

**Quirky count**

The Quirkyalone Poll 2005, conducted by the Quirkyalone Institute, found that four out of five quirkyalones are women. The movement is strongest in North America, with 54 per cent of them being college graduates.



# Singularly happy

Unattached and unabashed, 'quirkyalones' are a growing breed in Mumbai and around the world. **Debjani Ray reports**

**C**handrima Sen, 32, celebrates February 14 with her friends at one of the many swish pubs in Mumbai, dancing, drinking and being herself. For the advertising professional, it is a chance to cock a snook at the Hallmarkisation of romance, to celebrate her liberation and singlehood.

In doing so, she joins a brood of 'quirkyalones' across the city and the globe. The term was coined by American Sasha Cagen outside an ATM after a kiss-less New Year's Eve in 1999. In a flash, Cagen had found something to explain what she and millions of other women felt but failed to articulate.

To tell the world what it means, Cagen wrote an essay in *To-Do-List* magazine in 2000: "I am, perhaps, what you might call... deeply single. Almost never ever in a relationship. Until recently, I wondered if there might be something weird about me. But then, lonely romantics began to grace the covers of *TV Guide* and *Mademoiselle*. From *Ally McBeal* to *Sex in the City*, a spotlight came to shine on the forever single. Perhaps I was not so alone after all." Within a few days of publication, Cagen was inundated with letters (one young woman said, "It was as if the author had crawled under my skin and lived my life.")

Six years after those prophetic words, the Quirkyalone movement has become a rage in the US and the UK. Says Cagen, whose book, *Quirkyalone: A Manifesto for Uncompromising Romantics*, has become gospel for millions of single men and women across the world: "The nature of quirkiness is to be who you are. You never want to compromise your core sense of who you are and you want your partner to be who he or she is too." Quirkyalones are proud of their singleness, are not jealous of married people and sad and bitter about living single.

Satisfied singlehood is catching up in Mumbai as well and a growing number of women — and men — are choosing to live solo.

Priya Florence Shah, 37, has not thought of remarrying after losing her husband last year. Shah, who has an internet publishing business, is happy to be a quirkyalone. "I cannot now think of sharing my space with someone," she says. Shah now devotes all her energies to her-



**Footloose:** Priya Florence Shah, a quirkyalone, with her six-year-old daughter — *BL Soni/DNA*

**One is fun**

**International Quirkyalone Day (IQD)** is celebrated on February 14 to uphold the concepts of freedom, friendship and even self-love. But it is not anti-Valentine's Day.

**IQD** is a do-it-yourself celebration and is not centred in any particular country. Being a grassroots movement, you need to take the initiative to bring it to your city.

**Sasha Cagen's** book, *Quirkyalone: A Manifesto for Uncompromising Romantics*, was the take-off point for the movement to become a rage.

**Quirkyalones** even have a website [www.quirkyalone.net](http://www.quirkyalone.net) or can be contacted at [info@quirkyalone.net](mailto:info@quirkyalone.net).

self, her work and her six-year-old daughter. Nor does she feel any pressure to get married. "Should I ever feel like marrying again, it will have to be for a very special man," she says.

Advertising professional Surabhi Mehta, 39, chose to remain single because she "never felt the need to live with anybody," but says, "singleness is a very selfish existence. You are completely your own person. It's Me, Myself and I. You love yourself, you hate yourself; nobody else is allowed to be involved in this."

Sen, who lives with her partner, agrees that there's an occasional feeling of guilt, when she compares herself to her mother "who was a working woman yet gave so much in her relationships". But, she is a "full-on quirkyalone" and is certain that she will be single for life.

Scriptwriter Satrajit Bose, 30, is not rejecting the idea of coupledness for the sake of space, but he is extremely wary: "Two career-oriented people cannot make a home. I have seen too many couples whose marriages have fallen apart because of this. I don't want to be in such a messy situation. For Bose, singlehood is also a career choice. "I don't want to be tied down right now. My career matters most to me."

Instead of scrambling for a partner or mate to spend time with, these quirkyalones make friends the centre of their lives. Says Mehta, "My friends are like oxygen. So whether it's about paying taxes or asking the boss for a promotion, I always seek their advice." Singletons sometimes also look to their parents or siblings for anchor. Mehta adds, "I am my own support system, but I know that my parents and sister are there for me."

They might not need a traditional support system, but many singletons appreciate the need for a partner and yes, they miss sex. Says Mehta, "Sometimes I feel it would be easier if I had somebody in my life."

For author and media professional, Bulbul Mankani, relationships are not a cure for aloneness, "Relationships carry the possibility of happiness and growth and one should welcome them with the awareness that they are enhancing your existence. But being in them to avoid aloneness makes no sense."

Interestingly, for all the singletons, the bug-bear about ageing and loneliness is missing. Says 43-year-old Rupa Arora: "If I need somebody to take care of me when I am old, I might as well pay somebody to do that. I do not need a husband or live a cramped life with my children to achieve that."

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