

# **SOCIAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICES OF THE INDIAN HINDU MARRIED WOMEN IN MARRIAGE**

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of Sociology

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Sociology

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By

Ragini Sengupta

May, 2013

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## **ABSTRACT**

In India, “*Vivaha* or marriage, is one of the most significant *samaskara*” (rite of passage) in Hinduism (Ramdya 2010:xi) and is deemed essential for virtually everyone. With the growing economy, increased educational levels, the gradual rise in ‘love match marriages’ and knowing that marriage is usually a onetime opportunity, young Indian couples are willing to adopt and reject certain elements of the traditional Vedic wedding rituals to fit into the larger scheme of their life’s meaning and establish their own style. In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 married Indian Hindu women currently living in the United States to identify and examine the social factors that influenced the choices that these women made regarding the various Vedic wedding rituals. Ann Swidler’s (2004) “tool-kit” approach provides a theoretical framework for better understanding of how culture works, i.e., the complex ways in which people use their diverse culture as repertoires to describe the meaning of another culture that shapes the individual’s day-to-day lives. The interviewed women identified the social factors as the influence of modernization and westernization in India; the role of family and community; and the role of education which affected their choices. These three major social factors played a significant role in their decisions and conceptualizing their choices in the ritual selection process as well as providing a means to better understand the changing aspects of the Indian society.

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## **Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION**

Wedding celebrations in India have undergone immense transformation over the last decade or so. Historically, India has been viewed as a well-established traditional country with deep roots in its culture and value systems. However, as a result of external influences such as colonialism and westernization, India modernized at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century transforming in many ways – politically, economically, socially, culturally and technologically. One of the greatest and most important changes can be found in the institution of marriage. In India, “*Vivaha* or marriage, is one of the most significant *samaskara* (rite of passage) in Hinduism (Ramdya 2010:xi; Roy 2003) but since independence (1947) there have been radical changes in its structure and cultural expectations. Although, the basic religious beliefs associated with Indian marriages have not changed, many of the practices, customs and forms have changed (Dua 2012). For instance, arranging a marriage in India was a critical responsibility of the parents of both the bride and groom (Seth 2012) but the practice of young men and women selecting life partners by themselves is becoming more popular (Dua 2012).

In a traditional Hindu wedding, the wedding rituals are complex events that are composed of multiple parts which follows a script (Vedic) or are performed in a prescribed order predetermined by the community and not by the individual (Mead 2007). However, with increased money at an individual’s disposal, increased educational levels, the gradual rise in ‘love match marriages’ and belief that marriage is a onetime commitment, young Indian couples are willing to adopt and reject certain elements of the traditional Vedic wedding rituals to fit into the larger scheme of their life’s meaning and establish their own style.



Following this trend, the purpose of this research is to explore the social factors that influence the choices that the Indian women make regarding the various Vedic wedding rituals for their marriage ceremonies. This includes determining what rituals mean to them, who and what influences their choices and what contextual factors (family, friends, religion, social class or western exposure) might steer them in one direction or another. As a part of the research process, it is imperative to analyze the core components of the wedding rituals, as well as the material and cultural understandings of the marriage ceremonies. Although, in India, perspectives vary by differing roles, there are both dissimilarities and commonalities in the Indian value system. Therefore for the purpose of this study, I limited my examination of Indian wedding rituals to Hindu marriages following the Vedic ceremonies (i.e. those rituals most commonly associated with the Hindus).

In India, any other event is not as great and grandiose as a wedding is for Indian families (Heitzman and Worden 1995; Seth 2012). A wedding is considered the “window of marriage or marital life” (Smart 2008:763; Castren and Maillochon 2009) and is one of the few rituals or events that exists in every culture and is common in almost every society. Scholars studying weddings and wedding rituals have claimed that it is the “oldest ritual of humanity,” (Bonta and Firoz 2007:202) as it marks a change in a person’s life from being “a social individual to a part of a new social group, a couple” (Leeds-Hurwitz 2002:26). An event marking such a major change in status is termed as a “rite of passage” and the rites and ceremonies comprising the event are seen as ‘passage’ rituals (Kalimji 2004; Leeds-Hurwitz 2002). According to some scholars, these passage rituals are not just an expression of the newlyweds or the feelings of the extended families, but are the symbols that help the bride and the groom to be socialized into their newly attained marital status. Wedding rituals,

therefore, help individuals pass through three stages, namely “departure from the old status, the proper passing to the new status and finally entering into a new status” (Bonta and Firoz 2007:202).

In India, marriage is deemed essential for virtually everyone (Heitzman and Worden 1995). Indian weddings dramatically evoke every possible social obligation, kinship bond, traditional value, impassioned sentiment, and economic resources (Heitzman and Worden 1995). The study to examine the social factors that affected or influenced the wedding ritual selection process among the married Hindu women is important because weddings pertain to the most popular culture in India. Additionally, the complex gamut of Indian social systems is best displayed during the celebration of one’s wedding ceremony (Heitzman and Worden 1995). With a growing economy along with the social and technological changes, the Indian weddings have become more like an industry which is also rapidly transforming economically and socially with time.

Economically, the average cost of Indian wedding ceremonies ranges from \$26,000 to \$35,530 or more (Buckley 2006). With the Indian wedding industry growing at an average rate of 25 percent annually, the lavishness doled out at Indian weddings is just getting bigger by the day (Philip 2007; Sharpe 2005). Gone are the days when great weddings were the ones to be held at some five star hotels with *baratis* (groom’s party) trooping in, fanning Rs.10 (\$ 0.2) bundles. The latest trend now is to fly out the '*barat*' (groom’s party) comprising 250-350 people to Kaula Lampur or Singapore or any other foreign location to have the wedding (Philip 2007; Mann 2012; Shah 2012). Socially, when it comes to arranging a wedding ceremony, Indians believe in the ‘Big Bang theory’ (Anand 2007) where everything is larger than life such as the songs, dances, rituals, fireworks, festivities and even the entire family,

including the extended families, that descends in strength to celebrate the big fat Indian wedding. A great deal of effort and money is put into the wedding to make the ‘big day’ special (Monger 2011). However, weddings still continue to be a family ritual, where families save for years and spend considerably on the wedding and reception, even though the event is short-lived (Currie 1993).

Given the amount of money spent on this cultural ritual, it is reasonable to assert that it exemplifies a great number of personal, cultural and social values that are significant and are worth studying. Weddings, as researchers suggest, are a useful cultural phenomenon for understanding the values that a society upholds and the way people adopt, adapt and occasionally reject these values (Pepin et.al. 2008). Indian weddings are bound with a great deal of customs, ceremonies, rituals, superstitions, and conventions and “these customs and ceremonies can be seen to have at least one of the four functions: to fulfill a legal requirement; to enable a public recognition of the marriage; to help the couple set up home as an independent unit; and to wish the couple luck and good fortune” (Monger 2011:24). Thus, the customs and traditions of a marriage cover a wide range of practices including, the preceremony rituals such as *mehendi* (hand tattooing), bachelor-bachelorates’ party, *sangeet* (musical event) and the prewedding dinners and various post ceremony rituals such as receptions, opening presents and honeymoon (Castren and Maillochon 2009; Leeds-Hurwitz 2002; Monger 2011).

Thus, some research has examined the wedding rituals and customs, but studies focusing on interpreting the various social factors that influences the choices that the individual made for their wedding ceremony are very limited. Therefore to address this gap

in the literature, the current research study examines the various social factors that affected the ritual selection process of married Indian Hindu women living in the United States.

## **Chapter 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

In recent years, scholarly and popular interest in weddings and wedding rituals for American weddings has increased at an overwhelming rate (Barnes 2010; Currie 1993; Buckley 2006; Smart 2008) but has been limited in the analysis of Indian wedding rituals (Buckley 2006). Recent empirical research on American weddings has limited its focus primarily to romance and marriage ideals (Chesser 1980; Kalmijn 2004; Kephart 1967; Coontz 2004). Some scholars have focused their research overtly on the wedding industry and consumerism (Castren and Maillochon 2009; Buckley 2006; Otnes and Pleck 2003; Barnes 2010), while others have placed major emphasis on the gendered division of labor (Barnes 2010) and the importance of relational dimensions of weddings by analyzing and interviewing guests (Castren and Maillochon 2009). However, only a few studies have been conducted cross-culturally, and these focused only on the importance of ‘love’ in marriages (Levine et al. 1995; Mody 2002).

Previous research studies involving the understanding of Hindu tradition, marriage and its rituals are still limited. Some studies have focused on identifying the Hindu ideals of marriage and its tradition of giving ‘gifts’ in the form of women (Fruzzetti 1990; Harlan and Courtright 1995) while others have focused on Vedic interpretations of the Hindu society (Panikkar 1977) and a few others focused on ‘arranged marriages’ in India (Bennette 1983; Nanda 2000). Some scholars have focused on defining the meaning of the sacred marriage rituals of India (Selwyn 1979; Monger 2004; Pandya 2010; Ramdya 2010; Monger 2011). Notably, studies exploring and interpreting social factors affecting the ritual selection process or the choices that the participants have over these rituals are scarce. Even studies exploring,

interpreting and comparing wedding rituals and ceremonies sociologically are very limited. Therefore to address this gap in the literature, the current research study examines the various social factors that affected the ritual selection process of the married Indian Hindu women currently living in the United States.

The discussion of Indian Hindu marriages will begin with a brief overview of three major areas of research central in understanding the Hindu society as a whole and the social factors that may have influenced individuals' decision to select certain rituals over others. They are: 1) The history of Hindu society, its tradition and the interpretations of marriage; 2) The Hindu marriage and its ideals; and 3) Marriage/wedding and its rituals. I will also discuss the statistical overview of marriage, marital status and mean age at marriage, particularly among the females in India over a period 1891 to 2001, to show the changing trend in the age of the marriage among the women in pre and post-independent India. I also included a brief comparison of the mean ages at marriage in India with the rest of the world in the literature to portray the imploring difference. This data will offer empirical evidence on the social factors that are involved in determining the age at marriage of the females in the Hindu society under study. I will also review the history of the Indian education system and discuss its impact on the Indian society and its marriage system.

## **2.1. THE HISTORY OF HINDU SOCIETY, ITS TRADITION AND THE INTERPRETATION OF MARRIAGE**

Marriages in India are a mixture of pure customs, traditions and religious beliefs, along with their varied culture. Marital ideologies, beliefs and practices are complex and vary considerably from region to region in India and among various Indian communities or castes

systems (Harlan and Courtright 1995). To understand the significance of the Indian wedding rituals and ceremonies, it is imperative to understand the normative rules and attitudes of the traditional Indian society, its marriage arrangements and its social system.

### **2.1.1 THE HINDU SOCIETY: THE CASTE SYSTEM AND HINDU MARRIAGE**

Louis Dumont (1981), the French anthropologist provides an in-depth contemporary understanding of the Hindu society. Dumont (1981) argues that,

Western society tends to be individualistic in outlook; Indian society tends to be holistic: it understands the cosmos as a whole, of which society is a constituent part. As society plays within the social order of the universe, so people play roles within the society, but these people are not individuals with strictly discrete identities. Rather, they are interdependent parts of society, parts organized in terms of hierarchically ranked castes with relationships that are roughly equivalent among caste members (p.23).

Hindu society is a stratified one and the caste system is the structural basis of the Hindu society (Srinivas 1956). The caste system is one of the most commented upon features of the Indian society (Srinivas 1956; Raina 2004). “It is an ancient historical legacy linked closely with Hinduism that is still dominant” in India (Dhar 2013:2). The caste is believed to have been “first enunciated by ancient law-giver Manu<sup>1</sup> sometime in Vedic period (1500-1000 B.C.)” (Dhar 2013:2; Chhokar 2007). This system consists of four *varnas* or social groups namely, the *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and the *Shudra*. “The idea of hierarchy is omnipresent in the caste system; not only do the various castes form a hierarchy, but the occupations practiced by them, the various items of their diet, and the customs they observe, all form separate hierarchies” (Srinivas 1956:483).

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<sup>1</sup> *Laws of Manu* or *Manava Dharma Shastra* is one of the standard books in the Hindu canon, and a basic text for all gurus to base their teachings on. This 'revealed scripture' comprises 2684 verses, divided into twelve chapters presenting the norms of domestic, social, and religious life in India (circa 500 BC) under the Brahmin influence, and is fundamental to the understanding of ancient Indian society (O'Flaherty and Smith 1991; Das 1999).

According to the progenitors of the Rig Veda, the sacred texts that dates back to more than 3,000 years ago, believed that the *varnas* (social groups) came from various parts of the body of the primordial man, which *Brahma* (the creator God) created from clay (Raina 2004; Dhar 2013). Each group had a function in sustaining the life of society -- the social body (Raina 2004). The *Brahmans*, or priests, were created from the mouth. They were to provide for the intellectual and spiritual needs of the community. *Kshatriyas*, warriors and rulers, were derived from the arms and their role was to rule and to protect others. *Vaishyas*-- landowners and merchants -- were from the thighs, and were entrusted with the care of commerce and agriculture. *Shudras* -- artisans and servants -- came from the feet that were relegated to carrying out very menial and polluting work related to bodily decay and dirt (Dhar 2013, Raina 2004). The first three groups were regarded as “twice-born or *dwija* and the structural distance between the various castes is defined or ranked in terms of pollution and purity” (Dhar 2013:3).

Ranking, of the castes is the fundamental opposition between pure and impure, where “the *Brahmans* (priest class), the ritually purest of all persons stand at the head of the Cosmo social body, and the naturally impure *Sudras*, or servants, stand at the feet” (Harlan and Courtright 1995:5). The other caste groups, the *Kshatriyas* (warriors and rulers) and *Vaishyas* (potters) fall in between. Purity and impurity in caste, according to the Hindu tradition is mainly maintained through blood (Fruzzetti 1990). The marriage arrangement is therefore the primary context through which the family, the lineage and the kin group rank is maintained in relation with other castes. For Hindu society, “marriage is central to the social order. Marriage conducted according to caste and kinship rules helps to prolong male leneality and augment caste membership” (Fruzzett 1990:xix). Within the institution of marriage, “descent



is patrilineal: blood is inherited in the male line through the intermediary of women” (Harlan and Courtright 1995:6). Blood defilement or pollution in Indian Hindu society results because of contact with a less pure person or substance. (Harlan and Courtright 1995). For example, a *Brahmin* man marrying a *Khastriya* or *Shudra* woman would result in blood defilement. Similarly, social status and human capabilities are also linked with blood, caste system and lineage, which are the other important aspects for understanding the traditional Hindu marriage system.

Harlan and Courtright (1995) argue that understanding the physiognomy of the Hindus would help understand the social and religious construction of man and women in the society. They wrote, “blood condenses to form semen in men and sexual fluid in women. Conception occurs when the male and female “bloods” merge during sexual relations. A child inherits whatever purity is contained in parental blood. Line-preserving liason occurs between persons from the same caste group (*Jati*)” (p.6). For this reason, a man is required to marry a woman of the same caste otherwise inter-caste marriage produces impure issues thus polluting the entire lineage, family and kin groups. However, as descent is patrilineal, a higher caste man marrying a lower caste woman will produce offspring possessing less purity and status than the father, but will achieve legitimate membership in the caste community of the father. This type of liason is called ‘*anuloma* or with the grain’ (Harlan and Courtright 1995:6). Whereas, a higher caste woman marrying a lower caste man violates the structure of the society and the offspring typically ascribes a very low status or is out casted as his father from the society. This type of liason is called ‘*pratiloma* or against the grain’ (Harlan and Courtright 1995:6). Therefore, the purity of women is especially important for the maintainance of the position of the family within the social hierarchy.

### **2.1.2 THE HINDU SOCIETY: THE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONSTRUCTION OF MAN AND WOMAN AND HINDU MARRIAGE**

In *Dharmasastras*<sup>2</sup> a classical, legal and moral text of the Hindus states that all males should pass through four distinct stages or *ashrama*: studentship (*Brahmacharya ashram*), where a youth should study and serve the teacher (*guru*); householder (*Grahastha ashram*), where young men should marry and support the family and community; retirement (*Vanaprastha ashram*), where a man is in his middle age and should retire from active worldly life and engage in study and spiritual practices; and self-realization (*Sanyas ashram*), it's the old age where a man renounces the world and becomes a hermit to attain *moksha* (liberation) (Pandya 2010; Roy 2003; Harlan and Courtright 1995). Although, for men, the four stages or ashramas are more often honoured in principles than in practice especially for those who repaid their debts by fathering a son to support their lineage (Harlan and Courtright 1995).

Nonetheless, the same classical text, *Dharmashastra*, formulates only two basic roles or stages for a woman: as a daughter and a wife. Understanding the cultural representation of women in Hindu marriage is much more complicated than understanding the role and cultural representation of the males. As Fruzzetti (1990) writes, “Daughters are clearly distinguished from wives in line. The former must be given to other lines; the latter must be brought into one’s own line” (p.31). Harlan and Courtright (1995) confirms that women’s sexuality and social status becomes a threat to her father’s male line after she attains her puberty. It is believed that daughters should be married off soon and not kept at father’s

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<sup>2</sup> Dharmaśāstra is a genre of Sanskrit texts and refers to the *śāstra*, or Hindu branch of learning, pertaining to *dharma*, religious and legal duty. And is important within the Hindu tradition—first, as a source of religious law describing the life of an ideal householder and, second, as symbol of the summation of Hindu knowledge about religion, law, ethics, etc. (New World Encyclopedia 2007; Banerji and Banerjee 1999)

house for too long as the purity of one's women have to be maintained. The best way to ensure this is to give away the daughter young, as unmarried daughters are solely responsible for maintaining the status and prestige of her own line (family) as well as the line of her prospective husband's family once she gets married. However, such social pressure of maintaining purity is not experienced by sons as sons are not considered the 'guardians of purity' (Fruzzetti 1990: 12).

Furthermore, Bennette (1983) states that according to Hindu ideal, a woman by nature had to be uncomplaining, self effacing and accepting to any unhappy situation as a result of her own fate since a woman in a Hindu society is considered hierarchally inferior to men in her household, the men of her caste and as well as among the caste boundaries (Harlan and Courtright 1995). In a similar vein, the women's sexuality is well protected and channeled to procreation thus ensuing the protection of the family line. Fruzzetti (1990) writes, that the immortality of male line is made possible by the birth of the male children and it is through women of other line (same caste) "that a man can continue to ensure his ancestral line" (p. xxii). Therefore, as a code of conduct and behavior, restrictions are placed on women within and outside the household to protect the lineage.

## **2.2. HINDU MARRIAGE AND ITS IDEALS**

Fruzzetti (1990) gives a detailed overview of what Hindu marriage is. He writes,

Hindu marriage is a sacred rite linking persons to groups in terms of indigenous principles of and for action (where marriage, sacred ritual, person and group are culturally constructed). Marriage in India is entered into and performed to ensure immortality, continuity, and purity of the male descent line and of the social group for which the line is the organizing principle. Marriage is vital to the maintainance of one's caste status. The principles of marriage practices are therefore inseparable from the principles of hierarchy at the very core of the Indian society (p.8).

Some scholars claim that the Hindu view of marriage is beyond personal satisfaction. It is considered as the “path to your *dharma* towards your spouse, your children, your parents, your community and ultimately the greater society” (Pandya 2010:7). Hindu marriage differs in many ways from marriages in other societies. For example, according to Gallagher (2004:232), “marriage is about getting a man and a woman into a recognized public sexual union where the rights and responsibilities towards each other and their children are public and not merely privately defined,” or as a “reproductive social arrangement that traditionally involves the sexual union of men and women and them producing babies for the survival of the society” (Weisfeld and Weisfeld 2002:50). Similarly, according to West (1998), marriage is defined as a “contract between a man and a woman, who have the capacity to enter into an agreement, where the promise to live together in the relationship of husband and wife in law for life, or until the legal termination of the relationship” (p.122). In Hinduism, marriage is not an experiment or a contract but is an irrevocable commitment or a sacrament to a life-time relationship of one-wife-one-husband (Pandya 2010, Monger 2004). Pandya (2010) states that in order to satisfy such a commitment, one need to be willing and able to subordinate individual’s interest and inclinations to the larger ideal of reflecting divine love through life-long companionship. According to Hindu ideals of marriage, there are natural differences in the tastes and tempers, ideals and interests of individuals and marriage plays a major role in reconciling these differences to promote a harmonious life (Pandya 2010).

Thus, “caste and kinship principles, the hierarchical relations, and the immortality of the male line are an integral part of marriage, as marriage mediates between the lines maintaining equivalence within the layer system of caste hierarchy” (Fruzzetti 1990:xxii).

Any union defying such an order disrupts not only the social status of the family but the order of the society as well. Therefore, according to the Hindu marriage ideals any deviance from the norm is considered the alternative to a Hindu marriage, to the concerns of male lineality, household purity and societal status. Both Harlan and Courtright (1995) and Fruzzetti (1990) in their studies identified “love marriage” as opposing to the norms of the Hindu marriage ideals.

### **2.2.1 ARRANGED MARRIAGE VS. LOVE MARRIAGE**

In India, almost all marriages are arranged (Nanda 2000). Arranged marriages in India are considered the norm while marriages undertaken by parties themselves are considered as deviant and even dangerous behavior (Harlan and Courtright 1995). Love marriages are considered immoral (*kharab* = bad) and, are not performed in the Hindu ritual manner as the traditional marriages in India (Harlan and Courtright 1995). Love marriage as Fruzzetti (1990) states, “unites two individuals, whereas a Hindu marriage unites the son and daughter of two lines (separate houses), perhaps previously unknown to each other” (p. xxii). “Love or *prem*, meaning the conjugal love of husband and wife, in arranged marriages develops and grows through time as the relationship between the couple strengthens but when used outside the sacred context (love marriage) it refers to adultery, carnality, non-sacred, physical or antisocial love” (Fruzzetti 1990:10). Love marriage as Harlan and Courtright (1995) and Fruzzetti (1990) describe, are marriages involving brides and grooms marrying either from different castes groups, forbidden kinship relationships, of different communities (Muslims or Christians) and in defiance of parents and/or caste brothers. A love marriage usually creates turmoil at all points of hierarchical and segmentary caste groups but particularly affects the couple’s household and kin groups (Fruzzetti 1990).

Similarly, according to the Hindu tradition, love marriage insinuates sex alone while a Hindu marriage (arranged marriage) stresses the soundness of the conjugal union. *Prem* or love carries different meaning in different social contexts. Marriage negotiated by the parents and performed by the priest are not for the fulfillment of one's sexual expectation as sex is only a part of the Hindu marriage but not an immediate and ultimate aim (Nanda 2000). *Prem* or love according to the Hindu notion is understood as a combination of worship and love between gods and person. In Hindu ideology, a husband should love and respect his wife, for he is the lord; and the wife should be devoted to her godlike husband. Therefore, *prem* or love in this traditional sense is linked to respect (*samman*) on one level and on to devotional love (*bakhti*) on the other level (Fruzzetti 1990). Whereas, love in love marriages is considered antisocial and dangerous as in a way it challenges the caste and kinship principles in a hierarchy. Also such unions are regarded as cheap and immoral and are destined to fail because of its unstable foundation.

Scholars such as Fruzzetti (1990) and Harlan and Courtright (1995) found that according to Hindu ideologies, unmarried girls had to agree to the choice of a groom that was made by the male members of the family irrespective of their liking or disliking of the prospective partner. Even today it is somewhat customary on the part of the families even among the educated middle classes in modern India to choose a prospective bride or groom for their children. Marriage in India is as much a concern of the families as it is of the individuals (Nanda 2000). Still in many cases, mostly in rural areas as in ancient times, the bride and the groom would not meet each other before the marriage. In other situations, they might meet for a brief conversation and this meeting would either take place only after their parents have decided on their match being suitable or only under the supervision of some

family members'. However, in this present century, parents do not compel their children to marry the person they do not wish to. They usually seek other matches if the previous candidate has been rejected by either themselves or their child who is to be married (Nanda 2000). Nanda (2000) states that the family's reputation is still a very important factor for considering a marriage. "Matches are arranged only within the same caste and general social classes although some crossing of sub-caste is permissible if the class positions of the brides and grooms families are similar" (Nanda 2000:200). Therefore, in a society where divorce is still a scandal and exceedingly low, an arranged marriage is the beginning of a lifetime relationship not just between the bride and groom but between the families as well.

### **2.3. THE AGE AT MARRIAGE IN INDIA: A STATISTICAL OVERVIEW**

The age of the couple at marriage varies among cultures according to religious and civil laws and also according to the local customs (Monger 2011:7). In India, child marriages have long occurred on a large scale, and one would consequently expect a very low average age at marriage, particularly among the females (Agarwala 1957). The prevalence of child marriage in India is perhaps due to the fact that the ancient Hindu scriptures sanctioned them, suggesting that a girl should be married before she attains puberty or certainly soon after her menstruation (Agarwala 1957). Originally, according to the Hindu writings, the Hindu Law of Manu set out the ideal age difference between a man and a woman for marriage, saying that "the man should be three times the age of the girl and it was sinful for a man to breach this rule" (Monger 2004:7). Similarly, it was necessary that a girl should be married by the age of ten or twelve years at the maximum and if not married by this age then it was considered unlucky for both the girl and her family. However, coitus before puberty was

forbidden in these unions (Agarwala 1957). Therefore, it was quite common for a young girl to be promised in marriage to an older boy or a man.

The average 'Age at Marriage' or the mean 'Age at Effective Marriage' (AEM) is the age at "consummation of marriage" (Chandramouli 2011). The mean age at marriage in India of both males and females in 1891 was quite low but had been rising till 1921 (Census of India 1891; Census of India 1901; Census of India 1911; Census of India 1921). Child Marriage Restraint Act also known as Sarda Act (1929), India's first social reform issue taken up by the organized women in India, increased the age at marriage for both sexes (Agarwala 1957). Since 1981 till 2001, the age at marriage for females varied between 18.0 to 19.6 years and for males between 20.4 to 22.6 years (UNICEF 2001). As per Census 2001, the mean age at marriage for females remained stagnant over the past 20 years and is still hovering around 20 years between 2005 and 2009 (Census of India 2010). The mean age at marriage in India is also comparatively low when compared to the rest of the world. As per the 2001 census, the singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM)<sup>3</sup> for females in 1996-2001 in India was 20 years as compared to 26 in United States, 23 in Indonesia, Brazil and China, 21 in Nigeria and Pakistan.

It is necessary to emphasize that marriage in India is thought to be for life or is "an irrevocable betrothal" (Agarwala 1957:96). According to the ancient Hindu scriptures, a woman marries for life. If her husband predeceases her then traditionally she is not permitted to remarry but is supposed to commit 'sati' that is throwing herself on her husband's pyre (Monger 2004). Although, the tradition of 'sati' has been outlawed in the nineteenth century,

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<sup>3</sup> The singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM) is the average length of single life expressed in years among those who marry before age 50 (World Marriage Data 2008 2009).



remarriages among the Indians is still relatively uncommon (Buckley 2006; Monger 2004). As a result of which the divorce rate in India is extremely low and the age at marriage remains as low as 19.6 years for women and 20.4 years for males (UNICEF 2001; Census of India 2001). Moreover, only 1.1% of marriages in India results in a divorce as compared to 45.8% in United States as of 2007 (Divorce Rates 2005) though the Indian figure appears to be rising.

#### **2.4. HINDU SOCIETY: ITS EDUCATION SYETEM AND HINDU MARRIAGE**

“Historically, Indian education has been elitist” (Cheney et.al. 2005:1). Traditional Hindu education served only the needs of the *Brahmins* families especially the needs of the *Brahmin* boys who were taught to read and write only by a *Brahmin* teacher. Even under the Mughal rule, as Lall (2005:1) writes, “Education was similarly elitist, favoring the rich rather than those from the higher caste background.” Under the British rule from 1700s until 1947, “India’s education policies reinforced the pre-existing elitist tendencies” (Cheney et.al 2005:1).

The concept of a modern state, a modern economy and a modern education system was brought in by the British colonial rule. In the Charter of 1833, British India introduced English as the official language and expected the elite section of the Indian society to follow English culture, ideology and education system (Keay 2010). The education system under the colonial rule “served as a “gatekeeper” permitting an avenue of upward mobility only to those with resources” (Cheney et.al 2005:1; Lall 2005). With the advent of English education paved the way for some nationalist and reformation movements in the nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, as Lall (2005:1) states, “The Indian National Congress called for national education, placing an emphasis on technical and vocational training” which provided

opportunity for the women and other castes to realize the advantages of education “as a passport to political power and to acquire formal learning” (Cheney et.al 2005:2). During that time, India saw the rising of various government universities at Bombay (Mumbai), Calcutta (Kolkata) and Madras (Chennai) (Lall 2005).

Following independence as Lall (2005) writes,

Nehru envisaged India as a secular democracy with a state-led command economy. Education for all and industrial development were seen as crucial tools to unite a country divided on the basis of wealth, caste and religion, and formed the cornerstones of the anti-imperial struggle. Following Independence, school curricula were thus imbued with the twin themes of inclusiveness and national pride, placing emphasis on the fact that India’s different communities could live peacefully side by side as one nation (p.1).

Thus, the education system since independence (1947) improved drastically. Various policies and commissions were adopted by the Indian government to improve the education system. One such commission called the Kothari Commission (1964-6), envisaged education “to improve productivity, develop social and national unity, consolidate democracy, modernize the country and develop social, moral and spiritual values” (Lall 2005:1-2). According to the commission, education was made free and compulsory for all children up to the age of 14 years and the curriculum prioritized the study of science and mathematics. Other policies such as the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986 updated in 1992, Operation Blackboard (1987-88), etc. were established to develop the education system which was once an exclusive domain of the wealthiest and the elitist (Velkoff 1998; Lall 2005).

Since India’s independence, women’s education became one of the foremost concerns of the Indian government as well as the society at large (Sharmila and Dhas 2010). Educated women play a very significant role in the overall development and progress of the country.

Numerous studies show that the lack of an educated population can be an impediment to not only the country's economic development but also on women's lives and their families (Velkoff 1998; Sharmila and Dhas 2010). Velkoff (1998:1) also argues, "Illiterate women have high levels of fertility and mortality, poor nutritional status, low earning potential, and little autonomy within the household." To ward off such issues the Indian government committed to develop the literacy level of its women population. More and more girls are encouraged to go to schools and attend colleges now as compared to its past, before independence. Education as some scholars argue is the doorway to move up the social and economic hierarchy, something that can be achieved and is not ascribed by birth as the caste system. Therefore, women are opting for higher education to move up the higher socioeconomic groups. This trend is substantiated further by a recent article in New York Times by Anjani Trivedi (2013). It suggests that in India, besides demographics, the primary and growing factors determining compatibility in marriage market are economics and education (Trivedi 2013). Trivedi (2013) writes, "A growing pool of young women with unprecedented levels of education are seeking and making matches with educated men from higher socioeconomic groups."

## **2.5. MARRIAGE/WEDDING RITUALS**

Marriage in India is considered as one of the major life cycle rituals which "alters not only the women's status and group affiliation but also all her future actions. The rituals not only express these realities but define, construct and interpret them for the actors themselves" (Fruzzetti 1990). For example, a newly married woman begins a new style of life mainly observing her in-laws' custom and norms of action. A Hindu marriage ceremony is comprised of Vedic rituals. "Vedas, the treasury of the ancient spiritual and cultural wisdom

of India, view creation as a play of consciousness where the role of the human is to evolve from ignorance to knowledge (*tamaso maa jyotir gamaya*) and expand individual consciousness to embrace the universal consciousness” (Pandya 2010:5). Vedic ceremonies have been around and performed since time immemorial and there is more to the institution of marriage than just the mere change of status. In the traditional Hindu marriage ritual, the priest follows the sacred texts (*sastras*) and is developed along the lines of a devotional, respectful and conjugal relationship. The rite is witnessed by men and women as well as gods above and around, including the ancestors of the house (*ghar*). Lord Narayan (*Vishnu*) and fire (*Agni*) are considered as the major witnesses (*gavaah/sakkhi*) of the marriage. The relatives of both bride and groom are invited to the marriage rituals as Hindu marriage is the key for distinguishing between *kutum* from *jnati* classes of relatives. *Kutum* are those relatives who are established through marriage while *jnati* are the relatives in the male line mostly related to blood or descent (Fruzzetti 1990). The gathering of relatives at marriages serves to reinforce existing kinship ties and to welcome a whole set of new lines to an ongoing alliance. Fruzzetti (1990:9) states that “the elaborate rituals initiate, create and integrate different groups of relative or an entirely new line – that of groom and bride - into a complex system of alliances, bringing the lines of the in-laws into a wider social system.” Although, in the current times the marriage rites have evolved and changed to fit the needs of time and place, yet they have retained the very aspect of the meanings and emotions involved in the process. As Pandya (2010:7) writes, “The most important aspect of these ceremonies is designed for the social, emotional and spiritual growth.”

Vedic ceremonies have evolved over thousands of years and it is believed that Lord Rama and Sita (the two deities Hindus worship more commonly) too were married according

to the Vedic ceremonies. Although, the rituals are thousands of years old but each of them has specific significance in the Hindu view of life and these customs have evolved in different parts of India, in different castes and even in different families (Pandya 2010). Moreover, Hindus believe in having a marriage that is happy and lasts a lifetime and they believe that “a happy marriage begins with a ceremony that is uplifting, family oriented and harmonious” (Pandya 2010:8). Hindu culture celebrates marriage as a *samaskara*, a sacrament, a rite of passage and as scholars argue the Vedic ceremonies as performed in sanskrit (the most ancient surviving Indo-European language), which elevates the physical union of two individuals to the spiritual being (Panikkar 1977; Fruzzetti 1990; Pandya 2010). During the ceremonies or at a particular stage of marriage rituals, the groom is regarded and treated as a deity and the bride herself becomes a goddess representing Lord Rama and his faithful wife Sita (Fruzzetti 1990).

The Hindu marriage rites usually take place beneath a wooden canopy called the *mandap* which is constructed only for the purpose of this event (Monger 2004; Tzeses 2011). Few studies have been conducted on identifying the ritualistic part of the Hindu ceremony (Monger 2004; Pandya 2010). The full Hindu ceremony consists of approximately ten elements (Kannan 2011). Among them there are few rituals such as *Kanyadaan/Sampradaan* (giving away of the daughter) and *Saptapadi/Saat-phere* (seven steps and vows) which are similar in every wedding ceremony irrespective of the differences in region, caste and sub-caste while some customs have evolved with time, place and among families. Monger (2004) in his study identifies and interprets some of the major rituals of the Hindu wedding ceremony. He writes that the first part of the wedding ceremony is the *Sampradaan* or *Pani Gradana* or *Kanyadaan* (*Sampradaan* is a father’s gift of his daughter to a groom), where a

parent of the bride offers his or her daughter's hand to the bridegroom, asking him to accept the bride as his wife. According to the Vedas and Hindu ideologies, 'giving away of the daughter' or *Sampradaan/Kanyadaan* is the greatest gift "a man can bestow, the one from which he acquires the most merit (*punya*)" (Fruzzetti 1990:17). This gift is made through a series of rites and incantation so to let the world and dieties know of the exchange and is mediated by a Brahman priest (*pandit*) (Fruzzetti 1990). The second part of the Hindu ceremony, according to Monger (2004:160), is lighting up the fire (*Agni*) that represents the mouth of *Vishnu/Lord Narayan* (the Preserver of the universe) and "symbolizes the illumination of mind, of knowledge, and of happiness." Offerings are made to the fire in the form of parched rice and *ghee* (clarified butter) to evoke the deities in heaven for their blessings on the couple. The next stage is called the *Shilarohana*, where the bride puts her right foot onto a stone, implored by the groom to stamp as hard and as firmly as she can. This ritual symbolizes that the couple will be strong and firm together to face the onslaughts of the enemies and hardship in their future endeavours (Monger 2004:160). In yet another part of the ceremony, the bride is asked to pray to *Yama* (the Lord of Death), for long life, prosperity and happiness for the bridegroom by offering parched rice to the fire (*Agni*). This ritual according to Hindu ideals symbolizes defying death by offering the God of Death along with other gods.

The next part of the ceremony is related to the Hindu belief that the bride is protected by the moon for the first seven years of her marriage, then the following seven years by the sun and finally the next following seven years by the fire (Monger 2004). The history of this ritual dates back to thousands of years when the daughter of the Sun (*Surya*) was married to the moon (*Soma*) and were blessed as a couple for their journey and enterprise (Panikar

1977). The hymns, incantations and the ceremonies that celebrated the union of *Surya* – the Sun and *Soma* - the moon serves “as a model and image of every human marriage” (Panikar 1977:254). All the ceremonies that are part of the present Hindu wedding ceremony such as the taking of the hand, the circumbulation of the sacred fire and the setting into the new home are among the rites that were described in *Surya* and *Soma*’s wedding (Panikar 1977). Therefore, even now the couple walks around the sacred fire (*Agni*) seven times (*Saptapadi*) and at “each step they ask to be granted the blessings of food, prosperity, happiness, family, strength and life long friendship” (Monger 2004:160-61; Pandya 2010). The groom then blesses the bride with *sindoor* or *kumkum* (vermilion), at the parting of her hair or forehead or ties a sacred necklace (*mangalsutra*) around her neck. The significance of this ritual in history have different meanings. Monger (2004) writes that this ritual originated with the practice of the bridal couple marking each other by blood while Pandya (2010) says that it signifies the changed status of the bride to wife.

Then, the next part of the ceremony is to called *Dhruva Darshan* (gazing the pole star) where the groom takes his bride to look at the Sun and accept her in the presence of the Sun. This ceremony signifies the “mystical union of man’s creative ambition and women’s supportive strength” (Pandya 2010:32). But, if the wedding is at night, which happens in some regions of India, the priest guides the couple to look up the *Dhruva* (the pole star), the star of steadfastness or *Arundhati* the star of devotion (Monger 2004:161). After promising each other to be as steadfast and devoted as the stars they touch each others heart (*Haridaya Sparsh*) each vowing; “*I touch thy heart unto mine. God has given thy as my husband (wife). My heart be thine and thy heart be mine now*” (Monger 2004:161). The ceremony is

completed with further oblation (*punarhuti*) made to the sacred fire (*Agni*) with a blessing from the priest and the family.

Once the Vedic ceremony is complete, then the families perform the last rite of the wedding ceremony called the *Vidai*. Pandya (2010:23) writes, “the groom’s party along with the bride, leave to go to the groom’s home.” Therefore, once the daughter leaves her father’s house for her husband’s house the bride seals the deals to protect the purity, lineality and immoratanlity of the males line by producing son to the family (Fruzzetti 1990). The Hindu marriage ceremony thus, is more than just the rituals performed by the priests. As Fruzzetti (1990) puts in, all these rituals or rites are a means for understanding the role of married women in the household or the male line she is associated with. Fruzzetti (1990:15) writes, “The purpose of these rituals is to exemplify to the bride and the groom the meaning and importance of *sansar* (householdship), the acivities of daily life.” The Hindu marriage rites even bring together different categories and groups of people such as the relatives of the male lines and also the members associated with marriage. Similarly, the marriage rites also strengthens other relationships in the caste and hierarchical order.

## **2.6. ANN SWIDLER’S “TOOL-KIT” APPROACH**

With the literature focusing much on understanding the history of the Hindu society, its tradition and interpreting its marriage rituals and customs and the study set to explore the social factors influencing the choices that the women make during their wedding ceremonies, theoretically the study is guided by Ann Swidler’s (2004) “tool-kit” approach. Swidler’s (2004) “tool-kit” approach helps in exploring the larger questions about culture and meaning – “how culture actually works when people bring it to bear on a central arena of their daily experience and especially how culture is linked to action” (Swidler 2004:1). In other words,



the study focuses on examining the complex ways people use their diverse culture to describe the meaning of the individual's day-to-day lives. Ann Swidler, (2004), uses her "tool-kit" approach as a metaphor to show how culture works. She states that the tool kit contains cultural resources "of varying shapes, that fits the hand more or less well, are not always easy to use, and only sometimes does the job" (Swidler 2004: 24). According to Swidler, the cultural aspects of the society such as love, marriage or rituals are like the tools which can be picked or dropped based on the way an individual wants its 'self' to be represented. She argued that "culture constitutes multiple selves, worlds and modes of action where people do use culture as a tool-kit, even when one of the cultural tools they may pick up or put down is precisely the kind of self they inhabit" (p.24).

Swidler's thinks of culture as a repertoire. This image, according to Swidler (2004), suggests that "culture cultivates skills and habits in its users so that one can be more or less be good at the cultural repertoire one performs, and that such cultured capacities may exist both as discrete skills, habits and orientation" (p.25). She states that people have an array of cultural resources from which they can choose to use specific pieces at one time and use different ones at other times. She also explains that adding a cultural style, a mood or a justification of action to one's cultural repertoire is not as an easy task but it helps one to learn these skill sets thoroughly to be able to enact them with grace and conviction when required. Culture is used in different ways and the mastery of culture also varies. She explains that some "cultural orientations are so ingrained in the societies that they require neither any effort nor self-consciousness to perform them while others require laborious concentration" (Swidler 2001:25) and some others are acted out poorly as the cultural attitude is insecurely learned. Cultures are "complex and contradictory, and even a common

culture can be used in very different ways” (p.7). Therefore, thinking of a culture as a repertoire can explain an individual action or even the wider social pattern in cultural terms.

Swidler (2004) explains the approach with two related issues, “cultural variety, including the diversity of cultural resources available to particular individuals and groups; and the variable ways people hold or use culture - ranging from intense ideological commitment to the casual or indifferent use of platitude” (Swidler 2001:22). People try to live a life that is ideologically pure where every aspect of the daily life is examined and made consistent with their belief. While for the others, most of life is unexamined where a rich set of cultural traditions, from wedding anniversaries to bits of remembered advice from their mothers to the lyrics of popular songs may seem to make life more meaningful” (27). How culture will be adopted or abandoned is crucial in the analysis of how people choose among diverse cultural resources and put them to use in ways that best suits them.

In this study, weddings and wedding rituals, for instance, are one such cultural repertoires of the society, where I examine how people select among the various repertoires, picking up and putting aside cultural themes. Utilizing Swidler’s tool-kit approach, I will explore the circumstances under which people shift between parts of their repertoire to others, and explore what anchors the varied scripts they use while explaining the reasons behind the choices they made in wedding ritual selection for their ceremonies. I will also study how people who share similar cultural understanding integrate them differently into their lives. Therefore, within this theoretical framework and from the sociological point of view, I will explore the major social factors identified by the participants as their cultural repertoire to make plausible arguments. Using Ann Swidler’s tool-kit approach, I will analyze how people “pick up or put down” (Swidler 2004: 24) different parts of their cultural

repertoires, selecting those parts that correspond to the situation and/or rejecting them if they don't fit.

## **Chapter 3. METHODS**

This study is based on twenty semi-structured in-depth interviews to examine the social factors that affected or influenced the wedding ritual selection process among the married Hindu women during their wedding ceremonies. The focus of my research lies in those Indian married women who meet the “minimum” eligibility criteria listed in the literature but currently live in the United States. According to the ‘Migration Policy Institute’, (Terrazas and Batog 2010), there were about 1.6 million (1,622,522) foreigners born in India residing in the United States in 2008. Also, nearly half of all Indian immigrants resided in California (303,497 or 18.7 percent of the Indian-born population) in 2008 followed by New Jersey (187,732, or 11.6 percent), New York (141,738, or 8.7 percent) and Texas (131,729, or 8.1 percent) (Terrazas and Batog 2010). To limit the overwhelming 1,622,522 number of foreign born Indian immigrants, the study limited its study to interview only the women from India, who consisted of only 45.2 percent of all the Indian immigrants residing in the United States (Terrazas and Batog 2010). The study utilized only married Indian foreign born immigrant women who had a Hindu Vedic wedding ceremony in India (the percentage of which is not known). In this section, I shall discuss the following: the research design – the methodology and procedures employed to conduct the study; the sample selection process and procedure; the nature of the interviews; the data management procedure; and finally the data analysis process.

### **3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The study employed qualitative research methods to comprehend the various nuances of wedding rituals that make up a wedding ceremony. The qualitative interview, also known as an in-depth or intensive interview, is a special kind of conversation between the

interviewer and the participant to explore topics of interest that benefit both the interviewer and interviewee (Warren and Karner 2010). The “purpose of qualitative interviewing is the elicitation of narrative stories from the respondents that can indicate the meanings they give to those aspects of their life-world relevant to the interviewer’s topic” (Warren and Karner 2010:136). It helps the participant to describe what is meaningful or important to him/her using their own words. For an interviewer, this technique helps to explore further details of an interviewee's response by using probes and additional questions and also ascertains whether the interviewee interprets the questions correctly or not. For instance in this case, understanding the meaning of the wedding rituals to determine the factors that influence their choices, the interviewer encouraged the interviewees to describe the importance of the particular events using her own words. Among all other qualitative research methodologies such as ethnography, visual analysis or case studies, a qualitative interview would illuminate individual narratives and their experiences most effectively.

Additionally, wherever possible, this research also incorporated a ‘photo-elicitation’ approach. Photo-elicitation “is a qualitative inquiry approach that provides a means for deeply understanding the perspectives and experiences of people, their beliefs, and how they understand their worlds” (Harper 2002:14). Warren and Karner (2010:202) further describe the photo-elicitation interview as a “very simple variation on the theme of open ended interviewing” where photographs serve as a means of communication between the researcher and interviewee. According to Harper (2005), studies that use photographs in interviews reduce the areas of misunderstanding, sharpen the memory, and elicit longer and more comprehensive accounts of the events than qualitative interviews alone. Thus, viewing photographs during interview sessions helped trigger memories among participants and

clarified the “differences between what was ‘perceived’ and said in the presence and absence of photographs” (Twine 2006:488).

In-depth qualitative interviews of 20 married Indian Hindu women, currently living in the United States provided the data for the qualitative analysis. Time constraints precluded asking more women to participate in the study. An equal number of married Indian women who came to the US prior to their marriage and who came after the marriage were selected so as to assess possible differences in the choices and interpretation of marriage rituals.

Beginning in early September 2012, potential Indian married women participants were identified from my networks and were briefed about my research project through an introductory email (Appendix A), requesting them for their phone numbers and other contact information. Potential volunteers were then telephonically interviewed (Appendix B) to match the sample selection criteria discussed in detail in the next section. The volunteers were also notified that the study was approved by the University of Houston’s Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. Women willing to participate were asked to set a time and place for the interview based on their availability and feasibility. Women who participated in the interview received two consent forms informing them about the confidentiality and anonymity issues. Data were collected over a four month period. I conducted all the interviews and all the interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the participants to ensure accuracy of the responses. Two interview formats were used to collect the data. The first part of the interview consisted of the Face Sheet (Appendix D), asking general background information and the second part of the interview consisted of the Qualitative Interview Instrument (Appendix E) that focused on identifying the social factors influencing

the choices that they make regarding their wedding rituals. The following sections discuss the processes of data collection in detail.

## **3.2. SAMPLE SELECTION**

### **3.2.1 RECRUITMENT**

In order to identify my study population and find the interviewees, I used a non-probability snowball or chain referral sampling method (Lindlof and Taylor 2011; Heckathorn 2002). This method yields a study sample through “referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest” (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981:141). Therefore, sociologists commonly use this method when they research sensitive issues, possibly of a private nature that requires the knowledge of insiders to locate people for the study (Heckathorn 2002). Since the current study involves investigating the social factors that affects or influences the choices of rituals during the wedding ceremonies, it would require recruiting a sample that fits the “criteria specified by the research question” (Warren and Karner 2010:141).

My initial contacts varied quite widely. I began with four women, two of which were students at my university, one from work and the last one was a friend. All four women met the study criteria. Starting with my initial contacts, I asked the interviewees for the names of their neighbor, a co-worker, and a friend with the expectations that the contacts drawn from these three sources would lead to identifying more contacts required for the study. Since, I relied on a chain of personal recommendations for the interviewees; I ended up using a snowball sample procedure. I also contacted my friends and colleagues from the University of Houston and the communities I am a part of, such as the Sociological Students Association

and Graduate Indian Students Organization through email<sup>4</sup>, explaining the study objective and sample selection criteria. The email requested the respective recipients to identify potential respondents from their respective social networks for the recruitment purpose. Utilizing one's social networks is one of the most common ways used by qualitative researchers to identify potential participants for a study sample (Warren and Karner 2010).

### **3.2.1.1 SETTING THE INTERVIEWS**

After finalizing the candidacy of the participants, meetings were scheduled at times and places convenient for the potential respondents. Interviews were conducted in public places such as the UH library, cafeteria or other places such as coffee shops or parks in Houston. The interviews were anticipated to last between one to two hours. The participants were asked to bring in their wedding photo-album(s), if possible, for the photo-elicitation interview.

The original study design called for all face-to face interviews, but the contingencies of geographic location required an adaptation and some of the interviews were conducted through Skype. Bertrand and Bourdeau (2010) state that unlike quantitative research, “qualitative research instruments change and do not remain stable, and the researcher decides to utilize one data collection method, with or without changing the observation conditions” (p.27). Skype, as a data collection tool is gaining popularity among the social science researchers over the past few years (Bertrand and Bourdeau 2010). According to Weinmann and colleagues (2012), Skype has the “potential to be a viable, cost effective alternative to in-person interviews, mainly because it provides the possibility of covering study subjects in large geographical areas” (p.3). Also, Skype as a data collection tool is available for free

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A: ‘An Initial Introduction Contact Email’ for a detailed description of this.



download and has the potential to conduct both video and audio interviews, (Saumure and Given 2010) which allows the interviewee and the interviewer to see each other, identify and record non-verbal communications (Weinmann et.al 2012) and share photos or pictures to illustrate responses (Bertrand and Bourdeau 2010). Although, prior literature suggests that using different interview modes might yield different results (Sturges and Hanrahan 2004), these findings mostly depends on the research question. Saumure and Given (2010:2) also stated that using Skype, an interviewer runs the risk of having a “more stilted conversation with participants than in traditional face-to-face contexts.” The comparison of the interview scripts in this study revealed no significant differences in the interviewees and their responses between those interviewed on skype and in-person.

The study used both face-to-face and Skype interview techniques for the data collection. Of the 20 participants, seven participants who lived outside Houston were interviewed using Skype and their transcripts showed no difference from that of the participants who were interviewed in-person. Additionally, for photo elicitation purpose, each and every participant was asked to show their wedding photographs at some point during the interview. In this study, all of the photo-elicitation process was based on the digital photographs shown by the participants either on the social networking website or on Skype. Of all the 20 participants, only eight of them showed their wedding photographs since photo-viewing was not compulsory. Out of these eight participants, seven of them showed their photographs digitally from either their ‘Facebook profile’ or on their phones. Literature on Facebook reveals that Facebook is the most commonly used website for sharing and viewing photos (Taylor and Stern 2007). While one of the eight participants showed her photo album on Skype. The photo album showed by the participants on Skype was digitally

created and printed and is called ‘Karizma album’. Karizma albums are the trend-setter for personalized wedding digital albums in India and internationally (KARIZMA 1996). Interviews in the study were originally planned on being conducted in English language but the interview data was finally collected in more than one language i.e. in English, Hindi and Bengali. Of the 20 participants, one participant responded in Hindi, one participant responded in both Hindi and English and one participant responded in both Bengali and English. The rest of the seventeen participants responded in English.

During the transcribing process, the interviews were transcribed in their original languages and direct quotes were coded during the analysis. According to a study by Temple and Young (2004:163), researchers interested in translation and interpretation issues generally discuss “validity in terms of ‘correct’ interpretations, register, ethics, matching of social characteristics and neutral stances.” Therefore, if the translator understands the social world that influences the way one sees it then the translator can avoid being biased in the study. The translation in this research study was handled by me. Along with English, being proficient in both Hindi and Bengali, I translated the interviews myself as done by Bogusia Temple (Temple and Young 2004). Temple used Polish as her second language and managed a range of research projects where data were collected in multiple languages, and published extensively on methodological issues where language of the participants was not that of the researcher (Temple and Young 2004). In this study project, however, my knowledge of all the three languages helped me translate the non-English interviews in English with ease and without losing any information provided by the participant.

### **3.2.2 THE INTERVIEWEES (SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS)**

For the purpose of the thesis, I sought to interview a fairly homogenous group of married Indian Hindu women who are currently living in the United States. Since, I am interested in understanding what social factors influenced or steered the wedding ritual selection process among the Indian women during their wedding ceremonies in relation to their understanding of the wedding rituals, I sought to interview only those people who are married. According to Barnes (2010), married women have a broader perspective and a better understanding of what was truly significant or meaningful about the event as compared to single individuals. Also, I targeted to interview only the married women over single or engaged women since people's understanding of certain events are shaped by experience. Therefore, I decided that interviewing only married women would serve the purpose, as compared to their single or engaged counterparts, of understanding the social factors that influenced the women on selecting certain rituals over others.

India is the seventh largest, the second most populous, (around 1.2 billion), a democratic and a secular country. Any discrimination against the member of a particular religion is an offence punishable according to the Indian law. Four world religions - Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism originated in India whereas, Christianity and Islam arrived in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium CE that helped to shape the region's diverse culture (Kuiper 2010). All of these religions have their own fundamental customs and traditions for each of their institutions respectively, which has fascinated scholars from all across the world. The institution of marriage in India is unique and so are its customs and traditions in all the religions. In order to define my sample for this study, I chose a group that best represented the most dominant religion of the country, i.e. Hinduism (BBC 2009).

After determining the above criteria for my sample I narrowed down my sample size based on the candidates' current geographical location. Geographically, it seemed economical and easier to locate the required sample in the United States, my present country of residence as compared to women living in India. Moreover, it was logical to choose from a sample residing here in the United States since the study is being conducted here. Additionally, I also wanted to determine and understand the effect of exposure to the western culture, if any, had on the Indian women currently living in the United States. In order to determine and measure the effect of cultural differences on the ritual selection process, I decided to divide the population into two groups. The first group consisted of Indian Hindu married women who came to the United States prior to their marriage and the second one consist of those Indian Hindu women who came to the United States after their marriage. However, both the set of women had to have their wedding ceremonies in India and currently reside in the U.S. to be considered in the sample group for this study.

The next criterion for the sample selection was education. The sample that I thought of interviewing had to have a minimum of four year college degree. With education, as some scholars argue, women have better knowledge and skills to bargain for a greater say in the way their life goes and the choices they make (Bhopal 2010). Therefore, women with higher education are believed to better understand the possible choices that they can make regarding the rituals and their wedding ceremony. The final condition for narrowing the sample of the interviewees even further was for the women to be currently married only once and to an Indian Hindu husband. The choice of excluding the women who have been divorced, widowed or remarried was made because traditionally, there is a noticeable reduction both in the splendor and festivities of a wedding ceremony and in the wedding guests during the

remarriage (Humble 2009). Apart from this, there are several other minor ritualistic differences (such as brides' not wearing white) between the first and ensuing weddings (Castren and Maillochon 2009; Barnes 2010; Leeds-Hurwitz 2002). ). The exclusion of Indian Hindu women married to a non-Hindu, non-Indian husband was made based on the fact that inter-religion or international weddings usually tend to differ from the traditional Indian Hindu weddings and are beyond the scope of this study.

In this study, after interviewing all the participants, I identified certain patterns which were expected before beginning the interview process along with which a number of unexpected patterns were also identified which helped expose unknown contextual factors that steered Indian women from one direction to another in the ritual selection process. All these differences came together to create a diverse profile about how the Indian traditional wedding rituals fit into the larger scheme of the women's life's meaning. The basic demographic characteristics of the sample for this study were the following: the sample consisted of 20 married Indian Hindu women, who are born and raised in India, currently living in the United States, have at least a bachelor's degree and have been married to Indian Hindu men following the traditional Vedic Hindu marriage principles in India and have never been divorced or widowed. Ten of these women had been to the United States and lived here for at least six months prior to their marriage and the rest had travelled to the United States after their marriage. The participants who have had lived in the United States before their wedding were Dolly, Gauri, Jhumni, Jyoti, Megha, Namita, Nita, Ritu, Rupa, and Tanvi. Out of these ten participants Dolly, Jyoti, Megha, Namita, Nita and Ritu had love marriages while Gauri, Jhumni, Rupa and Tanvi had arranged marriages. The participants who came to US after their wedding were Addy, Gargi, Giya, Jaya, Mohini, Piya, Prarthna, Preeti, Rumki and

Shree. Out of these ten participants Addy, Gargi, Giya, Prarthna and Piya had love marriages while Jaya, Mohini, Preeti, Rumki and Shree had arranged marriages. All the participants are married to their first husbands, belong to the middle class and are currently living in United States. The average age of the sample at marriage was 26.5 years, which was quite older than the average mean age at marriage in India (19.6 years). Also, it was more likely that the older women are better aware of the rituals than the younger women because of their education and their experience. Finally, nineteen women self-identified as Hindus and one identified herself as a Jain (follower of Jainism and a sub-sect of the Hindus) (see Appendix F<sup>5</sup>).

### **3.3. THE INTERVIEWS**

Interviews ranged in lengths from sixty minute to about ninety minutes and were tape recorded. I used two different interview formats or instruments – ‘Demographic Face Sheet’ (see Appendix D) and ‘Qualitative Interview Instrument’<sup>6</sup> (see Appendix E).

#### **3.3.1 INSTRUMENTS**

The ‘Demographic Face Sheet is an efficient method of collecting personal information (age, place of birth and residence, marital status, occupation, schooling, ethnicity or nationality) used commonly by the qualitative researchers (Warren and Karner 2010; Castren and Maillochan 2009). During the interview session, the face sheet was given to the respondents to fill in the detailed questionnaire about them while the recording device was being set up.

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix F: Demographics

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix E: Qualitative Interview Instrument

The ‘Qualitative Interview Instrument’ on the other hand, consisted of ten broad, open-ended questions that formed the basis of the research study. The instrument was semi-structured and had a set of guiding questions that kept the interview on track. The ‘Qualitative Interview Instrument’ was an extended discussion of the respondent’s life history, their understanding of the Vedic rituals, and ideas that affected their thoughts or notions. Throughout the interview, probes and prompts were used whenever necessary, to elicit additional details.

### **3.3.2 CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW**

Interviews were unstructured and open-ended. The questions in the qualitative interview instrument were designed in an increasing order of difficulty that allowed the respondents to gradually get familiarized with both the interviewer and the research goal at the beginning and then required them to think deeply for answering the questions. The questions focused primarily on deciphering the understanding of the weddings and wedding rituals as perceived by the respondents and documenting the activities involved in their wedding to understand the choices they made during the event regarding the ritual selection process. Additionally, issues such as the history of the couple’s relationship and their reasons for getting married were also discussed. The interview instrument was arranged in the chronological order of significance with questions concerning their early life being discussed first followed by questions concerning wedding preparations and processes. The structure of the questionnaire helped the participants to clearly and chronologically narrate their stories.

Moreover, the use of open-ended questions, along with the probes and prompts, facilitated an in-depth conversation with the participants. For instance, to elicit additional details, prompts were used during the photo viewing process in cases where the participant

shared their wedding photographs. These photographs helped trigger the respondent's memory to better narrate their wedding accounts. Details from the photographs such as background colors, attires, decorations and guests were noted down as field notes. Although it was not mandatory for the participants to share their wedding photos as per the IRB (Institutional Review Board) guidelines.

### **3.3.3 CONSENT FORM AND HUMAN SUBJECT ISSUES (IRB)**

The qualitative interview sessions began with a brief introduction of the researcher, the study and the informed consent process<sup>7</sup>. A copy of the consent form was given to each interviewee for their records. All questions and concerns regarding the study objective, interview questions or the process in general were answered, at this time, subjects were also reminded that they can stop the interview any time, skip any questions they prefer to not answer, or request that the recording be stopped for any particular answer(s).

#### **3.3.3.1 HUMAN SUBJECT ISSUES**

Conducting research in a particular setting presents unique issues regarding identification of human subjects, consent, and confidentiality. The use of electronic databases also raises concerns about how to respect the wishes of participants when combining data and maintaining both the confidentiality and anonymity of the data and the respondent. The current study will draw upon interview data to examine the various wedding rituals which will include individual's emotional involvement in the event. Approval of IRB (Institutional Review Board) has been received.

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix C: Consent Form



### **3.4. DATA MANAGEMENT AND TRANSCRIBING PROCESS**

All interviews were audio taped for accuracy. The confidentiality of the respondents was maintained throughout the study period. Each interview recording were be given an identification code in the form of pseudonym selected by the interviewees themselves. The instrument with demographic information of the respondents - the 'face sheet'<sup>8</sup> was also identified in the same pattern as the interview recordings. Moreover, the details of the photographs displayed during the photo-elicitation interviews were recorded as field notes and labeled with the same pseudonyms.

After completion of each interview, the recorded data was accurately transcribed for the analysis process. The field notes, the face sheet and audiotape recordings will be destroyed at the completion of the project as per IRB guidelines.

At the beginning of the interview, I gave the participant a copy of the 'Informed consent' form that helped and explained the participants that all interviews and responses were completely anonymous and confidential. After the consent form, I gave them the demographic 'face sheet' to complete. On the demographic 'face sheet' the respondents were allowed to select a pseudonym of their choice. Interviews were conducted mainly in three places: University of Houston, any public place that is convenient for the respondents such as coffee shops and on Skype (video calling and recording). All participants were allowed to choose the place as well as the most convenient time and for my and the participant's safety I did not conduct any interviews during night time and/or any secluded areas. However, the subjects who were interviewed on Skype had the option of choosing an evening or night time for the interviews (i.e. 9 or 10 pm EST). The consent form and the demographic 'face sheet'

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix D: Face Sheet

was emailed to them prior to the scheduled interview timings. All interviews were digitally recorded and uploaded to a secure folder for this project.

### **3.5. ANALYSIS OF DATA**

Qualitative data collection and analysis usually progress simultaneously. For qualitative study, analysis begins not after the data are collected but with the simultaneous making of notes during the study (Warren and Karner 2010). Making analytic notes, which are sometimes called memos, is one important data analysis strategy that happens during the data collection process and throughout the analysis phase. “The notes or possibly the sketches, trace the thinking of the researcher and help guide a final conceptualization that answers research questions (or related ones) and offers a theory as an explanation for the answers” (Suter 2011:347). Qualitative data generates pages and pages of text, images and videos (Warren and Karner 2010) that at times becomes overwhelming. Analysis is time consuming and requires creativity. As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative data analysis requires “Data reduction (extracting the essence), data display (organizing for meaning), and drawing conclusions (explaining the findings)” (Suter 2011:346). Themes, colors and patterns such as adding bracketed notes on field notes or while transcribing and working on the documents and images helps in the analysis. Making notes of recurring patterns and open coding also makes the procedure of data collection easier.

The re-reading process occurred throughout the data collection process along with the preliminary analysis and ideas and codes being noted down during all the phases (Warren and Karner 2010). Identifying codes, themes and patterns along with color coding categories helps the researcher to make connections, and interpret and validate the collected data. Thus, according to Suter (2011:352), “Analysis is a multistep and multilayered process occurring in

a particular place and time, done by an individual or team”. In order to develop a thorough and compelling analysis of the study, one requires to work back and forth between the codes and themes as identified during the entire study period.

### **3.5.1 DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGY**

As the data collection process and the analysis of the data proceeds simultaneously, I continued adding analytical notes or memos and other codes during the transcribing process. I saved each of the interviews with the same pseudonym that the respondents chose to write on the ‘face sheet’. I added the pseudonym to the field notes as well, so the face sheet, the field notes and the interviews had corresponding names and thus they did not become confusing during further analysis. I then transcribed the interviews to have a written record of the interviews in order to code them according to the desired pattern. I used color codes, themes and patterns to determine the conceptual similarity in the responses of the respondents. Bracketed notes were added to the transcribed data to make sense of the long texts which were helpful for the data reduction process. The reduced data was then organized on the basis of mega codes. For example, all respondents who had love marriage were listed under one category and I color coded them with red ink with a sign “LM” and the respondents who had an arranged marriage were marked as “AM” with blue. I reviewed the codes, themes and patterns over and over again to make sense and link the recorded data, the field notes and the face sheet in reference to the study findings. I made a list of all codes and their meaning to ensure consistency throughout the project.

Following the transcriptions, coding and analysis of each interview, I grouped together women who had or shared similar answers or attitudes in the interviews. Using the

'face sheet' and the field notes I identified other similarities and differences in the demographic information to make assumptions regarding the subjects.

## **Chapter 4. OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS**

In the process of collecting information and data from the Indian married women, I was led through several different life experiences that helped to better understand the factors affecting the ritual selection process. The women attributed their choices to a range of social factors including traditions, customs, childhood experiences, family relationships, education, religion, caste, and social class. The women also ascribed their choices on their own understanding of the wedding rituals, friends and even their social environment. While all the women interviewed were very different from each other such in terms of their social background, caste, geographical location within India, several of the narratives were quite similar and told the same story about their wedding rituals and factors affecting their choices. Here, it is important to understand that it would be difficult to make absolute conclusions based on such a small sample even though some of these women had similar patterns and narratives.

Indian weddings are the core aspect of Indian culture that evokes the complex gamut of Indian social systems in its celebration. This study looks at the narratives of the married Indian women to identify and examine the social factors that influenced their choices in selecting various Vedic wedding rituals over others. The identification of the social factors will further help the study to answer question about the choices they made during their wedding ceremony. For instance, what social factors did the participants utilize to explain the way they got married or why they opted for a social marriage over a court marriage? Or what narratives did the participants use in relation to the identified social factors to explain the social obligations or sacrifices that they had to make in their wedding to comply with the

society. Or what would have they done differently during their ceremonies if they had the choice? Or on what basis did the participants perceived and viewed their wedding ceremonies and rituals. To answer all these questions, the study uses the ways the Indian married women living in the US think and talk about wedding and wedding rituals to explore larger questions about culture and its meaning: how culture actually works for them and how it influences individual actions. The study rests on interviews about the wedding ceremonies. Some of the arguments and evidence from the interviews range much more widely, examining how culture is used in the social life, family life, religious life and other cultural spheres using Swidler's 'tool kit' approach. According to Swidler's "tool-kit" approach, "culture inculcates diverse skills and capacities, shaping people as social actors, to be sure – by providing them tools for constructing lines of action, not by molding them to a uniform cultural type" (Swidler 2004:25).

In this study, I have chosen to examine the major social factors which influence an individual's choice of wedding rituals based on the narratives of the Indian women, the reviewed literature and the Indian society in general. In order to investigate whether the understanding and the individual interpretation of certain rituals played any role in the selection of these rituals in one's wedding, some of the most common, important and symbolic rituals in the Hindu-Vedic weddings have been selected to be studied from both the societal and the interviewee's perspective. The impact of the major social factors and the effect of understanding of these rituals in the ritual selection process are discussed in details in the following sections.

India is considered as one of the oldest nations in terms of its culture and tradition. The culture of India has been shaped by its long history, unique geography, and diverse demography and also by its ancient heritages (Lall 2003). In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, India's colonialism by the British exposed it to the western culture and traditions. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, India started modernizing and transforming, thus underwent a drastic change due to its economic prosperity and technological changes. Economic prosperity and technological advances also brought changes in the political and social arenas of the Indian society (Heitzman.and Worden 1995).

The gradual change in the economic, social and cultural aspect of the Indian society since independence led to three cultural repertoires – ‘westernization and modernization in India’, ‘the role of the family and community’ and ‘the role of education’, that the women used as their toolkit to explain the choices that they made regarding the wedding ritual selection process. Each of the repertoires is explained in detail and the varied scripts they used or selected which corresponds “to the situation or exemplary problem that currently hold their situation” (Swidler 2004:25) are discussed in the following sections. Some subthemes or part of the cultural themes such as understanding the meaning of the rituals are also identified since the women used them interchangeably to support their choices. In the section following the repertoires the five Vedic rituals that the participants identified and chose during their wedding ceremony are discussed.

#### **4.1. WESTERNIZATION AND MODERNIZATION IN INDIA**

The cultural history of India spans for more than thousands of years. However, with the advancement of the Indian economy over the past decade or so, modernization or western

influence on the Indian culture has been on the rise. The concept of westernization was first introduced in India by the British during their colonialism in India. India originally is a hierarchical country, where individuals or group of people are ranked on the basis of caste, class and power (Heitzman and Worden 1995). Caste groupings are primarily associated with Hinduism and during the pre-British period, mobility within the various castes groups was very stringent. The higher caste such as the *Brahmans* and *Kshatriyas* ruled over the social, economic, political and religious areas of the Indian society. The Indian economy which was based on barter rather than money was also stationary, one in which money was scarce and barter was the only source of trading system in the country (Srinivas 1956).

The British Empire, after its invasion in the nineteenth century, found certain institutions of India such as slavery, 'sati' (burning of the widow on her husband's pyre), corruption, feudalism, caste system, untouchability, child marriage and female infanticide etc. barbarous. They used all their power to overthrow and abolish such barbarous institutions by introducing certain aspects of westernization (British diet, dress, education, etc.) or the British culture to the Indian culture. For various reasons, it was impossible for the British to abolish such long rooted traditional institutions but westernization showed the path to reform them. The British government introduced certain political, social, economic and technological forces that affected the social and cultural life of the Indians in a massive way. Also following a capitalist and laissez-faire ideology, the British Empire gradually introduced new technology to develop the country under a socialist and democratic ideology (Srinivas 1956). Economically, the pre-British economy of India was scarce and stagnant and was based mostly on barter system. The British gradually brought in a growing monetary economy in India for its own profits.



The pace and form of westernization of India, varied from one region to another and from one section of the population to another. For instance, some people became westernized in their dress, diet, manners, speech, sports and the gadgets they used while others absorbed western science, knowledge and literature while remaining free externally from westernization (Srinivas 1956). “Westernization entails a change in the cosmological beliefs about the way that one should live (Lal 2003:9)” and the continued westernization of castes in the British and post-British period eventually led to the major cultural and structural changes in the Hindu society as a whole. Modernization on the other hand does not entail westernization. India’s encounter with the West over the past three centuries modernized the Indian society and its economy. “Modernization entails a change in belief about the way a material world operates” (Lal 2003:9), and accordingly by the turn of the twentieth century India transformed in many ways – politically, economically, socially and technologically.

In the present century, India is still a hierarchical society, where individuals or groups of people are ranked according to caste, class or power (Lal 2003). With the widening of the economic horizon and technological advancement, ranking of the caste groups are not stringent and are leading to social, cultural and structural changes in the Indian institutions. For instance, as per the existing literature of this study states, the institution of marriage has also undergone certain cultural and structural changes due to westernization and modernization in India. The participants, however, used these concepts (westernization and modernization) as their cultural repertoire or as a determinant means to defend their positions in selecting certain wedding rituals over others during their wedding ceremonies.

Traditionally, Indian wedding rituals are completely different from that of the western weddings rituals. According to Buckley's (2006) study of cross cultural weddings, there are some commonalities in the wedding rituals of both American 'white' wedding and Indian Hindu weddings such as 'giving away of the daughter' or the 'vows'. But the arrangements and the structure of the weddings for these two cultures are quite different. Nonetheless, the participants that were interviewed for the study in some or the other way had encountered the West (either the participants traveled to the US prior to their marriage or their respective spouse were in the US prior to their marriage) and were also exposed to the western culture either through social media, diet, dress, education or knowledge before or after their weddings. In this section, I will examine how these women "shifted from one part of their repertoire to another and, what anchored or invoked the varied scripts they use" (Swidler 2004:9).

#### **4.1.1 UNACKNOWLEDGED INFLUENCE OF WESTERNIZATION AND MODERNIZATION**

The participants in the study used different parts of their cultural repertoire to make sense of their situation. For instance, of all the participants, majority of the women did not acknowledge the effect of modernization on their lives and in their decision making processes regarding the wedding or its rituals. The participants consciously overruled the notion that their lives or decisions were influenced or affected by western thoughts and ideas. They used various cultural themes to explain how their lives and their decisions were unaffected in the western world while engaging in westernized activities. For example one of the participants, Jyoti (2012), a post-doctorate was quick to reply, "No, nothing changed because of the western influence that I can think of" when asked whether her close encounter with the western world and its culture (stay in the US) had any effect on her while she was

deciding to get married or in general. Similarly, Tanvi (2012), another participant also used the same repertoire as Jyoti. She said, “No not really, nothing would have changed while I was in the US for 3 years. My thoughts and values are too strong to change in such a short notice.”

Jyoti (2012) was further probed about her decisions on applying to the US schools for higher education rather than staying in India for the same, she explained how the prospects were far better in the US than in India: “The prospects for my area of research were better in the US than in India. So I ventured out for better opportunities.” Jyoti used different images of her repertoire or toolkit to support her own argument of ‘westernization’ or ‘modernization’ having no influence on her decision making processes regarding the selection of wedding rituals. Then again, Jyoti argues and draw in parts of her repertoire to state how her decision to travel to the US helped her becoming the person she is today. She explains and also gives credit to the ‘modern outlook’ of the western world which helped shape her personality and made her a responsible and confident person. She says, “I would say coming to America did change something in me. When I came to America I started to do stuff on my own, I worked, did everything on my own ... .” In fact, Jyoti insists on how her outlook gradually changed about India, its economy, its family system and its culture and traditions after spending some of the earlier years in the US. She explains how she believed in leading a life as a hermit, a loner while she was still in India but her thought completely changed after moving to US for studies. She said,

When I was in India, I was never bored, I just studied, I didn’t care about companionship I was always a loner. You know, it never really bothered me that I would be by myself for the rest of my life. I thought it would be an excellent idea to live alone. When I was in India, I was never bored, I just

studied . . . . But when I came to America, I left my parents back in India, so I did realize the importance of companionship, someone around you that you can depend on, friendship and also love eventually... . That is what changed me (Jyoti 2012).

Jyoti draws a different repertoire or cultural themes to argue her stand on the effect that westernization and modernization in India had on her life and her decision making processes that led her to select certain wedding rituals over the other or perform them in a certain way that satisfied her conscience. She explains how her decision to travel to the US changed her outlook about marriage, the Indian culture and its traditions. She says, “My coming to America has influenced my marriage decision? I would say yes, that is where I met my husband . . . I realized that marriage is not just a bond in terms of only husband and wife but also involves families” (Jyoti 2012). The core of her thinking or the repertoires of reasons that Jyoti brought up were more or less reasoned arguments that made sense to her, with little concern about the coherence among them. Most of the repertoires that Jyoti drew from her life experience contradicted her other repertoires and arguments. She was seen to use Swidler’s (2004:31) “shotgun approach of a debater, throwing out arguments on the chance that one might hit the mark.”

Other participants also used this ‘shotgun’ approach of throwing in arguments to the effect of westernization and modernization in India had on their lives and major decision making processes. Tanvi, a software engineer by profession, juggled her thought process between two repertoires. On one hand she explained how her experience with the western culture portrays freedom and independence while on the other hand how Indian culture values family life. She uses different repertoires such ‘family tradition’, ‘values’, ‘bonding’ to reason her argument about her decision on getting married the Indian Hindu way. She says,

No not really, nothing would have changed while I was in US for 3 years. My thoughts and values are too strong to change in such a short notice. I mean I like what you say the freedom here but back in India it's all about families and you alone cannot change anything. Indian marriages are like a big thing for the families and I don't think I thought differently about the wedding because of me being here. I love the social bonding that each and every member shows towards others (Tanvi 2012).

Addy, a housewife used different repertoire to explain her stand on the effect of westernization and modernization on the choices she made regarding her wedding ceremonies and rituals. She explained how her outlook towards the Indian marriage and its system changed when she met her husband who traveled to the US for his higher studies prior to their marriage. She used contrasting repertoires to argue how her childhood dream of “getting married” differed with what kind of wedding she eventually had. She explains that for her, marriage always meant having material wealth in the form of jewelry, bridal wears, expensive traditional attires, make-ups, hairdos, etc. but her exposure to modern outlook through movies and most importantly through her future husband changed her outlook about marriage. She used varied scripts or repertoires such as ‘love’, ‘family values’ and ‘tradition’ to defend her argument about how her thought process becomes more modern. She says,

When I will be married I will be bejeweled with lots of uhmmm stuff that my mother possessed and lots of other things that father will buy for me and lots of expensive *saris*, the dress the *lehenga* (traditional attire), the jewelry, the *udni* (drapes), the *salwar* suits. So that was the only thing that I will be treated like a queen and I will be getting everything of what I want and all in the best condition. Yeah that's what I thought when I was a kid. It definitely changed because when I met my boyfriend who is my current husband so uhmm when I met him the definition of marriage changed and I wanted to stay with him and be with him forever. So that time those things didn't matter then like I will be treated like a queen and uhmm jewelry and *saris* and the treatment that I will be getting. The only thing that struck me was I will be with my love forever (Addy 2012).

Addy also uses other repertoires to argue her stand about the effect of modernization in India had on her regarding the Indian marriage system. She explains that her indirect encounter with the western world through her husband who was staying in the US for his higher studies influenced her decisions on certain aspects of her marriage. For instance, she decided to cut down the huge drainage of money that the Indian families are required to undertake during the wedding of their children. She explained how in western weddings, the couple bear the expenses of their marriage and that's such a logical thing to do. She says, "I would have curbed down the huge drainage of money because here in western world they don't take money from their parents while they are getting married. So I would just have curbed that amount of money and I could have done whatever I could do by myself." Addy added some other repertoires to her argument to express her feelings about the Indian marriage system. Although, she argues that she loved the way she got married but she would have preferred some flexibility in the rituals and other stuff unlike the western weddings. She says,

Americans have one day wedding and the guy and the girl don't have to toil days after days under the strict rituals of Hinduism and then they have only one day two hour wedding and a biblical part, a social part and good foods and they are off for honeymoon. But we (Indians) will be stuck in the marriage ritual for eight days and after that on *astamangala* (eight days ritual) it is a ritual you know when you are allowed to be free and then you are allowed to do anything. I would have preferred that kind of wedding (Addy 2012).

Inversely, other participants were seen drawing reasoned arguments from their repertoires, trying various rationales to justify their situation under study. For instance, as discussed above, Tanvi used some metaphors to uphold the traditional Indian values and the corresponding family values as her reason to argue her stand about Hindu marriage system,

Rumki, a current PhD candidate in a US school draws on very much the same repertoire of arguments to support her wedding rituals and ceremony related choices. She said,

I love my tradition and I love the way Indian marriages are carried out in India. So I don't think anything would have changed my decision of marrying the way I married. I always wanted to get married the way I did...I always wanted to have the traditional, colorful marriage... . I am here in US for the last four years now in my mind I never thought of having a different kind of wedding. I don't think anything would have changed if I was here before my marriage (Rumki 2012).

Preeti (2012), currently a house-wife says, "*Shaadi aur US mein rehene ka koi connection nahi hai. Mein yahan rahun ya waha, shaadi toh shaadi hoti hai ... jahan ke rehne waale waha ke rules follow karne hote hai*" (There is no connection between marriage and me staying in US or India ... wedding is a wedding and we have to follow the rules of the country we belong to). Preeti's reasoning or use of the cultural repertoire facilitates a logical argument that was quite hard to defend as well as define. She draws her repertoire from the country's (India) cultural tradition. She logically explains how it is impossible to have a common connection between organizing a Hindu wedding ceremony in India and Indians living or traveling to the United States. She states that an Indian wedding ceremony organized in India will follow only the rules of the Indian culture and will have the influence of Indian culture and tradition.

Namita, also a housewife presents a much richer and fuller version of what Preeti argued. Namita uses tradition as a major repertoire to argue her stand. She explains that the traditions of Indian wedding is so deep rooted in its culture that it's really difficult to change or transform it. Namita says,

I lived in US for quite some time. But my perspectives about weddings and wedding rituals never changed ... when you are marrying an Indian guy who is born and raised in India, it's more difficult to change the age old traditions and my in-laws come from a very conservative background as I said before so nothing actually changed (Namita 2012).

There were other participants who used both tradition and modernization to explain their choices regarding wedding rituals. For instance, Nita, a working geologist, showed her happiness in following the Indian tradition wedding rules. She says, "I had a very traditional Indian wedding with red sari and all those *topor, mukut* (crown)." Mohini, currently a housewife, on the other hand uses the Indian tradition as a repertoire to justify her actions regarding the ritual selection process for her wedding ceremony. She, like Addy, uses her family and the monetary issues as her repertoires to explain her stand about the Hindu wedding system and demands to have some flexibility in the customs of the Hindu marriage. She was mostly seen drawing these repertoires in reference to the social changes that is occurring in modern India. She says,

I believe and think wedding rituals would of course have been different maybe I wouldn't have gone through the whole process of like that long or something like that maybe I would have gone for a court marriage... .Though, I enjoyed mine because to me my parents could afford it but I feel like when other parents are forced to go through the wedding because even if they cannot afford it... . As it is the demand of the society for the parents to arrange for their daughter's wedding and parents save their money kind of only for this day. So if I was here before my marriage things would have been different not the marriage but the whole process of marriage. Of course, I still would have want to have a traditional wedding but in a much smaller scale as I have my son and I want my son to go through a traditional wedding to keep up the tradition, to keep up the custom, and specially like him to know about the custom but of course in a much smaller scale maybe (Mohini 2012).

In the process of my interviews, my participants shifted from one part of their repertoire to another continuously, to defend their position and to make a plausible argument.



Swidler (2004) suggests that “some cultural orientations are so ingrained that they require neither effort nor self-consciousness, others require laborious concentrations. And still other parts of a repertoire are insecurely learned, so that one may act out a cultural attitude without being very good at it” (p.25). For example, an overwhelming number of woman (Piya, Giya, Addy, Dolly, Megha, Jyoti, Gargi and Ritu) were in favor of having a court or registered marriage rather than an elaborate wedding or social marriage. Although the families wanted to arrange a social wedding but participants used several parts of their cultural repertoire simultaneously to defend their positions and call up arguments that seems plausible. People had difficulty explaining the reasons of why they chose to have a social wedding when they favored a court marriage. Piya, currently an undergraduate student in a US school says, “I might have gone through all those rituals but I would have loved to have a court marriage.” In situations like these the participants juggled between the two available resources to validate and argue their point. Piya, who shared a strong bond with her family and valued their wishes and choices, was quick to response about why she thought a court marriage to be a better option than the social marriage. She says, “What all society needs is to see that certificate or certify that I am married. They need a proof that I am married.”

Similarly, Giya too shifts from one repertoire to another to explain her stance on agreeing to a court marriage in the first place. She says, “First of all we thought of just like registered marriage as we didn’t want to do like a whole social wedding probably because I don’t want all those drama.” Giya explains how she felt these wedding rituals and ceremonies to be some kind of theatrical performance. However, when she was asked what event or circumstances changed her mind on doing a social wedding, she offered a wealth of

arguments that contradicted her earlier responses and “tradition of thought” (Swidler 2004:26). She replied,

I don't know don't even remember the exact reasons ... like in every family there are something and I was the older child in the family and since it's a bigger family and even in S (husband's) family they want this little bit of a social marriage ... we decided that to have a very short not very long traditional marriage (Giya 2012).

Some of the participants' decisions were quite different from the ones discussed above. For instance, both Nita and Ritu went for a court marriage prior to their social weddings and lived together with their respective husbands before going through a social wedding. According to Section 7 of the Hindu Marriage Act, the law recognizes the ceremonies and customs of marriage “Hindu marriage may be solemnized in accordance with the customary rites and ceremonies of either party. Such rites and rituals include the *Saptapadi*—the taking of seven steps by the bridegroom and the bride jointly before the sacred fire. The marriage becomes complete and binding when the seventh step is taken” (Hindu Marriage Act, 1955). Therefore, both chose not to follow the traditional path and lived together as a married couple here in the US. It is part of the Indian norm for a couple to live together only if they had a social wedding following the seven steps round the fire. If in any circumstances, the couples had the registry marriage before their social wedding then the couple are required to live separately in their respective houses like it happened with Addy. Addy had a registry marriage a year before her social wedding but they were not allowed to stay together under the same roof until the completion of their social wedding.

In Ritu's and Nita's case, things were different. Both the women drew upon different repertoires to make a sense of their argument. For instance, Ritu says, “It's not wrong, right? The criterion with the family is to get married and then live under the same roof. It was our

decision so we got married according to the US laws and went back to India later to do our social marriage.” Ritu used some parts of the cultural themes such as “lack of time”, “busy with school”, or “no money/ lack of funds” toolkits to justify her actions. Though, she wasn’t very sure whether to consider their actions as a consequence of modernization in India. She used the cultural repertoire by slightly twisting the reasons without out rightly refuting the tradition. She argues,

Live-in relationships are not popular in India. My family wouldn’t have agreed to it. S (husband’s) family too was against live-in relationship. We were not able to go to India at that time so thought of getting married in a court and for the family to see and enjoy we went back later to have a social wedding (Ritu 2012).

Similarly, Nita too had a registered marriage before she went to the US for her studies. She says,

I got admitted in the US University... but my husband didn’t. So we both decided to pursue our careers but our parents wanted us to get married ... we decided to get registered first as we had no time to prepare the wedding ceremony... so we got married in a court ... our parents were there with us but decided to get the social marriage done by the following year (Nita 2012).

In both these cases, the participants gave an array of arguments, shifting from one repertoire to another to justify their acts of getting married in a court before their social wedding ceremonies. Also, in both the cases, the women’s decisions were a consequence of their encounter with the West but they refused to acknowledge it. Based on the narratives, this social factor or the repertoire showed little or no effect on the ritual selection process for my study participants. Nevertheless, on further observation of all the interview responses, it’s possible to conclude that there are some effects of both westernization and modernization on the wedding ceremonies and the ritual selection processes of the participants. For example,

two of my participants wanted to have a musical night the day before their wedding. According to Indian rituals, *sangeet* (a musical event) is a part of the pre-wedding ritual where the family and extended family members of the bride and the groom get together, separately for a musical event. Traditionally, *sangeet* (a musical event) is organized separately by both the bride and the groom's families and the bride and the groom are not allowed to meet each other before wedding (Monger 2004). Both Gauri and Megha arranged a DJ night instead of a *sangeet* (musical event) ceremony to celebrate the pre-wedding rituals. Megha says, "Just before the day of our marriage we had a DJ party at night, so K's (husband) family and our family came and they interacted with each other. It was a good platform for both the families to know each other like what kind of people we are and what kind of people they are." Similarly, Gauri says "a night before the wedding we had the *sangeet* (musical event). We had lot of people coming from both my family and the groom's side."

Similarly, according to Jyoti's narratives their respective parents sat together before deciding on the wedding dates to discuss about the rituals that they wanted to include in their children's wedding. Jyoti says, "I am a Punjabi and my husband is a Bengali, but our parents are very cool and open minded. There were some of the rituals like *Kanyadaan*, *Saptapadi* and one more I think *Mangalsutra* that were common in my and S (husband's) culture. So my parents were okay to follow the Bengali style as long as we followed these rituals." Though, the negotiations between the parents are not directly an effect of the western exposure but the forwardness of the families in relation to mixed marriage or inter-caste marriages are.

In the following sections, 'age at marriage' is discussed as a sub-theme of the effect of modernization and westernization in India. This factor is used interchangeably as a repertoire by the women to further explain the rational reasoning behind their decisions on getting married the way they did and choosing certain rituals over others.

#### **4.1.2 AGE AT MARRIAGE**

The mean age at marriage in India over the last two decades is on the rise, the ideal age of marriage for Indian girls in urban areas as of 2009 is between 20 to 23 years (Chandramouli 2011). In this study, the mean age at marriage for the 20 women interviewed is approximately 26.5 years which is quite high as compared to the Census data statistic discussed earlier in the literature. As literature suggests families in India are still under extensive pressure to marry off their daughters at around 20 years of age. Whereas in this study the higher age at marriage as compared to that reported in the census data has prompted me to consider this parameter as a factor which might influence the decision making process of the interviewees regarding their choice of wedding rituals. It has been reported in the literature that due to the prevalence of child marriage in India, historically, women were not allowed to have any say about their marriage for long but with increase in the legal marriageable age and education, westernization of the Indian culture, women are actively participating to decide their age at marriage. Hence, based on this current trend where the bride's opinion is now being considered in a wedding, the effect of the age at marriage on the choice of wedding rituals becomes an interesting parameter to study. Age at marriage was used as a repertoire or cultural theme by the participants to justify their stand on why and how they refuted the average marriageable age.

Gauri (2012) was 23 years of age when her parents talked to her about her getting married. They too, like Jaya's parents, were looking around for a suitable match. As for Gauri, she was asked by her parents to meet prospective grooms even while she was in the US doing her master's degree. She says, "While I was in US, my dad used to send me grooms in US, there were guys coming to meet me from different places, . . . . I mean guys in US used to come to US to visit me." As per Gauri, her parents were too desperate to get her married as she was over her marriageable age and was still unmarried at 26 years. She added, "I was in no mood to get married but then they (parents) wanted me desperately to get me married."

For the participants who traveled to the US with their spouses after their marriage had very little or no such power or choice to delay their weddings. For example, Jaya who wanted to do her Master's before getting married, was married off at the age of 23 years, precisely after she finished her Bachelor's. Preeti who too traveled to the US after her marriage got married at 23 years, as soon as she completed her MBA degree. She says, "*Gharwaalon ne kaha hi tha ki MBA khatam karte hi meri shaadi karwayenge, mujhe kahin pe naukri shuru karna tha*" (My family told me that as soon as I finish my MBA degree I will be married off, although I wanted to start working somewhere) (Preeti 2012). It can be concluded from the narratives that the participants who traveled to the US before marriage were not forced to marry early because they had the choice to choose between higher education and marriage and chose the former. On the other hand, the participants who traveled to the US after their marriage had no such options from which to choose.

In the second pattern, the age at marriage for the women who traveled to USA after their marriage, depended on their spouse. For example, Rumki and Jaya had fewer choices on

deciding when to get married to as it depended mostly on their spouse's choices, schedules and availability. According to Rumki's narratives, she got married when she was 26 years old but her marriage was fixed when she was 24 years old. She says that she had to wait for one and a half to two years for her husband to come to India from the US. Similarly, in Piya's case, she was only 20 years old when she got married to her husband. She says that it was the time when her husband was about to defend his Master's thesis and was planning to come to India: "So things were like, basically what happened was the day he defended his masters it was supposed to be like he will come back to India and we will get married then."

Similarly, in Jaya's case, her husband was visiting India at the time when she got married because both the families were looking for prospective matches. Therefore, according to their narrative, it was observed that the choice of age at marriage in these three cases depended heavily on the participant's spouse who lived in the US at that time rather than the participants themselves or their families. But the participants, who traveled to the US prior to their marriage, had the option and choice to decide their age at marriage based on their availability and schedules. For example, in Nita's case, she was the one who traveled to the US prior to her marriage and came back to India only to get married to her husband. Although they dated since their college days but her husband had to wait for Nita to complete her Master's. She says, "I came back from US after my master's defense to do the social wedding." Therefore, according to the narrative these patterns were observed that differentiated those that traveled to the US before their marriage to those who came here after their marriage.

## **4.2. THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY**

As per the Hindu ideals noted in the literature, Hindu marriage is about bringing in different categories and groups of people together, to assemble all the closely related male lines and all the relatives joined through marriage. Also, friends, neighbors and other local caste groups are also brought together during the marriage (Harlan and Courtright 1995). In this section, the role of the family and community is analyzed to see what role did this social factor as a repertoire played in influencing the choices of the women in the ritual selection process.

A lot of importance is given to the families in India. After interviewing the participants, I found out that the majority of them talked highly about their relationship with their family. All the participants were raised in a two parent family with some of them being raised in an extended family that includes paternal or maternal grandparents, paternal uncles, aunts and/or cousins – all living together. Participants agreed that during their growing up years they witnessed a number of events and ceremonies that helped them inculcate diverse skills and capacities that assisted to shape them as social actors and helped them socially to decide on their own lines of action. As Swidler (2004) suggested, people have an array of cultural resources that they draw upon whenever necessary. But adding a cultural style, mood or justification of action to one's repertoire is not easy. In my interviews, the participants learnt these skill sets or were socialized by their parents and families during their formative years. The participants drew several parts of their repertoires simultaneously such as childhood experiences, social environment, incidents or occurrences pertaining in their family life to defend or propose a plausible argument to explain their choices. Giya, for example, says that as she grew up in an extended family with her grandparents, uncles and



aunts and in the midst of various social events and ceremonies like rice feeding ceremony, *puja* (prayers), or weddings, helped her to shape up her social skills and her line of action. She even says that the culture that she was born into helped her as a tool to construct her own line of actions or herself rather than getting molded into some kind of uniform cultural type (Swidler 2004). She justifies her action of getting married the ritualistic way by saying that,

I grew up in a joint family so my grandmother, grandmother, my aunts and uncles, cousins we all lived together ... there were lots of ceremonies and events and so ... there were lots of weddings because both my uncles got married after I was born ... all kind of fun ceremonies like rice feeding ceremonies and all that and you know if it's like a big family it's like everybody have their own opinion and all that about different kinds of rituals and all that so and I think I learned a lot about different things because like if you have a big family, there are certain members like my mom or my grandmother or my aunties they came from different families so they have their own traditions and they have their own rituals and everything so it's all kind of put together in one thing. So I learned like different kind of traditions like that. It was kind of a learning experience (Giya 2012).

Giya also draws on a wealth of other arguments to explain how her life experience with her family members helped her to form an opinion about the Indian Hindu marriage system and her own wedding ceremony. For example, Giya witnessed two weddings in her own family while she was a teenager and draws in conclusion on how the two marriages were similar and/or different from her own marriage. Giya uses her paternal uncle's marriages as a repertoire to justify her decision and actions on getting married the same way as her uncles but simultaneously uses other resources or repertoires to argue how different her wedding ceremony was than the others. Giya says,

uhmmm I think it was a little bit different from mine, little bit because there were many more rituals at that point of time ... I think my uhmmm everybody followed a little more rituals at that point of time. When I got married it was like whatever I wanted like less rituals, more fun at that point of time I think rituals part came more prominent (Giya 2012).

Similarly, for the other participants also family played a major role in assembling discreet skills, habits and orientations to add up to their cultural repertoire. For example, Mohini, another participant too uses her social environment and her upbringing criteria within her family system as the two repertoires to explain certain events that shaped up her life and influenced her decisions in her later life. She draws her resources from the family she was born and raised into and from her childhood experiences. She states, “I was brought up in a nuclear family, me my mom and dad, my elder brother, my grandmother ... my father was away due to his job ... :”

In Ritu’s case however, she married in a US state court first before going back to India for her social marriage. She says, “I and S (husband) married in a court in Texas because we wanted to stay together and court marriage was the only option.” Ritu is born to a middle class urban family and according to her, family values and cultures are the most important assets of her life. She explained how staying together under the same roof with a man without marriage was unacceptable in India and its social system. She argued that her or her husband’s family too would not have approved of them living together before marriage so they opted for a court marriage. Though, she or her husband had no qualms towards live in relationship but she defended herself with a plausible explanation. Ritu said, “Both our parents were against a live-in relationship. A man and a women staying under the same roof before marriage was completely unacceptable. In India live-n relationships are considered bad. So we wanted to stay together here in US so we opted for a court marriage here in Texas.”

Similarly, Nita too had a registered marriage before she went to the US for her studies. She says,

I got admitted in the US University ... but my husband didn't. So we both decided to pursue our careers but our parents wanted us to get married ... we decided to get registered first as we had no time to prepare the wedding ceremony ... so we got married in a court ... our parents were there with us but decided to get the social marriage done by the following year (Nita 2012).

In both these cases, the participants gave an array of arguments, shifting from one repertoire to another to justify their acts of getting married in a court before their social marriages. Both the participants even argued saying that their respective families completely supported their decisions as they were better than live-in relationships which is unacceptable in India.

Some of the other participants such as Addy, Dolly, Megha, Jyoti and Gargi agreed to have favored court marriages too not because they disliked having a social wedding but because they wanted to save their parents from the unnecessary expenditures associated with the social wedding. In these situations the participants used different cultural themes such as monetary issues to argue their choices. For example, Addy says that during her wedding she felt very bad for both her and her husband's parents for spending so much money on a single event:

To be very honest, in the first place I was very against all this (social wedding) because I didn't want my parents to lose six to eight lakhs of money on me ... just on my jewelry, my sari, my tailoring, my hair do, my makeover of all days and *tattvas* (gifts) that we send to the groom's house that cost them about two lakhs (Addy 2012).

Addy even recalls talking to her husband and her parents about it but agreed to do social marriage anyway because: "My parents said that no we want to do this as you are the only daughter we have and my parents-in-law were also like yes this is how I want to get our daughter-in-law in our home and this is our dream." These participants used this repertoire of 'monetary issues' to show how the role of the family influenced the women to opt for social

weddings rather than heading for court marriage. Jyoti (2012) recalls: “I guess I would say that these religious kind of marriages is important to both our parents, so we did it ... that was important to both sets of parents ... it was not a very big deal or not a very big compromise for us.” Gargi, on the other hand, was not keen about the social marriage because she felt cheated and heartbroken because of a failed relationship but agreed because her then boyfriend and her family wanted her to have a social ritualistic marriage. She says: “I decided not to have a big wedding anymore as I felt cheated ... what’s the use to have a big wedding but my husband and my family wanted to have a big wedding to make it special for me.”

In general, for all the participants, family was the main factor for choosing a ritualistic wedding. Jaya apart from her family’s wishes says: “Everybody kind of has fun and enjoys the celebration and everybody is together for 2-3 days and it feels like fun, the atmosphere at home is like you are having a grand celebration and all.” Similarly, Rupa said:

It makes them (parents) feel happy and then I find that during the wedding process you get to know each other like not only that I am knowing my husband but I’m knowing his parents his extended family members, you get to know them a lot which feels good because finally you will be going there and they also will be a part of your life. So it is always good to get to know these people and feel that of course they want you to be there with them (Rupa 2012).

Although, Rupa was never against a social marriage before the tragic death of her father which forced her to advocate for a simple court marriage to save her mother from the extravagant expenses.

Therefore, the role of the family and the community was the major deciding factor for the participants to go for a social marriage. For some of the participants, such as Preeti and

Shree, family tradition and history was the only deciding factor for them to go for a social wedding. Shree said,

My family wanted this kind of a wedding for me and my sister. My sister's wedding was so much fun and they (parents) wanted me to have such kind of a wedding. It's you know the parents wish that they will wed their daughters in a grand way. So I was fine with it. I loved it though (Shree 2012).

While Preeti says, "*Bachpaan se shaadi dekhte aa rahein hai and binna shaadi ke koi nahi raha hai humare family mein, so tha ... shaadi karo and apni family start karo*" (Since childhood I have seen my family members getting married and it's the tradition ... I haven't seen anyone not married in my family so it's like get married and start your own family.) While some of the participants wanted to have the social wedding and always dreamt of having it. For instance, Rumki, "I always thought I will get married the way I am married. I love our culture and would love to follow the tradition ... I love the colorful traditional wedding of ours."

Hence to conclude, all the participants in the study gave major emphasis on this repertoire that is the family and their choices in selecting and performing the rituals the way their parents wanted them to be. For instance, Piya said,

*Kanyadaan* was against my principles and but I had to do it because my father was also involved in this ritual and it was his wish that he gives away her daughter in a marriage and also that's what the society looks at *Kanyadaan* ... so I did it. If it was me completely on my own then I would have not done the *Kanyadaan* (Piya 2012).

While some of the participants had to comply with the wishes of their family members by making certain adjustments. For instance, Dolly says, "At a point in the post wedding rituals at my husband's home, I was asked to wash my husband's feet with water and rinse it with my hair ... I didn't like that rituals but it was like a new family and you

cannot say anything to the new family so I did it.” Thus, this social factor played the most important role in selecting and choosing the rituals performed at the weddings.

In the following sections, ‘the type of marriage arrangement’ is discussed as a sub-theme to describe the role of the family and community in these arrangement types. This factor is again used interchangeably as a repertoire by the women to further explain the rational reasoning behind their decisions on getting married the way they did and choosing certain rituals over others.

#### **4.2.1 ROLE OF FAMILY IN MARRIAGE ARRANGEMENT – ARRANGED MARRIAGE VS. LOVE MARRIAGE**

Existing literature on Hindu tradition stresses that through marriage; a family’s status is maintained, strengthened or weakened because a marriage affects the status of the entire family and its lineage (Harlan and Courtright 1995). In India, arranged marriages are considered a norm as they serve to protect both the bride and the groom and avoid breaking caste and kinship principles (Fruzzetti 1990). Therefore, marriages that are undertaken by marrying parties themselves, the so called ‘love marriages’, are considered as deviant and dangerous as they might break the caste rule thus producing progenies that are relatively impure which is strictly against the Hindu ideals. The literature on arranged and love marriages in Indian society looked into certain major attributes such as family, kinship, rank order and lineage. These attributes are very important in every day social life and especially in a wedding. Since, these are directly related to the type of marriage a couple is undergoing, namely love or arranged, the direct or indirect influence of the type of marriage arrangement on the ritual selection process has been considered as a factor to be investigated. Its effect on

the overall wedding and thus the ritual selection process has been discussed in details in this section.

Of all the women interviewed, eleven of them had love marriages. They chose their own marriage partners while the remaining nine had their marriages arranged either by their parents, extended family members or the community they lived in. It was completely coincidental, unintended as well as surprising to find the dichotomy in the sample between arranged marriage and love marriage in this study. The negotiations, the preparations and the relationship between the two families differed among the two groups.

I begin the analysis with the participants who chose their own partners or grooms thus rejecting the first rule of Hindu traditional marriages. As the literature suggests, in India inter-caste marriages or affairs are thought to be dangerous as it breaks the caste rule and the rank order in the society or existing community. Addy, one of the eleven participants who had love marriage confesses that by going against her parent's wishes and choosing a suitable match for herself, she angered her parents in a big way. According to her narratives, there were several reasons why her act was considered deviant. She says,

When my mother got this news she was really upset because 'my daughter has finally chosen someone by herself and I (mother) could not do anything. I (mother) should have chosen some good match for her and they were good looking matches and there were lots of proposal from the family of some grooms were coming, really attractive very lucrative and very everything wise the very best kind of *sambandh* (*marriage match*), lots of offers were coming from my father's distant relatives, of my mother or wherever I went for *biye baris* (the weddings), we all attended. To be very honest my mother thought that she will choose someone for me ... but when she heard I had a boyfriend ... she was very upset (Addy 2012).

Caste and same age of the groom were other issues that Addy had to combat during her marriage. She says,

Since he (father) was an orthodox person and I was from a Brahmin family my father had only one problem that the guy was not Brahmin, he was from different caste so my grandfather also had the issues like Brahmin girls should be married to the Brahmin families. When my mother heard the news she was really upset but not because of the Brahmin issue but was upset but because she heard that my boyfriend is of my age and she could do nothing about it. I struggled a lot ... I was very stubborn ... they were trying to convince me in their ways ... I cried a lot ... and she (mother) didn't talk to me properly, food was not offered to me and it continued for a month ... and coping up with relatives and everything should be in places and I have to go out and struggle with myself. It was kind of the best challenge or the worst challenge I faced (Addy 2012).

The ordeals that Addy faced were inevitable because she violated the structure and the traditions of the Hindu society.

Namita, one of my other respondents, who self-identified herself as a believer of Jainism (a sect of Hindus), chose and married a guy from the same Jain community but faced similar ordeals as Addy but from the groom's side of the family. Namita recalls that her husband was the first one in his entire family who chose a bride for himself. She says,

In his family, this is the first time someone had picked a bride for himself. Because in their culture, picking a bride is completely organized in a different way. The guy is the last one to see the bride, before that all the family goes, their distant cousins go and all the grandparents go and it's kind of a very formal process. They interview the girl, they have a bio-data, they ask questions to the girl, interview her and they have this whole list of 20-30 girls who match their *kundlis* (horoscope) as per se and their family is really famous in Baramati (a small town in Rajasthan). So all of the guys in the family have lots of proposal from lots of girls. So that's how they choose and then they go to 2 or 3 girls house, they see how their family is, how they are treated as per se with food and how the girl behaves so that's how it goes. The guy never selects himself and this is the first time he took a step forward to select a bride for himself (Namita 2012).



Selecting a bride for the marriage, as the existing literature speaks depends on selecting the right family, following the caste order to maintain the purity in the lineage. In Namita's case too, caste was another factor that created issues with the family. Though, both hailed from the same *Marwari* (Indian Ethnic group from Rajasthan) community but were from different sub-castes. She says,

They were having a girl from outside their caste that was a big thing for them. There were too many misunderstandings in between us before the wedding. There were too many instances where people were insulted or were looked down where I thought of even calling off the wedding. Many people were hurt during the process; many people from my family were hurt. I don't even love seeing my own wedding pictures as they bring in those memories (Namita 2012).

Prarthna, on the other hand had to face a different kind of ordeal for violating the structure of the society. Her husband's family, especially her mother-in-law was furious with the match. She recalls that her marriage was a perfect match in terms of caste and rank order, family, *kundli* (horoscope) and lineage if it would have been arranged by the elder members of the family. But since she broke or deviated from the basic rule of the Hindu marriage system by choosing the groom all by herself, she had to face some problems during the wedding ceremony and after. She says,

My husband and I am a perfect match. He is around four years older than me as he was my senior in school, we were of the same caste and *jati* (group or community), our *kundlis* (horoscope) also matched and the social status of the family was also same, I mean my father and his father were colleagues. My mother-in-law was not happy with the relationship ... as we met on internet after five years after, you know I never talked to him ever when he was in my school but then somehow we were reunited. I always liked this guy ... but my mother-in-law was not happy as we arranged it ourselves (Prarthna 2012).

Piya's case was no different than the above three subjects. She too chose her own partner for marriage. In her case though, caste or family's social status was not an issue as both the families were family friends and the couple knew each other since childhood. The major issue was with age. According to her narratives, her husband's family was against their marriage because of her age. She confesses to be quite young around 20 years old at the time when she decided to get married to her husband. The guy's family was against this match as they thought it to be an infatuation. She says,

His (husband's) father thought that it was some kind of an infatuation and it wasn't a real love and that's why the problem arises and they decided that they don't want to be a part of the marriage. They (the guy's parents) were like you marry some different girl but not this girl. Other than this they never had any other issue with either caste or class ... at least that I know off (Piya 2012).

As a result, Piya's husband's family was completely against their marriage and decided not to attend the wedding ceremony thus creating rift between the two families.

Selecting one's own partner, as literature suggests, disrupted some of the age old Hindu traditional ideals but the choices influenced these women to further choose or affect the ritual selection processes. Still all the above participants, had more or less reasoned arguments with little concern about coherence among them. They were seen drawing from their repertoires, trying various rationales to justify their act as not deviant. Apart from these four women, the other participants who also violated the social structural arrangement by choosing their own marriage partners had somewhat smooth negotiations between them and their families. Although, all the eleven women agreed that their parents were fine with their choices as long as they were Hindus and not from other religious groups say Christians or Muslims. For example, Gargi says, "My mother was fine with my choices as long as he was a

Hindu. I never had any issues with either Muslims or Christians but that's what my family wished." To this, Giya says, "I found my own groom ... They [parents] did not arrange the marriage or anything ... so they didn't have a say in it."

The other nine women in the study whose marriages were arranged by the family were free from all these issues. All of them agreed that though their marriages were arranged, they still were given a choice to say yes or no to their arranged matches. For example, Rumki says,

My mother and my mother-in-law were friends and we belong to the same caste group. We both are Brahmins so the match was perfect. But I definitely had a say on this. My mother asked me many times whether I would like to marry this guy or not. They never forced anything on me. I talked to my husband before our marriage was fixed and liked him. If I never liked him I had the option of saying no to the proposal. So it was definitely my choice and my approval that mattered (Rumki 2012).

All the other participants too had the same kind of story to tell, however, I found one participant's narrative quite ironic. Jhumni whose marriage was arranged too married a guy who wasn't of the same caste as she was but still had a smooth marriage. She says, "I and my husband are of different caste groups but we never had an issue. Our families arranged it so everything was fine."

Analyzing the effect of above mentioned kinds of marriage arrangement on the individual's choice of rituals is not straight-forward. At a first glance on the information collected, it seems that the choice of marriage rituals are independent of the kind of marriage arrangement but an in-depth analysis provides a contrary view. In love marriages, apart from choosing a partner for them, some of the interviewees even chose what dates and way they

want to get married. For instance, Piya, who went against her and her husband's family's wish to get married, says,

I chose my ritual first of all. I mean the date (laughs) nobody asked me anything if I didn't want to do something I just told them that I don't want to do that ... I asked my ... to teach me how to read Bengali numbers and my father ...taught me something and ... I learned it but I learned it wrong. The numbers were really confusing and there were so many things like you know he was coming , there were VISA problems he had to do his VISA as well as my VISA then we have to stay there for some time and come back (USA) so basically we really cannot go through the auspicious dates as per the Hindu religion. We followed the best thing ... that they (US embassy) will approve us to come here so ya moreover we had a window of one week or two weeks to do something like that so I think 6<sup>th</sup> August was the actual auspicious day as per the calendar and I misread that and that was the most horrible day to get married. It was kind of no moon day so ya I saw that and he told my father that Piya has selected 5<sup>th</sup> August and my father was like why did she select 5<sup>th</sup> Aug because it's supposed to be 6<sup>th</sup> Aug and he was like I don't know. So I said like I misread it and it was a kind of a mistake and I made it 5<sup>th</sup> (Piya 2012).

Similarly, Giya too had similar narratives as that of Piya. She says,

I found my own groom ... we told our family but they did not arrange the marriage or anything. So it was like we kind of decided like when we want to get married and all that. So it's nothing like it was arranged or anything so it was like we decided on our own like when we wanted to get married ... in India there are certain months where one cannot get married but we decided that we have to choose one of those dates as we didn't have any time to come back and get back to school. He didn't want to stay longer so we decided December 24<sup>th</sup> which is totally a no no month for marriage but our family didn't have anything to do with it ... so planning process I would say most of it was done by me (Giya 2012).

It should be noted that all the participants in this study who had a love marriage and faced some or the other kind of opposition from either their own or their husband's families had to perform some of the tasks for the wedding arrangements all by themselves which is not the norm in Indian weddings such as choosing dates, deciding the venues, booking the

catering, deciding on the invitation cards, etc. Also such opposition hindered their dream of having a perfect wedding and they cared less about the religious and social significances of the various rituals associated with the weddings. Such as for Piya, her father and mother-in-law were not present to welcome them home. Actually she had never been to her in-laws place after getting married.

Similarly, in Prarthna's case, her husband's family asked for dowry, where giving or receiving dowry is banned in India according to the law. She says, "My mother-in-law and father-in-law asked my parents to give them 4 lakhs rupees (\$8000) in cash and arrange gifts for some 500 of their guests (*baratis*). Not a single penny was asked from the other daughter-in-law because hers was an arranged marriage." Then she says that as her father refused to give them the money or dowry, her mother-in-law was very upset with the match and tried to jeopardize some of the wedding rituals. For instance, she did not allow the groom to tie the *mangalsutra* (sacred thread) around her neck at the time of the wedding ceremony as well as ordered the priest not to perform the *saat-phere* (seven vows and steps) for them.

The subjects, who had arranged marriages such as Rumki, Preeti, Jhumni or Tanvi, never faced such issues from either of the families. According to their narratives, they kind of had the freedom to choose and were allowed to get involved in decision making processes for the wedding preparations such as choosing the venue, dinner menu or their wedding attires. For instance, Tanvi's parents and in-laws involved her and her husband in everything. She says, "We wanted the dates to be something in November, December ... whatever was available they (parents) made it possible for our ease ... they (parents) waited for me to come to India and choose my dinner menu ... we all decided on the wedding invitations even."

Similarly, Preeti, Rumki and Jhumni wore the wedding attire of their own choice whereas Prarthna had to wear whatever her in-laws bought her for the wedding without even consulting her.

It is worth noting that, of the ten participants who came to the US prior to their marriage, six chose their own partners. Of the other ten participants who accompanied their husbands to the US after their marriage, five had love marriages. Of the eleven participants who had love marriages, six came to the US before marriage and four of them met their husbands while they were in the US. Majority of participants who had love marriages were already in relationships with their husbands prior to their US expedition. Out of the nine participants who had arranged marriages, four came to the US before marriage and five after their marriage. Based on the above observation, no significant difference was noted among the two sets of participants and their marriage arrangements based on their arrival to the US prior or after their marriage. It is thus concluded that, the type of marriage arrangement did not depend upon the participants' arrival in the US prior or after their marriage and vice-versa. For example, both Dolly and Tanvi were the first in their respective families to travel to the US for studies. Dolly found her husband in the same school whereas Tanvi's parents had to arrange the marriage for her. Tanvi says, "I was unable to find anybody for myself so my parents had to arrange it for me." Similarly, if Rumki and Addy's narratives are considered then both lived with their families, were working in companies but their marriage arrangements were different. Addy found her own groom while Rumki's marriage was arranged by her parents.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the type of marriage arrangement influenced the participants' freedom to make and be involved in decisions related to the choice of some customs, rituals and wedding preparations in general. And also the type of marriage arrangement did not depend upon the participants' arrival in the US prior or after their marriage and vice-versa. Some participants who had love marriages performed most of the decision making processes, including selection of rituals, themselves since either one of the families did not agree to the marriage and did not offer any help. Whereas, in case of some of the arranged marriages the families involved the participants to make some decisions of their choice regarding rituals and also wedding preparations in general. Thus, the type of marriage arrangement played some role in the selection process of wedding rituals for my research subjects.

### **4.3. THE ROLE OF EDUCATION**

As per the existing literature on India and its education system, the education system in India improved drastically since independence (1947). Numerous colleges and universities emerged all over the country to provide better educational opportunities to its people. Therefore, since independence, receiving higher education has become the inspiration of almost every person completing high school which was once an exclusive domain of the wealthiest, the privileged and males. Additionally, women's education became one of the foremost concerns of the government as well as the society at large. In the present time, it is believed that educated women play a very significant role in overall development and progress of the country. In this section, therefore, I will examine how these women used

education as one of the other repertoires to examine the choices their made regarding the ritual selection process.

The participants in this study considered education as one of the basic necessities of their life apart from food, clothes and shelter. Besides the family, education played a major influence in their upbringing process. For example, for Mohini's family, education was so important that their parents scheduled their whole life – vacations, appointments, work schedules and other priorities around her and her brother's education. She says that during her youth, her mother took care of them alone so that they could have a stable education while her father moved from one place to another as he had a transferable job. Mohini also states that it was because of their education that her parents stayed apart from each other to give their children the required stability they need to excel in education. She quotes,

My father was an IAS officer over there, so he had this traveling job and he used to get transferred. So it's been a lot of time that my mom brought me and my brother up because my father had to stay away from us for few years in the beginning mostly out of Calcutta and my brother was in higher grade so we cannot move with him ... education was one of the most important thing for us you know like you see your brother, your parents they are all after you because of education. That is one of the very most important things in my life and for our family (Mohini 2012).

In addition to education being an important factor for one's family, it also played a major role in shaping up Mohini's character and her outlook towards the society. Mohini narrates that as she studied in a Catholic school, she experienced different cultural practices and customs which were different from the one she was born into - her family. She also states that because of her education she was able to understand and comprehend different religions and their practices. Mohini says,



I went to a Catholic school and was brought up with a lot of diversity and culture, I got used to see the different culture, different religion, uhhh learning about different culture as being or going to a Catholic school it was a different environment over there but everything was pretty good for us and settle and I enjoyed it (Mohini 2012).

Similarly, for Namita the role of education had a complete different meaning. Namita explained how because of her parents low education status, they had to face various challenges in their life relating to their respective jobs, finances and their upbringing processes. Namita held education as a necessity to support her family with their financial needs. Because of their financial condition her family including herself considered education as a key to high paying jobs and a gate way to having a good and stable life. For the above two participants, the role that the education played in their lives was quite different. Mohini used her school experience as a repertoire to argue how it had taught her the difference between her own Indian Hindu culture and that of the Indian Christian or catholic culture whereas Namita used her education as a resource to argue for her modern outlook. These moods, cultural styles, habits and skills thus became a part of the cultural repertoire or resources that many people used at different times.

Some of the participants used education as a leverage for delaying their marriage for couple of years. Presently, for the Indian society, as the literature suggests, educating girls and daughters became the most important agenda of the families as education of women paved way for many more advantages than disadvantages. Education empowers the women to express their feelings, concerns and issues in a different way. Education even endows women to have freedom in making certain decisions regarding their life, marriage, etc. and be financially independent. For example, Jhumni, who came to the US before her marriage for her higher studies, got married when she was around 30 years old. According to the

existing literature, a daughter should be married at a much younger age or she is considered to be a burden to the father. But, according to Jhumki, her education played a major role in her marriage decisions. She explains how she convinced her parents to postpone thinking about her marriage for couple of years as she wanted to get married after she has completed her Master's degree. She used different narratives such as 'higher education', 'research', 'master's degree', 'better job prospects' and 'settled life' as her resources to support her arguments.

Similarly, both Jyoti and Dolly used education as the repertoires and mobilized several parts of their repertoire simultaneously to make an argument and/or defend their position about their decisions on marrying at an age that was quite higher than the official recorded average age. Dolly explained how she and her future husband focused solely on completing their respective degrees before deciding the official wedding dates. She also says how her decision to finish her degree program prior to her marriage was supported by her parents. Dolly states,

From 2002 to 2006 we (her and her husband) just focused on getting the degree and R (husband) got a job in 2007, I got the degree in 2008. Our focus was attaining the degree, marriage was of course there in our cards but preparation of marriage wasn't the priority ... parents too said to focus on education first and then think about marriage (Dolly 2012).

Contrarily, some other participants used education to define their family's status in the society. For example, Addy talked a lot about her family's educational background and the position and status they held in the society to her husband and his family. She admitted that she talked very highly about her family's background to her husband's family prior to

her marriage only to showcase her family's values, traditions and cultures to her new future family. She explains that her husband's family was very impressed and enthralled to have her as their daughter-in-law as according to her they believed she hailed from a renowned and cultured family. In India, as the literature suggests, higher education helps an individual to move higher up the ladder in status, class and position. To this Addy said,

... my family is very educated and very cultured family and I am a part of this family. So this thing is very appealing to anybody. So when I said that my family people are in the parliament and were [are] judges in High court during British period so it was like speaker Bijoy Banerjee and everything they were like enthralled not because of that but they liked me as their daughter-in-law right from the very beginning even when they didn't see me (Addy 2012).

Similarly, for Jaya, education was important in a different way. Some participants and/or their families used the repertoire of 'the value of education' to negotiate better grooms for them/their daughters while some used 'the value of education' for referring personal achievements. Jaya states that she was very keen on pursuing her master's degree in medicine and become a doctor like her parents. She explained that her keenness to pursue higher education was only to achieve and enjoy the same status and respect like her parents who are also doctors. She says, "My parents are doctors ... I too wanted to be like them ... ."

However, in reality she got married right after she finished with her bachelor's degree. When I asked her to explain the reasons to this decision, she used the Swidler's (2004) "shotgun approach of a debater," (p.31) and argued how her education and her parents' educational and professional background helped her family to find her a suitable groom. She argued how her parents were supportive of her pursuing her higher studies but at the same time were worried about her growing marriage age: "What if she (Jaya) grows up in

an age where she cannot get married and we cannot find a good match or good boy for her” (Jaya 2012). She used yet another resource to defend her decision on agreeing to marry the suitable groom was the fact that the guy was also in favor of her pursuing higher education after their marriage. She said,

“... we talked to each other for a while and phone conversations happened after we met each other and ... he did his bachelors from IIT Bombay and his Masters and PhD from Rice ... we talked about my education and he was okay with me wanting to pursue my higher education after our marriage” (Jaya 2012).

Jaya and other the participants thus used education as a repertoire and various other cultural resources to support and reason their arguments to make sense of the choices they made during the ritual selection process.

Therefore, after analyzing this section, I can conclude that education as a repertoire played a significant role in influencing, supporting and determining the choices that the participants made regarding their wedding rituals as a whole. The participants in gave immense importance to the value of education in their life as well as in their selection of marriage rituals. They believed education broadened their outlook and strengthened their decision- making capacity.

#### **4.4. SHIFTING BETWEEN REPERTOIRES**

In this section, I will be analyzing the three repertoires, namely, westernization, role of family and education as a combination since the participants have used these repertoires interchangeably sometimes to defend their views and sometimes unknowingly contradicting

their own beliefs. All the participants tried to make sense of the images of the repertoires or toolkits by using arguments as a debater. For self-realization and explanation of the more deeply held meanings, the participants continued to “mobilize divergent, sometimes contradictory cultural frames” (Swidler 2004: 31). These cultural repertoires as used by the participants included not simply varying images and arguments but multiple cases, stories, or examples that may each differently define or examine a situation. According to Swidler (2004:31), when people shift such stories midstream, “they are shifting the cultural frame within which the situation is understood.” Swidler (2004) also says that, “A person operating within one set of assumptions comes to a problem he cannot handle within his dominant scheme. Then, after floundering for a while trying to adapt his frame to unexpected difficulties, he may quite abruptly jump from one frame to another” (p.31). Such a leap between frames occurred during the interview when I asked the participants to describe the influence of western exposure had on their decision making process.

It turned out that the participants had well elaborated theory of how the western exposure influenced their life’s meanings in different ways. The participants used the repertoires interchangeably, abruptly shifting from one frame to another. During the analysis of this section though, I identified a pattern that differed between the responses of the participants who travelled to the US prior to their marriage as compared to the participants who travelled to the US after their marriage. The results were surprisingly ironical and contrasting. Even, it turned out that the repertoires and images that the participants who traveled to the US prior to their marriage used, also had similar outcomes in case of those participants who came to the US after their marriage. For example, Namita, a participant who was in the US prior to her marriage explains how her staying in the US for some time

affected her choices during the wedding process. She starts her story by using varying images and arguments to explain how her exposure to the western culture and her family values clashed with each other and influenced her decision on agreeing to this marriage proposal. She explains how she rejected the marriage proposal the first time her present husband asked her for marriage. She argues using various repertoires such as “western exposure”, “forward”, “conservatism”, to explain the role of the two families. She says,

We were more forward as I said before; my mom had a voice in the house and my dad always agreed on whatever decisions my mom made. But with P (husband) family, it was completely opposite. Guys talked to guys only and women had no voice at all. In their family, women are more like into the kitchen, cooking, taking care of the household, they have to put a *ghoonghat* (veil) and wear sari all the time and most importantly not get involved in any decisions ... I refused P (husband) proposal the first time (Namita 2012).

But then she argued how her own family values and culture influenced her decision to think differently. She shifted between her cultural frames and argued that in spite of her being forward and much westernized, she was attracted towards traditional families and their values system, thus accepting his proposal and making an effort to learn her husband’s culture. She says, “It’s really difficult to find a Jain guy who has similar values and eating habits like me and my family. I was very impressed by P (husband) as he tried to stick to his core values (not eating non-vegetarian food, etc) even while he was in US, away from home. So I said yes to him.” Then again she used her other repertoire, the value of education to explain her efforts to learn her husband’s language and culture before getting married in the family. She says, “... but I learned their language though it was very frustrating at times but I learned it ... they were surprised to see me speaking their language. They were pretty impressed too” (Namita 2012).

Further, Namita explains how her exposure to the western culture had a positive effect on her decisions and choices. She confessed that she was and is more than willing to go back to India and stay with her husband's family and take care of them. She says, "I think my western exposure did have an effect in the wedding planning process. I am more than willing to go back to India and live with P (husband) family and take care of them." Therefore, Namita used contradictory cultural frames and jumped between frames to explain how the western exposure influenced her wedding related decisions. However, for Prarthna, who came to the US after her marriage narrated a different story and used her repertoires differently. She explained that she had her proper exposure to the western culture when she moved to the US with her husband after her marriage. She argued that she was happy that she was able to come to the US as her husband's family values, culture and behavior were quite different from hers and she had difficulties adjusting to her new family. She used a different part of her cultural repertoire that is "happiness" and "freedom" to argue how the quality of her life has improved because of her stay in the US. She says,

It is good that I am in US now, because after my marriage I had to work like a servant in my in-laws place while I was in India. My mother-in-law was not happy with our marriage and so doesn't like me at all ... here I don't have to worry at all ... I can wear jeans here all the time but in India I had to wear a sari ... its difficult, you know. I wish I was here in US before my marriage then things would have been different in my wedding (Prarthna 2012).

Prarthna used a well-established theory to argue and explain how things or her decisions about her wedding ceremony would have been different if she was exposed to this culture prior to her marriage.

For Gauri, who had an arranged marriage and traveled to the US prior to her marriage also used different cultural frames to explain her choices. She argues how she followed every ritual that was arranged for her by her family except for the *sangeet* (the musical event organized the day before the wedding day) ceremony. She stated that staying in the US for some time had brought her close to her family, their values and their culture. She says, “I started bonding more with my brother, more with my mom, okay kinds with my dad. I came here for my Masters and I became more close to my brother like we had to talk every day, we had to discuss everything ... but I came closer to my mom and my brother.” Gauri uses “her bonding with her family” as a cultural frame to support her arguments. She explains how the western exposure helped her choose and comply with all the rituals that her family chose for her during her wedding. Similarly for Jyoti, her coming to the US prior to her marriage made her realize the importance of companionship and helped her on deciding to get married to the person she chose for herself. She says,

When I came to America, I left my parents back in India, I realized the need for companionship, I was a loner but in US you are all by yourself and then you realize ... you need someone, someone around that you can depend on, friendship, love actually ... . America has anyway an influence on my marriage (Jyoti 2012).

Both Gauri and Jyoti used their cultural repertoires interchangeably to argue their situations and the choices they made while selecting their life-partners and rituals for their wedding ceremonies. Piya on the other hand, argues how things would have been done differently if she was in the US before her marriage. Piya, who had to face some major setbacks during her marriage and had to compromise a lot with the situation, was quick to shift frames and supporting the western culture more than the traditional, archaic Indian values



and culture. She argues how she was forced to go for a social ritualistic wedding because of the Indian Hindu societal norms. She even argues that she would have preferred a court marriage over a social ritualistic marriage: “I might have not gone through all those ritual ... and would have had a court marriage because society [American] needs to see the certificate that I am married ... in India it’s not like that.”

Therefore, based on the narratives, I can conclude that the participants who lived in the US prior to their marriage used their exposure to the western culture to better understand the role and values of their families in their lives and were more open to adapt the Indian culture than rejecting them. They shifted their cultural frame midstream to use the role of their respective families as their repertoire. The participants who travelled to the US prior to their marriage argued that they became closer to their parents and how the in-between relationship among the family members improved. Similarly, the participants used education as their repertoire to argue their decision to go to the US for higher studies. Whereas, the participants who came to the US after their marriage, especially those who had major issues in their marriages from their -in-laws used their repertoires differently. These participants viewed western culture as a means to do things differently than what they followed during their wedding ceremonies. Thus, the effect of western culture had different effects on the participants interviewed. For some participants, the exposure to western culture helped them in selecting certain rituals. For others the exposure to western culture affected their thought process post marriage about their wedding process, rituals and Indian traditions.

#### **4.5. UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RITUALS IN A WEDDING**

As the existing literature on the Indian wedding rituals suggest, there has hardly been any alteration in the Vedic wedding rituals through centuries but the meaning and social expectations of the individuals of these rituals may have changed. After interviewing the participants, I found that all of them had followed the Hindu Vedic wedding ceremony but the reasons for their choices of the rituals, the meanings they attributed to the rituals and their sense of significances differed. Although, understanding the meaning of the rituals, according to Swidler's approach depends mostly on an individual's culture and the availability of different means and the meaning they attach to each of the existing repertoires. Consequently, an understanding of the meaning and significance of the wedding rituals might also influence the choices of the women in deciding what rituals they want to include, adapt or reject in their wedding which include pre-wedding, the actual wedding and the post wedding ceremonies.

In this section, I begin with the analysis of the meanings that the individuals attached to the importance of wedding rituals in general. In this study, I found some similarities and a pattern in the participants' responses that might help to understand the wedding. For instance, almost all the participants of the study acknowledged that the rituals in the Hindu wedding ceremony have some known or unknown meanings and significances that have survived the thick of time. In this section, I highlight how the participants shifted between the cultural frames of the social factors and the repertoire of understanding the meaning of the rituals to give them a deeper meaning of their wedding ceremonies and assist them in the ritual selection process.

In the previous section I discussed that the participants used the image of the social factors as their primary repertoire or tool kit to make plausible arguments. But here it will be seen that the participants are utilizing their own life experiences as repertoires to make plausible arguments about the understanding of the rituals that also helped them to choose between the various Vedic rituals. These cultural repertoires include multiple cases, stories, myths and/or examples that each may define differently in the context of any given situation. In my interviews, when I asked how rituals were perceived and what role they play in the wedding ceremony, the women shifted between different repertoires (frames) to make a better sense of what they understand by the meaning and importance of the rituals without losing confidence. For example, Megha switched between different frames/ideologies/repertoires to make a better sense of what she perceives of the rituals. She started off by saying that she had a love marriage so rituals were not important for her: “We had a love marriage and we are having what we already thought of having or built upon our relationship. All those rituals I don’t think are helping us but ...” But then she moves to another frame explaining how these rituals played a significant role in her marriage. She argued how the rituals played their part of teaching them to be responsible and respectful towards each other and their life decisions. She says,

... although on top of it they [rituals] might be helping to keep us [us to keeping us] together. Marriage is about rituals, basically the whole thing, the whole procession and everything is about rituals. I don’t think it’s a formality, I like it and if you have to follow this in your relationship or go ahead you have to be same you have to know your responsibilities, you should be aware of your responsibilities so obviously they are kind of some blessings in that way in keeping us what we are but you need to be aware of your responsibilities (Megha 2012).

The rituals were not as important for Megha as they are for Dolly. Dolly believed in the wedding rituals and perceived them to be very important for a successful marriage. She seemed to use the images and cultural frames more actively than Megha to guide and help her with the question. She uses various metaphors such as “followed through ages”, “tradition”, “full proof”, and “part of our culture” and stories of her parents’ and grandparents’ marriage to explain why understanding of the rituals are important. She embraces the value of the rituals in a wedding by describing the cultural meaning that reinforces a successful marriage. She explains how the rituals have passed the test of time, as they are followed for generations and thus is the key to successful marriage. She says,

It has been followed through ages ... if you are following something and it is full proof and you are getting the results you know it. Similarly, I think if these rituals are followed for so many generations and of course there are some significance where you might not know or we are not experts but there is certain significance for everything that is followed through tradition or Hindu tradition or through the rituals some of them for the current generation might find odd. Like I said, the *Vidai* ceremony was odd for me as I didn’t like it so much but may be that had some kind of some kind of thought behind it. I might not get it right now but because I am thinking in a certain way but I think all these rituals have some kind of importance, some kind of message and these messages have been approved through generations so I think that’s the reason why we still you know continue to follow these rituals and which is what Indian marriage are very nice because we have been following these rituals for so long it’s not just one day we get up and say “I do” that’s does not mean that I am demeaning any of the other marriages. Because wedding is not just the involvement of two people it is the involvement of religion, the culture, the ancient culture, the families so it’s more like a social celebration rather than like a two people coming and saying that they want to spend their life together (Dolly 2012).

Jaya’s narrative also showed similar views and beliefs about the importance of rituals as Dolly’s. She too believed the authenticity of the rituals as they are practiced for so many years by generations of people and moreover the belief that these rituals have resulted in

successful marriages. She also draws her conclusions on the importance of these rituals from her parents' and grandparents' successful marital images. She claims that since her parents and grandparents had similar kind of wedding ceremonies, they are happy and are living a together for so many years. Therefore, it was pertinent for her to believe on these rituals. During the interview, Jaya was uncomfortable about the concept of choosing her own rituals for the wedding. She explained how the rituals are an integral part of the Vedic ceremony and each of the rituals signifies some thing or the other and cannot be differentiated or chosen by an individual. She says,

You cannot choose them (rituals) because you don't have much option to choose from. They are the rituals that happen in the Hindu wedding. And rituals are not been chosen because they are there in every wedding and this is how those rituals should go. Because there is no list of rituals from which you can pick the ones you like and they are the specific one that have to happen in the marriage. That's how they have been carried out, it's kind of a tradition that it is carried out in the family all through the years, many years and it's just the tradition ... that's how the arranged marriages are different from love marriages. Because the first thing is that (in love marriages) you are not willing to the parent's wish of getting married according to the parents wish so that's the first thing that the girl and the boy has broken and if it's the parents' wishes then they should have all the rituals but I don't think that they (love marriages) have all of those in their weddings because you have to do that as you are getting married ... . Because every *puja* (offering) is different and every ceremony is different and marriage has certain rules and regulations of how it should be carried out that's why these rituals are carried out they are of no use in your married life. They are not a waste of time and your family members are with you, your loved ones are with you during these ceremonies and rituals and everybody is busy in their lives so much that they don't get to spend time with each other (Jaya 2012).

In her narratives, Jaya also argued how an Indian wedding is all about families and not just individuals. She uses the 'family' and 'love – arranged marriage' repertoire to explain the importance of the rituals. She explained that those who go against their parents' wishes and chooses their life partner are the ones who choose between the various rituals

thus defying the family and the societal norms. Therefore, according to her narratives, Vedic rituals are things that are not chosen but performed as they are the integral part of the wedding and for her all of this is important.

Mohini's thoughts on rituals, however, were more on the cultural lines. Mohini used culture as a repertoire and integrated it with her experience. According to Swidler (2004:46), "People vary greatly in how much culture they apply to their own lives." Mohini drew on a wide range of her traditional resources and how she wanted to hold on to these values. She says,

I wanted to keep the culture up and I wanted to follow the customs, the rituals because when a Bengali bride gets married you always think like after few years I would get married once more or again, no you don't think like that in India you only think that you get married only for the first and the last time in life and you want to have everything done according to your traditional culture at least that's what I wanted to have (Mohini 2012)

While Rupa narrates that the rituals are important rather social wedding is important because it helps the families to bond with each other. She argues that all the rituals are so constructed that they in some way or the other encompass and encourage the two families to come together, participate in the event and enjoy the new relationships. She recalls,

Each ritual has something, some meaning, some significance, but I am not very sure about exactly the significances of all the rituals but what I think is that Indian weddings are like planned in such a way that two families get close to each other so maybe all the rituals have some significance to the relationships that you are going to make. So I think this is the way you get to know each other very well, because there are very many rituals which you just have to play games or these are fun things. I think these are silly but these have an impact on the two families to get close to each other to get to know because of course that girl has to be in that family forever. I think these play a role in the making of the relationships ... of course when you are going

through them (rituals) there maybe controversies of what the significance is. But of course it clearly has an importance in your life afterwards when you yourself become a parent or when somebody younger than you will go through a wedding then you really get to know, or have that feeling “yes why not” (Rupa 2012).

Piya's, Giya's and Nita's narration were somewhat differed from rest of them. Piya narrates that she was interested in neither the social wedding nor its rituals. She uses her familial tension and pressure (her in-laws rejected the proposal and declined the invitation to come and attend their wedding ceremony) as her cultural resource to examine the situation. She uses some contradictory cultural frames to explain her argument. For instance, for her the rituals and the wedding was just a platform for her family member and friends to come together and enjoy their special moment. Although before she said that they do not mean anything to her. She says,

I would not say I don't believe in the rituals and the time that I was going through I really didn't want to go through these rituals because I simply believed that what I am doing is simply correct if people think I am wrong I don't care about that so that was the mentality that time. For me the rituals were very good social gathering where people will come and the bonding will get strong (Piya 2012).

Giya on the other had considers rituals to be just a source of fun. She says, “So those rituals are for fun like just doing those because it's in the tradition, it's in the process, so you are doing just the rituals. Living with a person and rituals never work. They are just rituals.” For Nita, rituals were just a formality to show the world that a couple is married. She says, “Rituals are just a formality, you never use it ever again in your life. They just are important for a wedding to complete so they are done, nothing else.” The responses of the other fifteen respondents somewhat echoed similar narratives.

Based on the narratives, it can be ascertained that the understanding of the importance of rituals in a wedding ceremony influenced some of participants' choices to either blindly follow the rituals or question their existence. For instance, Jaya chose to follow the wedding rituals because she had no other choice but to follow her family's tradition. But for Dolly, Mohini and even Rupa, it was their choice to follow the traditional rituals because they understood the rituals to be important in a wedding ceremony. Therefore, to conclude, knowing the importance of rituals in a wedding ceremony assisted in understanding the meaning of the rituals in particular thus allowing the participants to at least choose between the rituals that mean the most to them.

#### **4.6. INTERPRETATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF KEY RITUALS**

As the existing literature suggests, - *Kanyadaan*, *Saptapadi*, *Sindoor/Mangalsutra* and *Vidai* are the four rituals that are considered an integral part of the Vedic script which are required both for the consummation of a wedding ceremony and for entering the *Grihastya ashrama* (*householder status*). Rituals are “a set of prescribed behaviors” (Buckley 2006:14; Rappaport 2002) that has some meaning of association with the bride, the groom and their families. The rituals that the participants chose are - *Haldi* (turmeric), *Kanyadaan* (giving away of the daughter), *Saptapadi* (step steps and vows), *Sindoor/Mangalsutra* (vermillion/sacred thread), and *Vidai* (bidding farewell to the bride). They labeled these as ‘the most important’ rituals in the Hindu wedding ceremony. The meaning that the participants attached to these rituals varied significantly because of the differences in their cultural practices, regional differences, geographic location and/or their upbringing. Hence, the meaning(s) that the participants attached to these rituals have been considered as a factor



influencing the ritual selection process. Although the participants had very few liberties to choose among these rituals, still the effect of an individual's interpretation of these rituals on the overall wedding and the ritual selection process will be discussed in detail in this section.

#### **4.6.1 HALDI (ANNOINTMENT OF TURMERIC)**

According to the literature, at *Haldi* (turmeric ceremony), both the bride and the groom are smeared with a creamy paste made of turmeric and oil from head to toe by the female members of their respective families. One of the effects of this ritual is believed to be that, "The body is heated up for sexual intercourse" (Selwyn 1979:685). However, interviewees attached different meanings to this ritual that were drawn upon from different cultural resources such as popular commercials, fables, movies, history and even medicine. According to Swidler (2004:25), "people have an array of cultural resources upon which they can draw" and can choose or use specific pieces of culture at one time and some at different times.

For instance, Jyoti who was unaware of the tradition behind this ritual attached a 'beautification' meaning to it using one of the most popular television commercials that was aired during her childhood years in India. The commercial showed ways to beautify one's skin by regular usage of their product. She uses this message depicted in the commercial as a resource to examine this particular ritual and understand its significance. She states,

You know *Haldi* (turmeric) is like you remember that commercial *Vicco turmeric nahi cosmetic, Vicco aurvedic cream. Keel muhasaon ko jad se mitaye; haldi aur chandan ke gun is me samaye...thwacha ki raksha kare antiseptic cream; twacha ki raksha kare antispetic cream*"(sings) (Vicco is an

antiseptic cream made up of turmeric and sandal that protects the face from any blemishes or boils) (Jyoti 2012).

Similarly, Shree and Prarthna both said that as Haldi (turmeric) has medicinal value and helps the skin to glow that's the reason why the rituals is important in the ceremony. Prathna says, "*Haldi se roop mein nikhar aata hai aur uss din dulhan ko sabse sundar dikhane ke liye haldi lagwayi jati hai*" (turmeric helps the skin to glow and on the wedding day the bride has to look at her best as it's her day, that's the reason why *Haldi* is anointed on the bride's face and body).

Some of the women thought of the *haldi* ceremony as a fun ritual, where everyone is together and tries to anoint turmeric on not just the bride or the groom but also amongst each other. Piya confirmed it by showing a photograph of her *Haldi* ceremony and said, "Turmeric is antiseptic and good for skin and my family, my friends, his friends and some of his extended family who were there all gathered together and we played it like *Holi* (festival of color). It was fun." Piya used *Holi* as a metaphor or toolkit to explain this ritual as a fun-filled ritual where everyone in the family are anointing turmeric paste to each other. *Holi* is a spring festival that is celebrated every year in India as the festival of color. In the photograph, Piya pointed out who her friends were and who were her family members. All the faces in the photograph were smeared with a yellow paste that Piya identified as *Haldi* (turmeric paste).

While for Giya and Piya, who planned their wedding entirely on their own wanted to include the ritual because of its "lightness." For Giya as well, Haldi was a fun-filled ritual and eased the busy and stressful atmosphere. Giya (2012), "*Haldi* was so much fun. Everyone was happy, cheering, feel good ritual. So definitely I wanted to include that and I

have seen it in other weddings and it was really really fun.” Therefore, based on the narratives of the interviewees, it was observed that the *Haldi* (turmeric) is categorized and labeled as a fun ritual where every member of the family is invited to participate in the ritual.

Although, Gauri, Tanvi, Namita and Jaya say that the ritual is somewhat gender centric and the female members of the family are allowed to perform this ritual. For instance, Tanvi (2012) says, “Two days before the wedding all the married women in the house gather around to grind fresh turmeric. This turmeric is then used on me on the day of the wedding, actually the early morning of the wedding day say around 5 or 6 am.” Namita agrees and says,

*Haldi* is a fun ritual which is performed only by the women of the house. Men are not allowed in here. They [women] put *Haldi* on you like my face, hands, shoulders, knee and feet. This way they purify you from head to toe. Also, the woman who puts *Haldi* on me bathes me for the same purification purpose. Then the brothers come and carry you into the house to protect you from the evil eye (Namita 2012).

However, Gargi had a different story to tell. She says, “Every member of the family were present during my *haldi*. Everyone (males as well) were anointing *Haldi* on me and on each other ... it’s an easy going ritual. I loved it.”

The participants thus, chose this ritual as a part of their ceremony mostly because of the popularity in the society. The ritual was considered as a fun ritual by most of them and a means to gather all the friends and families together. The participants also examined the ritual from its logical point of view when they used various cultural resources such as television commercials and stories to explain the importance of the ritual in the ceremony.

The participants also argued that the ritual helped them to look prettier and beautiful as a bride for their ceremony. Moreover, the participants were seen using different repertoires such as ‘role of the family’ and ‘understanding of the ritual’ in general to support their decision that they made for this ritual to be included in their wedding ceremony. The participants used these repertoires alternatively to examine the situation and make plausible arguments supporting it. Thus, it can be concluded that for this particular ritual selection process, the meaning and the interpretations that the participants attached to this ritual and the various repertoires that they used played an important role in influencing their decision in choosing this wedding rituals.

#### **4.6.2 KANYADAAN (GIVING AWAY OF THE DAUGHTER)**

As per the existing literature, the ritual *Kanyadaan* or the giving away of the daughter is the greatest gift of all that a father (man) can bestow. It is that kind of a gift where the daughter is exchanged or given away to the groom and his family on the day of the wedding mainly by the parents of the bride. Of all the participants, nineteen acknowledged performing this ritual for their wedding ceremony. The participants agreed that *Kanyadaan* (giving away of the daughter) is considered as the most important and vital ritual for a wedding yet some of them showed serious contempt towards it. Piya, for instance, who chose everything about her wedding starting from her groom to her wedding date and rituals had no say about some of the rituals (*Kanyadaan and Sindoor*) as they are considered the primary rituals in the Hindu Vedic scripts. She was completely against the *Kanyadaan* ritual because according to her this ritual was against her principles and disgraced her abilities as a person. She used her knowledge and education as a repertoire to argue her position in the society as a ‘perfectly normal woman who can take care of herself’ and ‘one who does not have any physical

disabilities.’ She argues that marriage for her meant to have a partner to share her thoughts and dreams with but not as a person who becomes her caretaker. She even used her family as a repertoire to explain her decision to choose this ritual. She says that she complied with this ritual because of her father’s wish. Piya’s explained that her father thought this ritual to be his duty and due to the societal obligations he wanted to fulfill his responsibilities as a father. She says,

*Kanyadaan* is against my principles ... why my father will ask somebody to take care of me when I am being enough to take care of myself and it’s not that I am a uhhh unable or disabled person, I am not sorry about them ... but I am not a person who cannot do anything. If I was born like that, then there would have been a need to have somebody like that. I wanted a company, I wanted a person with whom I can spend the rest of my life with whom I can match my feelings, I can share my concerns and everything and make a good life with the partner ... I didn’t want to do the *kanyadaan* ... but at the same time my father was also involved I cannot ask him not to do something which he wanted to. So he did his job and I did my job so that was kind of that (Piya 2012).

Piya’s narratives further explain her reasons for not wanting to select this particular ritual. She argues that due to this ritual -*Kanyadaan* the bride’s parents in most of the Indian marriages had to bow down to the wishes of the groom’s family. She uses the role of the family and society to argue her choice. She explains that the ritual itself is very sacred but the way it is carried out in the society is demeaning. She clarifies that marriage as an institution should be based on respect and equality but not belittling any family or gender. But in Indian society the family that gives away their daughter is not given equal respect as the groom’s family. She says,

Why my father has to bow down ... if you are from the girls side, if you are a girl’s parent then you have to be really a little low compared to the boys side and I didn’t really get that, means why would I be on the low side. I have to be

on the equal side because our parents have taught us and have done enough for us and the boy's parents have done the same thing ... For me marriage is a respectful relationship it's a gratitude we both have to share and it's not about demeaning ones family or anyone or anyone's gender there. So that part of our society I really hate. ... I hate this part of the wedding (Piya 2012).

While for Preeti, Addy and Dolly *Kanyadaan* was emotionally a very painful ritual. For Preeti, the meaning that was attached to this ritual was what she disliked the most including its verses. She used the family as a repertoire to explain how this particular ritual verbally and physically separates her from her family. Also, the verses of the ritual clearly states that she can no longer claim her father's house (where she spent her childhood days) as her own house. Preeti states,

*Kanyadaan ke time mein bahut royi thi, bahut painful that mere liye. Mantra jo bole jatein hai who Sanskrit mein hotein hai but humarein panditji ne humhein harr mantra ka arth samjha rahein the .... Jab unhonein kaha ki hum aur iss ghar ke beti nahi rahein tab bahut royi mein ... iske (Kanyadaan) baad se hum ak wife hai, daughter-in-law hai and humara ghar hamara sasural hi hai”* (During the time of the *Kanyadaan*, I cried a lot, it was very painful for me. The verses are in Sanskrit and it's really difficult to understand them. But our priest was translating the Sanskrit verses for our better understanding of the ritual called *Kanyadaan* ... the priest said that after this [*Kanyadaan* - giving away of the daughter] I am no longer a daughter of this family, I cried a lot as from now on I am a wife and a daughter-in-law and this house is no longer my house but my husband's house will be my home now) (Preeti 2012).

For Addy, it was emotionally painful for her to see her parents during the *Kanyadaan* ritual. She argued that the ritual should be taken out from the ceremony as it pained her parents to give away their daughter. She narrated how her mother started giving away her stuff right after performing this ritual because she can no longer keep her in her house as her daughter. She argued that the role of this ritual is to specifically remind the parents of the daughter to stop worrying or being protecting about their daughter as she is no longer their

property or asset. Additionally, like Piya, Addy also used the same cultural resources to explain how the society works for these rituals. She too was upset about the fact that her father had to plead to the groom at the time of *kanyadaan* by touching his feet and asking him to keep his daughter safe and healthy. Addy believed that it's an unnecessary part of the ritual because the guy she is getting married to is in love with her and would definitely keep her safe. She says,

About *kanyadaan* its very painful there is no need of this because I am going away and as being the only daughter, very protected, very adored and very much taken care of and then everything I am taking away their money, their peace, and probably I might not be that happy in US because there will be a lot of struggle because I didn't enter the kitchen or did any household work. My mother also had some kind of worries that what she will be doing in US and she is going so so far away but she cannot worry about me anymore ... I am taking away their mental peace as I am no longer their responsibility ... I am a mother and I know how it feels ... I am taking away my belongings and my everything there, my hair clips, undergarments, pajama, night wears everything, comb with them when I went out from that *kanyadaan* ritual was my mother started throwing those stuff away take that comb away out of my sight, take that night gown out of my sight as I can get her smell that is why it is terrible event (crying). She used to get my smell in the house from the garments I use. In *kanyadaan* when it's happening, my father has to touch my husband's knee and tell him to take care of me and it's a mantra, a Sanskrit mantra that is kind of happening, my father cannot tell it in his own Bengali dialect but the Sanskrit mantra is that take my daughter with you and I beg you that she will be loved, she will be in a healthy diet, so it's a kind of kind of mercy that my husband is doing on my father that thing I didn't like (Addy 2012).

However, Dolly believed that it is important to understand the meaning of the *Kanyadaan* ritual before it is either included or performed in the wedding ceremony. She used different cultural resources to explain this ritual. Her views about this ritual was not negative neither she debated to get rid of this ritual from the ceremony. What she focused most on was to argue its importance based on its true meaning. Dolly explains that

*kanyadaan* is not any ritual where gifts are exchanged but it's a ritual where the father is giving away his most prized possession to a man who he hardly knows. She uses her own motherhood as a cultural resource to explain how hard it is to give away a daughter. She argues that it is very important that the groom or future son-in-law understand the importance of this ritual and not think of it as an exchange. She says

Technically the rituals starts and my dad is along with me sitting there as its mostly between my dad and the son-in-law ... there is this ritual called *Kanyadaan* where he is actually giving away his daughter ... it is thought like it's an exchange ... so it's mostly like asking him to be a nice person, he needs to take care of his daughter and stuff like that. ... it's very important personally because I am a mother to a daughter now, so just for me giving away a daughter who you have taken care of your whole life and then one day, and one fine day you get up and you give her away. The husband better understand the value of it. Better understand the importance of you know it's not just a joke to take somebody's daughter and you know this whole ritual where this guy - the priest explains the whole thing it's kind of the emotional blackmail but he needs to understand that this father is giving away his prized possession to a son to his future son-in-law so I think it's very important and emotional for the father and the daughter as well (Dolly 2012).

Both for Rumki and Jhumni, some elements associated with *Kanyadaan* were unacceptable but they considered it to be the most important rituals in the wedding ceremony. For example, Rumki says,

*Kanyadaan* in a Hindu marriage is one of the most important and essential ritual. Without *Kanyadaan* a daughter cannot be accepted in the new family. During this ritual, the bride's *gotra* (family name) is transferred to that of your husband's family name, that's when the daughter officially becomes a daughter-in-law and wife. She becomes a new member of the groom's family. This transfer can be done when the father or any other male member of her family gives her away to the other family. I loved this ritual because I understand the meaning of this ritual. I was being given away from a family so that I can be part of another family not because I am considered a property or burden to my family ... what I don't like about this ritual is the *daan* part (giving away part) ... the priest who was officiating my marriage asked my



father to give some token money and gold to both the priest and my husband but my father refused to give any money. I remember him telling the priest that she is my daughter and not any property that I am selling off to this man, something like that. I agree with my father and am proud of him for choosing not to do it (Rumki 2012).

Jhumni too was unhappy with the *daan* (giving away) part of the ritual. She even described the details of the ritual of what is usually done during the ritual. She says,

I wasn't very sure of what was going on at the beginning ... it's too much of a noise and all. Then after sometime, mine and my husband's hands were clasped together and were tied with some garlands and some water and other things were poured. Then the priest asked my father to some Sanskrit verses. Both of us wanted to know what was going on so we asked the priest to explain. That's when I understood the meaning of *Kanyadaan*. My father was asked to clasp his hand like *namoskar* (welcome posture) like begging something from someone ... he was actually begging my husband to take care of me ... . That's *Kanyadaan* and I felt really bad ... like my father is an elderly person and A (husband) is like of my age ... . A (husband) was also uncomfortable. This is what I didn't like about the ritual. This is not done (Jhumni 2012).

Jhumni's description of *Kanyadaan* (giving away of the daughter) matched Addy's *Kanyadaan* photographs. In the photograph, the bride and the groom sat opposite to each other and the priest was seated beside the bride's father while the father of the bride was seated next to the groom. The priest was the one conducting the marriage as Jhumni described; both Addy and her husband's hands were tied together with a red colored cloth and some flowers. Both Rumki and Jhumni used the same cultural resources such as the meaning of the ritual and their knowledge about the Hindu culture and its tradition to support their arguments. Like Piya and Addy, Rumki and Jhumni too had issues about the *daan* part of the ritual. They too thought and argued to take off this part from the ritual because it

disrespects the bride's family and their parenting indirectly. Therefore, the thought to get rid of this part of the ritual was consensus.

Therefore, to conclude, *Kanyadaan*, as a primary Hindu Vedic ritual, wasn't either acclaimed nor admired by any of the interviewees. Most of the participants such as Addy said, "About *Kanyadaan*, its very painful, there is no need of this ritual"; Piya, "It's against my principles. I am ok not doing the ritual"; Tanvi and Preeti were against the ritual. However, some of them such as Dolly, Rumki or Jhumni, who focused on understanding the meaning, accepted the ritual with grace and had no issues including it in the ceremony whereas, the rest bothered less about the inclusions or exclusion of this wedding ritual.

Thus, for most of the participants, understanding the meaning of *Kanyadaan* helped them form their own opinion about this ritual. However, none of them had the choice to exclude this ritual in spite of their disliking about either the whole ritual or parts of it. The participants were seen using various cultural resources to explain their dilemma of choosing these rituals. Most of the participants used their family values, their choices and the on-going societal practices as their cultural resources to support their decision. They argued that in spite of their own disliking about the ritual, they complied to support and respect their family's wishes and choices. While some of them used their modern thinking and education to curtail some part of their ritual to support their argument of choosing their own ritual for their wedding as well as respecting their family. Therefore, all the participants in my sample went ahead with this ritual irrespective of their feelings about this specific ritual.

#### **4.6.3 SAPTAPADI/SAAT-PHERE (SEVEN STEPS OR SEVEN VOWS)**

*Saptapadi* or *Saat-phere* is the seven steps that the bride and the groom take together around the scared fire. During this, they are promising to love, protect, and care not only for each other but their families as well. This ritual was one of the most popular and loved ritual among all my participants. For some participants such as Mohini, the ritual of *saat-phere* (seven steps) added some seriousness to the wedding ceremony:

I thought that the most important ritual was the going round the fire and ... making the promises because it added sense of seriousness to the whole marriage. It feels like right now I am getting married and these are the things I am saying and these are the responsibilities when you say like that this is my responsibility to keep my husband happy and his family happy it kind of adds seriousness to you and you feel like okay that I need to take care of the family and to like obey; you follow it so that's like when you feel like when you take the vows in front of the fire that makes you feel that and you are chanting the vows and promises in front of the fire that makes you feel that if I am saying this I need to follow this just not because I am saying this. This was the most authentic and the most important thing in a wedding (Mohini 2012).

For others such as Nita, Rumki, Jhumki or Gauri, *Saat-phere* (seven steps) was all about vows and promises made to each other: “I (Gauri) think the *phera* does symbolize something. It is like promising each other something in each *phera* (*round*). Like we are going to live together, we are going to share food, and we are going to share our lives, have children together and grow.”

For Prarthna however, *saat-phere* (seven steps) was a choice that she made during her wedding ceremony. According to the existing literature, *saat-phere* (seven steps) and *kanyadaan* (giving away of the daughter) are the two most essential rituals in an Indian Hindu wedding. The Indian law even recognizes the rites and rituals of *saat-phere* (seven

steps) as a requirement for the completion of a marriage. Surprisingly though, *saat-phere* was not a part of Prarthna's wedding rituals. When asked why this ritual was not included in her wedding ceremony and what factors influenced her to select and include this ritual, she was ready with her reply. She narrated different stories to come to a possible conclusion. First she argued how her marriage was a love marriage and as discussed in the love marriage versus arranged marriage section before, Prarthna's mother-in-law was not happy with the proposal and gave her a hard time with her entire wedding ceremony. Prarthna's explained how in midst of all those issues, she chose and insisted on performing *saat-phere* (seven steps). She even drew on her cultural resources from the popular Bollywood movies and television soaps to explain the importance of this ritual. She says,

*Meri shaadi bina saat-phere ke khatam ho gayi thi. Meri sasuma ne saat-phere hone nahi diya, unko mein pasand nahi thi aur hamare shaadi ke khilaaf thi ... jaldi-jaldi mein shhadi khatam karne ko kaha lekin meine apne panditji ko majboor kiya ki mujhe yeh saat-phere karna hai. Tum hi socho bina saat-phere ke shaadi kabhi puri hoti hai? Har movies and serials mein dikhaya jata hai so mujhe bhi chahiye tha so meine insist kiya karne ko. (My wedding ceremony was over without the *saat-phere* ritual. My mother-in-law doesn't like me and was not in favor of our marriage. She was not happy with the match and requested the priest to skip this ritual and get over with the wedding ceremony as fast as possible but I insisted the priest to perform the *saat-phere* for us. Can you believe it, a marriage without *saat-phere*? *Saat-phere* is an integral part of all the movies and serials that I have watched so far. So, I chose the *saat-phere* ritual and included it in my ceremony) (Prarthna 2012).*

Hence, based on the narrative of all the participants *Saat-phere* (seven steps) was amongst the most popular ritual even more than *Haldi* (turmeric). For most of the participants *Saat-phere* (seven steps) was the vows or promises that they made to each other. For instance, Namita (2012) says, "*Saat-phere* is not only the seven steps that we take together but the seven promises that we make to each other, to respect each other, love protect each other and

you know during the *saat-phere* (seven steps) they take the *anchal* (part of the sari) and tie it to the grooms attire and this symbolizes that you are tied for life. It's a beautiful experience.” In case of the ritual of *Saptapadi/Saat-phere* (seven steps), the understanding of its meaning had profound impact on the participants' decision to choose and embrace this Vedic ritual. All of the participants made an effort to learn about this ritual and liked different aspects of it. Some interpreted it as the most serious ritual in the wedding stressing on the importance of the vows involved and some related to it as the ritual which seals and defines the bond between the husband and the wife and makes them realize the responsibilities they have towards each other as a married couple. It was this understanding that even made one of the participants to compel the *purohit* (minister) to conduct the ritual even when her husband's family had decided to do away with the ritual altogether.

With respect to the ritual of *Saptapadi*, the participants utilized different cultural resources such as “sharing a life together”, “promises”, “love”, “commitment” “togetherness”, and “vows” to examine and support their arguments about why they selected or preferred to choose this ritual. The participants also utilized the role of their respective family as a repertoire that influenced their decisions making process.

#### **4.6.4 SINDOOR/MANGALSUTRA (VERMILION/ SACRED THREAD)**

The *Sindoor* and/or the *Mangalsutra* ritual were the most controversial rituals among the interviewed participants. According to the existing literature, *sindoor/mangalsutra* is considered as a mark or a symbol of those who are married. According to Vedas, an unmarried girl is not allowed to wear any of these marks or symbols. However, the men in the Indian society have no such markings to show their married status. Also, this ritual is one

of the only rituals which are practiced in everyday life. Based on this tradition, some of the participants in this section labeled applying vermilion (*sindoor*) or tying the sacred thread (*mangalsutra*) as sexist while others viewed this ritual as a mode that uplifted their status in the society while few others termed the ritual as 'romantic'.

Piya, for example, thought this ritual was biased and sexist. She argued that if given a chance she would have declined performing this ritual for her wedding. However, she uses the society as her cultural resource to argue her point of action. She says that it was for the society that she agreed to do this ritual as she did not want to fight the societal system. She further says that it is unfair for the Indian society to demarcate a woman with such symbols during the wedding ceremony since there is nothing this customary for married men to follow. She says,

I understand about it (vermillion) it's a demarcation that this girl have been engaged permanently but still in Hindu marriage I still don't find any demarcation for a boy because how come you can distinguish that this boy has been taken too so this was not exactly with me or my principle but it was kind of okay things like this happen in a society and you cannot fight with the society all the time (Piya 2012).

On the contrary, both Giya and Addy had emotional attachments with the ritual. Giya, for instance, was too emotional about the ritual because of her past experiences with her mother and aunts. She explains how as a kid she witnessed her mother and even her aunts applying vermillion (*sindoor*) to their forehead every day. She like all other small girls dreamt of getting married and applying *sindoor* (vermillion) just like their mothers. On the day of her wedding, she got emotional as she was nostalgic about this ritual. Giya used some of her childhood memories as her cultural resource to make logical arguments. Although,

Giya no longer applies *sindoor* (vermillion) but thinking about the ritual makes her nostalgic.

Giya says that:

Felt kind of like at that point of time I was like having something different which I never had and I think it was a little bit emotional and the (pause) ... because the way we grew up we have seen our parents like my mother or my aunts to put a little bit of vermillion every day, now I don't even use that for a long time, so it's nothing to be emotional now but I feel like at that point of time I was young and it was like oh! I was also getting married and probably that's the one point which struck you or hit you like okay you are getting married so I think that's the main thing of getting emotional. Yeah, probably all that you grew up with, all those culture you know and you have seen them like all those stuff from childhood so you have some kind of notion or kind of like something in your mind in like this thing is like going to be different and so probably this was why I was a little emotional (Giya 2012).

For Addy on the other hand, this ritual was not emotional and but she refers this ritual as romantic. She argues how this ritual symbolizes the feeling of togetherness, the feeling of 'owning' each other romantically and not by any force. She says, a,

You know the feeling is very different (blushing) whenever a husband is putting *Sindoor*, the person you love is putting *Sindoor* on your forehead that means that I am yours, and I am all yours and you are owing me like in every way like whatever you are you are owning me and I will be with you and the *Sindoor* his touch like his hand on my forehead his artistic sense that this thing will be in the center and no other places and everything appeals me a lot and it brought tears because I love the ritual. I wore *Sindoor* and I liked wearing a *Sindoor* because it made my total looks changed. And it touched my nose and that means that he will be very happy with me because that is how it happens it just fell on my nose too. And when I saw myself in the mirror I didn't recognize myself and it was such a pretty face and bright kind of, a totally different face and I still wear *Sindoor* (Addy 2012).

For Preeti, the sacred thread (*mangalsutra*) was very symbolic and somewhat superstitious. She describes the process of tying *mangalsutra* (sacred thread) around her neck as an auspicious event. She explains how this sacred thread symbolizes a family and its well-

being. She further narrates how tying this thread makes her the sole protector of her husband's family and their reputation. She says,

*Kale and gold beads se banta hai yeh and mummy, dadi se kahani suni hai ki yeh shaadi sudha hone ka ehsaas dilati hai and iske hare ak beads family member hai and dhaga or thread in family members ko bandhe rakta hai. anu mein iski rakhshak hun, protector ... iske tootne se pati uhmmm husband ke saath upsagun hota hai ... yeh shaadi ke waqt pati apni patni ko pehnata hai ...”* (It's made of black and the gold beads and I heard stories from my mother and granny that the sacred thread symbolizes or marks you as married the bead and the thread symbolizes your whole family which is tied together in one single thread ... and you are the protector of this thread or family and if the thread breaks something bad happens to your husband ... this thread is tied around the wife's neck during the ceremony by her husband) (Preeti 2012).

However, for Prarthna, it was very upsetting as her mother-in-law asked her to tie the thread all by herself before the *saat-phere* and said that it was their family's tradition. As seen in the movies, she was hoping that her husband would tie the sacred thread or the *mangalsutra* around her neck. She argues that her mother in-law changed parts of the rituals to get over with the wedding ceremony. She says,

*My mother-in-law gave me the mangalsutra and asked me to wear it as in her family it's a tradition where the bride ties it all by herself. Who [mother-in-law] mujhe pasand nahi karti hai isisliye tradition ke naam pe change kar diyakaha otherwise aisa kabhi hota hai ...* (my mother-in-law doesn't like me so in the name of the tradition she changed the part of the ritual, have you ever heard something like this ... ) (Prarthna 2010).

Thus, this ritual means or carries different meaning for different participants. Some of the participants believed it to be sexist while some believed in the sanctity of the ritual. For example, both Rumki and Rupa believed that this ritual alleviates their social status from being a spinster to a married woman. They also believed that due to these symbols, the



society acknowledged and respected their identity more than the others. Therefore, to conclude, it is observed that those participants such as Rumki, Jhumni, Gargi, Preeti, Jaya and Prarthna, who believed in the sanctity of this ritual chose to continue following the ritual in their everyday lives while other who believed it to be sexist or considered it just as a ritual with no meaning or significance on it chose not to follow the ritual in their everyday lives.

#### **4.6.5 VIDAI (FAREWELL CEREMONY)**

*Vidai*, according to the literature, is a ritual where the bride along with the groom's party leaves her father's home to go to the groom's home (Pandya 2010). This ceremony was the most emotionally painful ceremony for all the women interviewed. Some of the women even cried remembering the moment. Almost all the women agreed that the rituals associated with the *Vidai* ceremony should either be removed completely or abridged based on the choice of the bride. This section thus explores whether the understanding of the ritual of *Vidai* played any role in determining its selection in the wedding for the brides.

Of the 20 interviewed, eight women had to go through the entirety of the *Vidai* ceremony which they considered very painful. For example, both Preeti and Prarthna had a thirty minute elaborate *Vidai* ceremony. Preeti in her narratives explains the process of the *vidai* ceremony in detail. She says,

*Vidai ke waqt aur kuch kuch rituals follow karte hai. Jaise, sabhi bade mere pau dhote hai, phir ashirwaad diya jata hai and phir vida kiya jata hai ... pau isiliye dhote hai kyunki mera, jo kuch bhi iss ghar se jura hai use dho dete hai ... rin mukht karte hai ma-baap ka"* (During the *Vidai* ceremony, the family performs some rituals, such as the elders of my family washed my feet and gave us blessings ... by washing the feet the elders symbolically washes away all my impurities and frees me of my parent's debt) (Preeti 2012).

Similarly, Prarthna recalls having the same kind of ceremony as that of Preeti. Prarthna narrates that during her *vidai* (departure ceremony) some emotional Bollywood songs, which fit the rituals, were played in the background and process took around thirty minutes. She also says that during that time her entire family was in tears. In the midst of all this she even had to change into new attire which she despised the most. She says,

During *Vidai*, my family my cousins started playing those *vidai* songs from the wedding movies to bring in the feel like you know, the *ehsaas* (feeling). *Phir toh sab rone lage, meri mummy, papa, bhai behen, sab rone lage, mein bhi bahiut royi ...* (Then suddenly everyone started crying, my mother, father, brothers and sisters, all started crying including me ... ) the most irritating part of this ritual was that *meri sasumom ne tab mujhe kapre change karne ke liye bhej diya ... aisa koi karta hai bhala?* (My mother-in-law sent me off to change my clothes at that time of the ceremony ... have you ever heard anyone doing this?) (Prarthna 2012)

Both confessed that the rituals related to the *Vidai* ceremony should be deleted from the weddings as they does not serve any purpose but just hurts the bride's family.

Dolly, Jyoti, Giya, Gauri, Rupa and Ritu, consider themselves to be lucky with the choices that they were able to make with the *Vidai* rituals. Dolly skipped the ritual and according to her narratives she was proud of her decision. Dolly narrates the process of the *vidai* ceremony in detail and uses different cultural resources to logically explain the reasons for not choosing this particular ritual for her wedding ceremony. She states that as a kid she disliked the entire concept of *vidai* because of the meaning of the ritual. She uses her 'knowledge' and 'understanding of the rituals' as her repertoires. She explains that the ritual stages the departure of the bride where she is moving from her maternal home to her new family house (husband's household). But in the process she was asked to repay her parents' debt which she thought was "ridiculous". She says,

Yes I skipped one of the rituals, means I skipped it technically because I didn't like to do it but I was also really lucky to skip that ritual. From a very young age I used to hate that ritual or the concept of that ritual where you have to take the rice in your hand and you do it on your *Vidai* and you take rice in your hand or *anchal* (part of the sari) and put it back and that symbolizes that whatever you have eaten in your fathers place you give it back. So whatever you have had from them you give it back to them. That was a very, I think that's the most ridiculous thing to do because your parents love you so much and they did all these not out of pressure or anything but sheer love and brought you up and then they feed you and just to give them back because you want to go ahead and have a married life seemed a very selfish on part of the daughter to do and I always because I had my sister's wedding and saw that and I got goose bumps on my arms and feet to think that and I really didn't like that so I was lucky (Dolly 2012).

In Gauri's case, however, her parents were too sad to perform the *Vidai* ceremony so they skipped the ritual too to save them and their daughter from that pain and rushed the ceremony. Gauri says,

Generally in *Vidai* there are many rituals but for our wedding, we didn't want to elaborate on it because it was a sad moment so we cut short of it. It was my mom dad's decision. Because they didn't want to elaborate it because they didn't want to see it and they didn't believe you know something they didn't want to put this sad thing for so long and I was okay with it (Gauri 2012).

Whereas, in Giya and Jyoti's case the elders blessed the couple and the newlyweds were immediately sent off to their new home (in-laws place). They were not asked to pay the debt of their parents by presenting them with rice.

According to Addy, Gargi, Jaya and Mohini, they were not that lucky. Mohini confesses that:

First of all, the *Vidai* thing, I don't like, everyone is coming to you and everybody is giving you blessings and wishing you of course for a happy married life but the whole process is like pretty bad for me as it is that you are pretty sad that you are leaving your family behind you, your house that you have grown up and you are leaving it behind you and going to somebody else's house and where you don't know anybody properly that was something like it should be something so huge they should make a huge ceremony out of it. They should let it go pretty coolly that it's time for you to go so go, it's

pretty pretty much troubling and hurting to the bride especially when you have to leave and go to someone else, and when you reach there they kind of celebrate their which I totally agree that they are happy that you are coming but if you think from the brides side perspective she is in a very bad mood, she is crying and everybody is just happy enjoying the moment but except for the bride because she doesn't feel like enjoying it (Mohini 2012).

For Mohini, her *vidai* was emotionally painful for her. She explains that the whole process from the bride's or the daughter's perspective. She argues how painful it is for the brides to leave a house she had wonderful memories and move on to a new home. She even argues that this should not be a part of the celebration process or make it a huge event.

Both Addy and Gargi cried while narrating their *Vidai* ceremony. According to Gargi,

It was very sad that always a bride had to leave her house, her family and every near and dear ones ... those rituals during the *Vidai* are pretty bad. You throw some rice at the back of your head before stepping out of the house and by doing that you are actually repay your parents debt. I never liked this ritual, I always cried when I saw such rituals in movies....it's so painful (Gargi 2012).

Moreover, Gargi was one of the participants who showed me some of her wedding photographs. Of all the photographs, one of them was of the *Vidai* ceremony where she pointed out how sad she was by pointing her 'red nose' and drawn face. During the photo elicitation process, I also noted some women in the background; either covered their face with their palms or with their *anchal* (part of the sari). Gargi identified those women as her mother and some paternal and maternal aunts and in the photograph all seemed to be crying. As literature on *Vidai* too suggested that it is a part of the *Vidai* ritual where women are supposed to lament loudly (Pandya 2010).

Of all the women interviewed, Piya was the only one who had no *Vidai* ceremony because her husband's family was against their marriage and decided not to be a part of her wedding ceremony. She says, "No I didn't have one as I had nowhere to go to." The other women such as Rumki, Jhumni or Shree had no issues or qualms with the rituals associated

with the *Vidai* ceremony. They agreed that it was a very sentimental and emotionally painful moment to leave the house forever but tried not to create any fuss over it. Rumki says, “It’s a ritual and you follow it or not no one cares and at that moment you hardly care about anything as you are very sad to leave your parents’ house.”

Therefore, based on the participants narratives it can be concluded that the women made choices regarding the selection of this ritual for their wedding ceremony. The participants were seen using various cultural resources such as ‘love’, ‘selflessness of the parents’, ‘sad’, ‘crying’, ‘feeling’, and ‘support from parents’, to support their arguments for declining this particular ritual from their wedding ceremony. While some of the other participants who had no choice to exclude this ritual from their wedding ceremony used ‘familial pressure’, ‘society norms’, as their cultural resources to support their argument.

Based on the above observations, I can conclude that the participants used varied ways to mobilize their culture into practical use. The participants did not simply use perspectives or values drawn from their culture to express their choices but used “multiform repertoires of meaning frame and reframe experience in an open-ended way” (Swidler 2004: 40). For instance, while using the debater’s approach, the participants used varied, unselective and unorganized arguments to examine the situation such as debating on how western exposure influenced their choices of selecting their life partners. While, in other situations, the participants were seen drawing up one cultural frame, usually corresponding to an imagined case or situation, using it until they have a logical argument. For example, Jaya drew upon ‘the role of family’ as her main repertoire to logically argue her position and the choices she made for her wedding.

Similarly, the focus on exploring life experiences of the participants to determine, what social factors influenced their choices regarding their wedding ritual varied in the many ways. One of them was the way the participants used various cultural resources. People possess different cultures which are the active parts of their current experience. According to Swidler (2004: 70), “People vary also in ways they integrate culture with life experience, and that they may change over time and across life spheres in the ways they draw connection between culture and lives they actually lead.” For instance, Prarthna’s life in US after her marriage is better than the life she led in India with her in-laws. So Prarthna attached her current ‘active’ experience (US) to the experience that she had in reserve (India) and integrated her cultural resource to argue the choices she would have made if she was in US prior to her marriage.

Finally, the analysis assists in understanding the various strategies the participants use to examine a specific situation. According to Swidler (2004: 86), “One of the cultural resources that help people to enact a strategy of action is a set of “values” that orient important choices within that strategy.” Therefore, drawing from the participant’s narratives, it can be said that ‘values’ of a person were the ‘chain of reasons’ (Swidler 2004:86), one uses as their cultural resources. Values were one of the many cultural resources that the participants drew upon to examine their situation at hand and were even seen consulting them (values) and applying them to specific choices. For instance, almost all the participants were against the *kanyadaan* (giving away of the bride) ritual but used various other cultural resources to strategize their actions. Therefore, in conclusion, the participants identified ‘westernization and modernization in India’, ‘the role of the family and community’ and ‘the role of education’ as the three major social factors which the participants used as their tool-

kit or repertoire to examine and argue the choices they made regarding their wedding ceremonies.

## **Chapter 5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK**

The current study focused on exploring the major social factors that influenced the choices which the Indian married women made regarding their wedding rituals. During the analysis, it was observed, the choices that women made regarding their wedding rituals were not confined only to selecting the Vedic wedding rituals but encompassed broader concerns. These ranged quite widely from how they selected their own marriage partners, decided their own age at marriage, chose wedding dates and how they understood the meaning of the rituals and followed them. The study findings identified – ‘the influence of westernization and modernization in India’, ‘the role of family and community’, and ‘the role of education’ as the three major social factors that the participants drew on to explain and substantiate the choices they made for their wedding ceremony. Recognizing these social factors from the analysis further benefited the research in interpreting and examining the social and cultural changes in the Indian marriage system, thus contributing to the existing literature on wedding and wedding rituals.

This study employed an in-depth qualitative interview method and interviewed 20 married Indian Hindu women who are currently living in the United States. Interviewing these women provided rich and valuable insight of their wedding ceremony. The women mainly spoke about the ways they perceived their own marriage, how they organized their ceremony, took vows, and finally included or discarded certain rituals over others. All the women in the study, used the three social factors actively, examining and arguing their standpoint. As the part of the analysis process, the study utilized Ann Swidler’s (2004) tool-kit approach to examine the situation at hand. The study participants used the three major social factors as their repertoires to better argue and explain the choices they made regarding



their wedding rituals. Along with the repertoires the participants also used various cultural themes and ideas to logically argue their standpoint. This study employed Swidler's tool-kit only for the analysis of the collected data and to showcase the usefulness of the study.

According to the study findings, it was observed that the three major social factors the influence of westernization and modernization in India; the role of family and community; and the role of education greatly influenced the choices of the women and played an important role in the participants life. For instance, the influence of westernization and modernization in India as a social factor influenced them to choose their own life-partners. Traditionally, in India selecting a marriage partner is considered as the responsibility of the both the bride's and groom's parents and relatives. According to the study findings, more than half of the participants of this study chose their own marriage partners. Although, finding a groom for one's self triggered and confronted the participants with certain social and familial issues. For example, Piya's husband's family refused to support their marriage and boycotted the wedding ceremony. Similarly, Addy's mother stopped talking to her the day she found out about her daughter's boyfriend (now husband). In such cases, it is observed that a growing involvement of western ideas and concepts empowered these women to choose or decide between their wedding rituals and their family choices, customs and traditions. Similarly, the study observed that its participants gave immense importance to education in their lives. According to the analysis, education opportunities influenced the women's choice to marry at an age that was older than the average age for marriage in India. Majority of the participants married at a much later age than the average age. It was also observed that the education of the daughters directly correlated to their family's social position and class and vice versa. The study found that the higher education gave women power to negotiate

between their choices with their respective families choices. Therefore, it can be concluded that the current findings show that without the influences of modernization and higher levels of education, the participants would not have had even thought that they had any choice in their weddings in terms of the decision making processes as a whole. Due to modernization and higher education opportunities, it was observed that the women freely thought and formed opinions about the various parts of their wedding process. For instance, apart from choosing one's marriage partners, many women selected their wedding dates which differend from the auspicious ones, chose their wedding venue, the guest list and even some of the ritual and parts of it. For instance, some of the participants chose not to perform some parts of the *Vidai* (departure ceremony) rituals or the *Kanyadaan* (giving away of the daughter) rituals. In all these cases the social factors greatly influenced the choices that the Indian women made regarding the wedding rituals.

The role of family and community, on the other hand, played defining role in influencing the choices of the women. According to the narratives, the women strongly claimed that they had the liberty to choose and/or reject various aspects of their wedding process. For instance, the women who had arranged marriages negotiated between the power based on the education and modern outlook to choose and select from the pool of grooms that were sent to them by their families for selection process. Though, none of the participants were ever forced or pressurized with the groom selection process. It was determined from the analysis that the women were given multiple choices to select their own groom as selected by their families.

According to the analysis, it was observed that in most cases the families helped in navigating women's choices in some direction or the other which in most cases was heavily

inclined towards the families wishes. For instance, all the women chose social marriage over court marriage and followed the Vedic ritual that was required for them to maintain the family's social class and position in the society. With some women, it was observed that the family completely supported their daughter's decision regarding the choice they made for their weddings. While, in other cases the women chose to comply with the family's culture and tradition. In these situations, it was observed that though the families gave them the possibility of choices to decide from but the participants had unfavorable viewpoints towards most of these given options (regarding rituals and other wedding related matters). Thus, the participants mostly ended up choosing amongst the options which were not favored by them but favored by their respective families. Finally, it can be concluded, that the women in the midst of identifying all these social factors decided to be a good daughter and do what the family wanted them to do within the role of the family. Therefore, all the three social factors greatly influenced the ritual choices.

However, no significant difference was found in the ritual selection process among the women who traveled to the US prior to their marriage from those who traveled to the US after their marriage. Although, the women who came to the US prior to their marriage utilized their western exposure and modern outlook to explain the other wedding related choices they made such as wedding dates, venue or wedding partners in a more sophisticated manner than the women who traveled to the US after their marriage. From the findings, it can also be concluded that the choices that these women made were rather insignificant when compared to the western culture but quite revolutionary in Indian culture with its conservative traditions. In India, where families make the decisions about arranging weddings and finding partners, the narratives of the women choosing their own wedding

partners and also voicing their opinions on changing some parts of the rituals was very noteworthy. Since previous generations to the women interviewed (their parents and/or grandparents) had no choice or opportunity to question in these situations, in choosing their wedding rituals and questioning the meaning of the rituals by these women should be considered quite transformative within the Indian society.

Finally, to conclude, a Hindu marriage is originally described as a religious and social institution that formalizes the social union of both the individuals and their families. Since India's independence from colonialism, marriage has turned out to be the most revolutionized institution. In India, marriage as a social institution is the source for developing and maintaining a stable and ideal society. For centuries, Hindu wedding rituals followed a strict Vedic script that was neither altered nor challenged. Any changes in the system of marriage rights might challenge the balance of the Indian society. Increase in 'love match marriages', social awareness, increased educational level and increasing economic growth are playing significant roles in transforming the cultural and social expectations of the Hindu marriage system and the Indian society. Therefore, in accordance with the recent trend in adopting various ways to modify and alter certain aspects of the traditional Vedic wedding rituals without disrupting the social order of the society, this study focused its research on identifying the social factors that influenced the choices that the Indian women made regarding the selection of varying Vedic wedding rituals for their marriage ceremony.

### **5.1. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK OF THE RESEARCH**

All social research has some limitations but these shortcomings do not completely eradicate the contributions of this work. This study also has its own limitations. The major limitation was the limited time period that was available to complete the study and its small

sample size. Although, the decision to select a small sample size was an integral part of the research design process. The research was designed to receive rich and valuable data from its sample participants regarding their wedding ceremonies and experiences. Therefore, the research was planned to allow the researcher to utilize and analyze the data effectively and efficiently.

Moreover, the findings of the study will also help in contributing to the existing literature and knowledge of the Indian wedding system. These findings will also aid in projecting new trajectories to future research endeavors. The present study identified the social factors that influenced the choices of the married Hindu Indian women in their wedding ceremony. The study findings also showed how the participants used these social factors to examine their situations and argue their standpoints. For the purpose of future research, I would want to recruit and interview both the participant's husbands and the couple's parents separately to understand and examine their viewpoint and preferences regarding the choices they made for the wedding ceremony. Additionally, how these choices effect or are affecting the structure of the Indian society could also be studied to shed more light on the social aspects of the Indian Hindu weddings.

## **Chapter 6. APPENDICES**

### **6.1. APPENDIX A: INITIAL INTRODUCTION CONTACT EMAIL**

Hello\_\_\_\_\_

I am writing to you to see if you might be willing to participate in my Master's thesis research project and/or help me find a potential respondent for the same. This project has been reviewed by the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (713) 743-9204. I was given your name by (XXX) who suggested you might be a good fit for my sample.

For my thesis, I am planning to study and analyze the Indian wedding ceremonies, its rites and rituals as performed by you in your wedding and identify the various social factors such as the role of the family, friend or community affecting the ritual selection processes. I am seeking to interview only Indian married Hindu women, who are currently living in the United States, were married in a Hindu ceremony in India and who came to the United States either (1) prior to their marriage or (2) after their marriage.

It will be greatly appreciated if you can recommend any friend, family or colleague of yours who might be willing to participate in the study and/or fits the above mentioned criteria. Please do send them my contact information (email ID or phone number) or forward this email for the same. According to the IRB guidelines, the confidentiality of the potential respondents contact information will be maintained throughout the study period and afterwards.

You can email me at <mailto:rsengupta2@uh.edu>/ [meetrags@gmail.com](mailto:meetrags@gmail.com) or message me on Facebook - <http://www.facebook.com/ragini.sengupta> to briefly discuss about the project and/or your possible participation.

Hope to hear from you soon. Thank you for your time.

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Email ID - [meetrags@gmail.com](mailto:meetrags@gmail.com)

You can message me on Facebook - <http://www.facebook.com/ragini.sengupta>

## **6.2. APENDIX B: TELEPHONE SCRIPT: FOR SAMPLE SELECTION CRITERIA**

(This project has been reviewed by the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (713) 743-9204).

The telephone script includes questions required to finalize the recruitment process.

### **I need to ask you a few questions to get started,**

1. Are you between 21 to 35 years of age?

*If yes, proceed*

2. Where were you born?

*If in India, proceed*

3. What is your religious background or affiliation?

*If Hindu, proceed*

4. Are you married?

*If yes, proceed*

5. Is this your first marriage?

*If yes, proceed*

6. In which country you got married?

*If India, proceed*

7. Is your spouse of same ethnic origin as you are?

*If yes, proceed.*

If the potential interviewee meets the above sample requirements, I will ask them if they are willing to participate in the study and will possibly schedule a time for the interview.

If the potential interviewee does not meet the sample criteria, I will thank her for her time and briefly explain why she does not fit my study criteria. I will also request her to recommend any friend, family or colleague of hers who might be willing to participate in the study and/or fits the above mentioned criteria.

### **6.3. APENDIX C: PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM**

#### UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

#### **SOCIAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE RITUAL SELECTION PROCESS AMONG THE INDIAN BRIDES LIVING IN THE US**

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Ragini Sengupta from the Sociology Department at the University of Houston. This project is being conducted as part of a Master's thesis under the supervision of Dr. Tracy Xavia Karner.

#### **NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study is to explore some of the significant and intricate aspects of the Hindu wedding ceremonies to analyze the social factors affecting the ritual selection process among the married Indian women. This includes determining what rituals mean to them, who and what influences their choices and what contextual factors (family, friends, religion, social class or western exposure) might steer them in one direction or another.

#### **PROCEDURES**

Snowball sampling method will be used in the study to identify the respondents for the in-depth interview. Indian married Hindu women will be recruited for the study, currently living in the United States and had a Hindu wedding ceremony in India. Out of the 20 participants, two sets of women will be recruited – those who traveled to the United States prior to their marriage for reasons other than marriage such as education or work and those who came to US after their marriage along with their spouses.

You will be one of approximately 20 subjects to be asked to participate in the project. The participation in the project would require the subjects to fill out a demographic face sheet first, which will take approximately ten minutes of your time and partake in a one to two hour interview answering questions regarding their wedding ceremonies and factors affecting their choices. Subjects will be asked to refer friends/colleagues that they believe fit the study criteria that may also be included in the research. However, participants are not required to



refer other people and their decision to do so will have no effect on their own inclusion in the project.

Your identity will not be associated with any of the data I collect from either the face sheet or the interview session and no personal information will be published in association to your responses. There will be identifiers but in accordance to the University of Houston IRB guidelines, only the prime investigator will know who the interviewed persons were. Results that will be reported in the project will guarantee complete anonymity of the consented participants.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw at any time you feel uncomfortable. If you agree to participate, you may choose not to answer every question. If you become uncomfortable at any time during the interview and wish to discontinue or skip any question, you may do so.

The data I collect will solely be used for the research analysis purpose. It will help me in understanding the social factors effecting or influencing the ritual selection process. I also hope to use the information to add to the existing knowledge in the field and assist in conducting future research understanding the values and attitudes of the Indians living in the United States. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me by phone or email listed below.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Every effort will be made to the confidentiality of your participation in this project. Each of the subject's pseudonyms will appear on all written documents. The list pairing the subject's original name and their pseudonyms will be kept separate from all research materials and will be available only to the principal investigator. Confidentiality will be maintained within legal limits.

### **RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participants in this study. However, should the subject at any point feel uncomfortable, they may end the interview and withdraw their participation.as per the University of Houston IRB guidelines

### **BENEFITS**

Your participation will help investigators to better understand the significances of the marriage rituals in an individual's life and the importance of marriage as well.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

## **PUBLICATION STATEMENT**

The results of this study may be published in professional and/or scientific journals. It may also be used for educational purposes or for professional presentations. However, no individual subject will be identified in any publications or presentations.

## **AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF AUDIO/VIDEO TAPES**

If you consent to participate in this study, please indicate whether you agree to be audio/video taped during the study by checking the appropriate box below. If you agree, please also indicate whether the audio/video tapes can be used for publication/presentations.

- I agree to be audio/video taped during the interview.
  - I agree that the audio/ video tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
  - I do not agree that the audio/ video tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
- I do not agree to be audio/video taped during the interview.

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## **SUBJECT RIGHTS**

1. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons participating in this project.
2. All procedures have been explained to me and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
3. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me.
4. Any benefits have been explained to me.
5. I understand that, if I have any questions, I may contact Ragini Sengupta at 832-472-1855 or email her at meetrags@gmail.com/rsengupta2@uh.edu. I may also contact Dr. Tracy Xavia Karner, faculty sponsor, at 713.743.3961 or email her at txkarner@uh.edu
6. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or to stop my participation in this project at any time before or during the project. I may also refuse to answer any question.
7. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (713-743-9204). ALL RESEARCH

PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

8. All information that is obtained in connection with this project and that can be identified with me will remain confidential as far as possible within legal limits. Information gained from this study that can be identified with me may be released to no one other than the principal investigator and his/her faculty sponsor. The results may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations without identifying me by name.

I HAVE READ (OR HAVE HAD READ TO ME) THE CONTENTS OF THIS CONSENT FORM AND HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED TO ASK QUESTIONS. I HAVE RECEIVED ANSWERS TO MY QUESTIONS. I GIVE MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I HAVE RECEIVED (OR WILL RECEIVE) A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR MY RECORDS AND FUTURE REFERENCE.

Study Subject (print name): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Study Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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I HAVE READ THIS FORM TO THE SUBJECT AND/OR THE SUBJECT HAS READ THIS FORM. AN EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH WAS GIVEN AND QUESTIONS FROM THE SUBJECT WERE SOLICITED AND ANSWERED TO THE SUBJECT'S SATISFACTION. IN MY JUDGMENT, THE SUBJECT HAS DEMONSTRATED COMPREHENSION OF THE INFORMATION.

Principal Investigator (print name and title): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## **6.5. APENDIX E: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT**

**Qualitative Interviews proceed like guided conversations. The following ten topics will be covered though open ended questioning process that includes prompts and probes to help the interviewee thoroughly describe her experiences. Questions will be asked in varying order and may be trailed by follow-up questions.**

1. Please tell me about how you decided to come to the US and what that was like for you

You came to USA when you were (XXX) age and for (XXX) purpose

What was coming to the US like for you?

Have you ever travelled this far or stayed away from your parents before your marriage?

What were your age (XX) then when you first moved out of your parents' house?

Were your parents comfortable with your decision of to move out of the house or country?

2. Can you please tell me a little about your childhood days? How was your relationship with your parents and siblings? Or tell me about your growing up years and your relationship with your family and other siblings (if any)?

We can start with the city you were born into?

The cultural aspect

How is it like living in India?

Do you have any siblings? Are they married? Where are they now? Where did they marry?

Have you ever attended any wedding ceremonies while you were a child?

Tell me about your wedding fantasies as a child. What were your expectations about your own wedding and marriage then? Have they changed with time, with age and experience?

Do you know about your parents wedding?

Was your wedding different or similar to your parents?

What sort of wedding you had and why you decided to have that sort of wedding?

3. Can you please tell me in detail about you, your husband, and your relationship with him? Please tell me about it in detail.

How and where did you meet your spouse?

Did you meet your husband through your parents?

What was your husband doing when you met each other for the first time?

Was it a love at first sight?

How long did you and your husband see each other/ date before getting married? When was the first time that you seriously talked about marriage?

How did you decide then that your husband is the right person for you?

If your parents arranged the marriage, were you comfortable with their decision? Was there any pressure on you?

Who else was involved in the mate selection-decision making process?

Was there any family pressure on you to get married to your husband? How and when did you tell your parents about this man and vice versa?

How did your parents react to the news?

Were they supportive of your decision or did they needed some persuasion?

What age did your parents begin talking to you about getting married?

How and by whom was your marriage arranged / fixed – by your parents or by you? (If)

4. Can you tell me a little about the specific elements of your wedding and how you came to choose these? And what would you say your main priorities and considerations in your wedding preparations were?

Timings, venue, ceremony, guests, flower/music, dress, reception, honeymoon, cost, family and friends, tradition, religion, Your own wishes

A sense of what you don't want and why?

What were the wedding preparations like?

Who had the responsibility for planning the wedding?

Can you show me your wedding photographs?

Did you face any challenges in your wedding preparations related to logistic (venue, priest, etc)

5. Can you tell me in detail the total number of wedding rituals you had in your wedding along with their names, their meanings and how you came to choose these?

Kanyadaan, Saptapadi, Sindoor/Mangalsutra, Vidai Others, specify

What is the meaning of each of these rituals? (In your own words)

Can you assign the importance of the above rituals based on religion, culture and you and why?

From your own perspective

In its original form

Popular meanings

6. Do you think your exposure to western culture prior to your wedding had any effect on you a) wedding planning process b) picking and choosing the rituals for the wedding day and c) assigning importance to these wedding rituals in your lives?
7. What is your reason for having a wedding? Overall, what did your wedding say about you?
8. Looking back, what is your single most vivid memory of the day? In the hindsight would you have done anything differently, either at the preparation stage or the day itself?

Any regrets

Anything done differently

Anything that you want to do now because you understand its meaning better or vice versa

9. In your culture, what role or how important is religion in weddings?

How religious are you?

Is your family religiously inclined?

Were there any religious obligation, rules or norms associated directly to your marriage or wedding rituals?

What role did religion play in your decision to marry, how you selected your spouse, how the ceremony was conducted?

10. So, in general, can you tell me what do you understand by marriage? Can you define what marriage means to you in your own words?

Do you believe in this institution of marriage? If yes, then why?

Did you consider not marrying at all?

Why was religious wedding important to you?

What according to you is the most acceptable way of getting married means to you? Why was getting married important to you?

What are your general thoughts on marriage in today's world?

Do you think everyone should get married at least once? Why?

Are you comfortable with other alternatives of marriage?

What kind of experience or ceremony do you want for your children?

Do you think your children or your next generation will approach their life choices differently or similarly to how your parents reacted to yours?

## **6.6. APENDIX F: SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

### **6.6.1 TRAVELED TO THE US PRIOR TO MARRIAGE**

#### **6.6.1.1 TRAVELED TO THE US PRIOR TO MARRIAGE + LOVE MATCH MARRIAGE**

NAME	AGE AT MARRIAGE	NO. OF YEARS MARRIED	EDUCATION
Dolly	27	6	Ph.D.
Jyoti	26	8	Ph.D.
Megha	24	1	MS
Namita	25	3	BS
Nita	26	6	Ph.D.
Ritu	26	8	Ph.D.

#### **6.6.1.2 TRAVELED TO THE US PRIOR TO MARRIAGE + ARRANGED MARRIAGE**

NAME	AGE AT MARRIAGE	NO. OF YEARS MARRIED	EDUCATION
Gauri	26	1	MS
Jhumni	30	2	Ph.D.
Rupa	29	7	Ph.D.
Tanvi	26	1	MS



## **6.6.2 TRAVELED TO THE US AFTER THEIR MARRIAGE**

### **6.6.2.1 TRAVELED TO THE US AFTER THEIR MARRIAGE + LOVE MATCH MARRIAGE**

NAME	AGE AT MARRIAGE	NO. OF YEARS MARRIED	EDUCATION
<b>Addy</b>	25	3	M.Phil.
<b>Gargi</b>	27	5	MS
<b>Giya</b>	27	7.5	MS
<b>Piya</b>	20	7	BS
<b>Prarthna</b>	24	2	BS

### **6.6.2.2 TRAVELED TO THE US AFTER THEIR MARRIAGE + ARRANGED MARRIAGE**

NAME	AGE AT MARRIAGE	NO. OF YEARS MARRIED	EDUCATION
<b>Jaya</b>	23	4	BS
<b>Mohini</b>	24	12	MS
<b>Preeti</b>	23	1.5	MBA
<b>Rumki</b>	26	3.5	MA
<b>Shree</b>	26	3	MS

## **Chapter 7. BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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