

Pati, patni aur woh

by MANOHAR SINGH GILL

My wife said: "We must go to the pictures. Haven't been there for years".

I demurred, seeing no reason to break a sensible policy. She insisted and said: "Everybody has been to see, Pati, Patni aur Woh'."

I said: "What has that got to do with us?"

She argued that her friend Bimla had been insisting that she (my wife) should not see the picture alone. She must take me along. Apparently, there was a point in it which had to be driven home.

FIRST ARGUMENT

I gave in and telephoned my friend, the magistrate. He, in turn, rang up Santa Singh, A.S.I., who immediately despatched foot constable Banta Singh to the cinema. Within half an hour I had two free passes — a part of my rights as a civil servant.

On the way to the cinema my wife was all smiles, mis-

chievous ones. From what I could gather from the title and the hints she threw, in this picture the "patni" for once goes gallivanting, to the discomfort of the male chauvinist pig, that is the Indian husband.

I had my doubts whether this would be so, for even the liberated Indian cinema would not dare to show the "patni" as anything but "pativrata". But my wife seemed sure of her facts.

The picture was hilarious, but the joke was all on wives. I laughed louder and louder, and my wife became crosser and crosser. She could not see any humour in a situation where the husband was such a cheat and a cad. The first argument started as soon as we got into the car on the way home.

"Now I know what you were up to in England", she said with a grim expression.

"What could I be doing there

except studying?" I said defensively.

"You don't have to tell me all that," she answered. "Bimla's cousin's uncle met you there and told me everything. The fool that I was, I never believed him. Now I do".

I failed to see the logic of the argument and sought a clarification.

"Well, it is quite obvious," she explained almost in triumph. "Your conduct in the picture hall — when Sanjeev Kumar was misbehaving so badly — gave you away".

I apologised and sought forgiveness.

STONY SILENCE

Over dinner it started all over again. "Why do you go on tours so often?" she asked.

"Just the usual Government duties," I replied in a neutral tone.

"I do not believe you", she said. "Bimla's husband never

goes on tour. Why do you?"

"But Binu's does", I riposted.

"Well, I must check for myself", she said with determination. "I am going to see the Chief Secretary tomorrow."

I quailed before her threat and wished I had the ingenuity of Sanjeev Kumar. Since I have a less nimble brain I picked up a book and withdrew into stony silence.

After 10 minutes the telephone rang.

I was transformed by the voice at the other end. My gloom vanished and I launched into a long conversation, interspersed with much laughter. She eyed me suspiciously from the other end of the double bed and as soon as I put down the telephone, demanded: "Woh kon thi?"

"My grandmother", I answered in despair, took a sleeping pill and went to bed.