bodies, choices and perspectives. This is not the first incident that happened with me. In another case the accountant was so confused with the Ms and Miss that he punched Mr Ms together before my name while generating a money receipt. He left it to me to decide my choice. In another occasion while shouting out my name aloud in a food joint for my order the waiter read Mrs before my name. It seems their system cannot change my initials. So for some food joints I became Mrs. It is always a polite conversation in public space which starts with Miss or Mrs to take note of me as a customer, patient, passenger, client, consultant or a [student](#). Once a bank agent called my number and asked my age then she asked if my husband took my financial decisions. She assumed everything from my age. Sometimes people [don't](#) even ask the age they just look at your white hair and body weight and assumptions [follow](#).

The journey of Miss and Mrs or Ms brings one to class and age. Once someone cross the golden period of sixties, Ms/Miss/Mrs changes to Smt or Shrimati. In Indian terms unmarried women are Kumari and married ones are Shrimati/Shrijuta. But for men whether married or unmarried they are called Shriman/Shrijut or in short Shri. All these initials and titles are meant to be honouring the people bearing these titles. But in reality sometimes these titles can bring huge stress in people's lives. Imagine if you never met a friend in a long time and you find her name in the list of patients or clients with Mrs by default and she discusses singlehood with you. You will judge her differently.

There are many more important options for non-binary persons which include Mx pronounced as mix or mux, Ind for individual, Pr for person and Mre for mystery to be precise. This International Women's Day I guess it is really 'Time is Now' to unveil the intricacies of respect and honour which defines the diversity in women.

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BY SAMHITA BAROOAH

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