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**THE CHANGING STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE TRADITIONAL INDO-
FIJIAN (HINDU) WEDDING CEREMONY**

by

Reshmi Lata Prasad

A supervised research project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Masters of Arts in Literature

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School of Language, Arts and Media
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March, 2013

DECLARATION

Statement by Author

I, Reshmi Lata Prasad declare that the supervised research project titled "The changing status of women in the traditional Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding" is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no materials previously published, or substantially overlapping with material submitted for the award of any other degree at any institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

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Statement by Supervisor

The research for this project was performed under my supervision and to my knowledge is the sole work of Mrs. Reshmi Lata Prasad.

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Abstract

This research project reviews the changing status of women in a traditional Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremony. Working from a feminist perspective, the larger focus of this project is to highlight ways in which women functioned within the strict norms of the society constructed mainly for the benefit of the patriarch. Indo-Fijian (Hindu) women view that tradition and culture have been gender biased as they have operated in the favor of men, thereby reducing women's importance in the society. Inspired by issues relating to the Indo-Fijian women in a traditional wedding ceremony in the novel *Amma....the frail wooden door* by Amitesh Deo, this research project works to discover the place of Indo-Fijian women in the traditional wedding ceremony and ascertain the changes in their status. A comparative study based on the past and the contemporary Indo-Fijian (Hindu) societies and wedding ceremonies have been carried out which reveal that the status of women have undergone positive changes in the Hindu wedding ceremony. Information gathered through the interviews conducted on the Indo-Fijians (Hindus) show that migration, education and modernization are some of the major factors which have facilitated the improvement of the status of women and have helped them to build their capacity in the society. Indo-Fijian women have come a long way since the girmite era and have tried their best to emerge from suppression and male dominance. Their efforts have been recognized and their achievement is visible in various forms.

Table of Contents

	Pg.
Acknowledgement	(i)
Abstract.....	(ii)
Table of Contents.....	(iii)
Introductions.....	1
Chapter 1: Weddings in the Hindu Society (A Feminist Approach).....	5
Traditional Indo-Fijian (Hindu) Wedding Ceremonies in Fiji.....	11
1.1 The Girit Era.....	11
1.2 Post Girit Era and Today.....	15
Chapter 2: Changing Values in the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) Wedding System.....	24
2.1 Changing Role of Women in the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) Wedding Ceremony...24	
2.2 Women and Education.....	25
2.3 Women and Modernization.....	26
2.4 Wedding and Bollywood.....	28
2.5 Bollywood: Gender Empowerment for Indo-Fijian Women.....	31
Chapter 3: Portrayal of Indo-Fijian (Hindu) Wedding in the work of Indo-Fijian Writers.....	33
Chapter 4: Chapter Analysis.....	40
4.1 Importance of Wedding Ceremony in the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) Society.....	40
4.2 Equality of Women in Decision Making.....	41

4.3 Changes in the Wedding Ceremony Organized by Women.....	42
4.4 Love Marriages versus Arranged Marriages.....	44
4.5 Changing Gender Roles in the Wedding Ceremony.....	45
4.6 Factors Causing Changes in the Status of Indo Fijian Women in the Traditional (Hindu) Weddings in Fiji.....	47
4.6.1 Migration.....	47
4.6.2 Education.....	47
4.6.3 Modernization and Fashion.....	48
4.6.4 Impact of Bollywood.....	49
4.7 Gift and Monetary Exchange: A Gender Bias Concept.....	49
Conclusion.....	53
Bibliography.....	55
Appendix: Interview Transcripts.....	58-109

Introduction

The status of Indo-Fijian women has undergone significant cultural and social metamorphosis in more than a hundred years of their existence in Fiji. Indo-Fijian society has been a male dominated one; however the changing times have altered their attitude towards women and this has enabled Indo-Fijian women to bring about changes in their lives and improve their status in society. The changes however have been slow and have not been seen in all areas due to male dominance. The power of the patriarch in the society often made women appear weak and vulnerable and their importance in society was not recognized for a very long time. However in comparison to the girit and post-girit era there has been significant improvement in the status of women, especially in the economic sector today. This was difficult to achieve in the early days of indenture, as Brij Lal points out:

Typical conditions offered to the Fiji migrants stated that they would be engaged in work related to the cultivation and manufacture of agricultural products; that they would work for nine hours each week day and five on Saturday, with Sunday and public holidays being free; that *men would be paid one shilling and women nine pennies* for time as well as task work. [emphasis added]¹

Women, therefore, have been subjected to inequality due to their gender, despite the fact that they had more use value as they not only earned money by working on the farms but were also responsible for carrying out domestic duties. Today some working women face similar problems as they are in paid employment and at the same time are solely responsible for carrying out domestic tasks as well.

The traditions and customs have also been in the favor of the patriarch and women have been subjects of inferiority. Indo-Fijian (Hindu) weddings have been seen as a good

¹ Brij Lal, *Bittersweet* (Sydney: Australian National University, 2004) 6.

example of a male favored occasion where the rituals carried out impose greater burden on women.

This research work therefore looks at the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding system from a feminist perspective and offers a detailed look at the ways in which it is sexist. It also offers an analysis of the changes that have occurred in the Indo-Fijian ceremonies over time. Having insufficient written resources on Indo-Fijian women to compliment the topic of study, interviews have been used as the corresponding research method. To work efficiently with this minor research work, a smaller sample size of twelve participants from varying age groups, genders and backgrounds have been selected. However, all participants are Indo-Fijian Hindus.

The main text chosen for this thesis work is the novel *Amma...the frail wooden door* written by a debut writer Amitesh Deo. Deo is not a writer by profession and his text suffers from a lack of literary experience and stylistic flair. However the basis of his writing is the story and his text operates as a social document revealing the untold stories of many families. The story allows the readers to reach into the dark corners of the Indo-Fijian society and connect the experiences that are shared by people who undergo such situations. The role of Amma – mother – is played by Savitri who is the central character in the novel. As Nazhat Shameen writes:

This is a story of a family left without a mother, left to the tragedies of poverty, ignorance and desperation after her suicide. The book tells the story of an excited and hopeful Savitri, from a poor but happy farming family, married off into a life of sacrifice, contempt and patriarchy. It is the story of an unhappy marriage, and a family driven by incomprehension about the brutal and uncaring character of Taji, the man Savitri married with so much hope, and with whom she lived with so much disappointment and pain.²

² Nazhat Shameem, *Remarks at the book launch-Amma*, (Fiji: Law Fiji, 2011) retrieved from <http://lawfiji.com/speeches/amma-a-frail-wooden-door/>

The second chapter of the novel (Amma weds Taji) is specifically selected as it gives an account of the Indo-Fijian(Hindu) wedding system and the ideas conveyed by the author regarding the gender bias within the rituals is agreed with by the experiences of the interviewees. Several concepts such the burden of total expenses put on the bride's family, the irrational demands of expensive gifts and monetary presents and the refusal to allow these gifts to enable equality are some of the similar ideas that have been shared by the participants interviewed. Therefore, although the things mentioned in the novel cannot be held true, as it is a work of fiction, it speaks volumes about the place of women in the society. This research work therefore aims to highlight the changing status of women in the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) weddings discussed in four chapters. Chapter one highlights the importance of the wedding ceremony in the lives of the Indo-Fijian (Hindus) in Fiji. It discusses the role of women in the wedding ceremony from a feminist perspective and exposes the subjugated status of women by men during the girit era, post-girit era and in the contemporary society. The study shows a trend that over the number of years the status of women has significantly improved in the Hindu wedding system.

Chapter two identifies several key factors such as education, migration and modernization and views them as a source of motivation for women which has encouraged women to work towards achieving gender equality. The chapter will therefore discuss in details how the factors mentioned have assisted women to improve their status in the society.

Chapter three outlines the portrayal of Indo-Fijian weddings in literature. *Amma...the frail wooden door* is used as the primary text and the works of several theorists such as Luce Irigaray, Maggie Humm and Simone de Beauvoir have been employed to conduct a theoretical analysis of the second chapter of the novel (Amma wed Taji).

Chapter 4 focuses on the interview analysis and provides an account of the participants' perspectives on the changing status of Indo-Fijian women at the wedding ceremony.

The analysis is based on the information collected from the participants through the interviews and it specifies the changing status of women in the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremony and point out the factors that have caused the changes to take place.

Chapter 1 Weddings in the Hindu Society (A Feminist Approach)

Indo-Fijian society follows a strict and complex social structure. The Hindu way of life is guided by the *Solah Sanskar* (sixteen principals) which educates people about their traditional obligations throughout life till death. Out of the sixteen the wedding is seen as the most important occasion, which traditionally binds two strangers. A wedding is seen as a ritual that brings couples together for their current lives and many lives yet to come. This is due to Hinduism's profound belief in reincarnation. There is a common phrase heard at Hindu weddings that once people get married they will be together for seven lives. For a long time in old Indian societies there was no need to strengthen the bond with paper marriage (legal marriage). Traditional marriages played a more active role in ensuring that the couples remain loyal to each other. The presence of hundreds of relatives to witness the wedding ceremony hugely outnumbered the witnesses we now have during court marriages, and this number ensured that couples would keep their integrity as well as the pride of their family intact by leading an exemplary family life.

The wedding or engagement rings that are common today had no relevance in traditional marriages and were not needed to signify that a woman is married. The *Mangalsutra* (wedding chain made of black beads), *Sindur* (red powder put in the partings of the hair) and *Tikka* (round red spot on the forehead made by sindur) were more important to symbolize that a woman is married. Indian women use this to show that they are married and that their husbands are alive. Wearing *Kaanch* (glass bangles) with the wedding chain and sindur is also seen as a good omen and most women believe that this will prolong the lives of their husbands. However, there are no symbols for Hindu men to show that they are married.

In the case of the death of the husband these emblems are taken away from the woman, and from then on she should wear only white or lightly colored saris. Colors signified happiness and the death of the husband would mean that the good life that wife used to have is over as she will be expected to devote her life to god, away from worldly happiness. There was no provision to remarry after the passing away of the husband.

Many widows would seek shelter at ashrams to spend the rest of their lives. In pre-colonial India women gave up their lives at the funeral pyre of their husbands. Women who would undergo the act of self immolation were known as *Sati*. It was a belief that after the death of the husband there was nothing left for the women in the mortal world. She should, therefore, give up her life so that she can be reborn with her husband and continue to live together. Spivak argues that the act of self immolation by women is an excess and wrongly imposed upon women. She points out that “Dharamshastra (religious texts) teaches her that suicide (widow sacrifice) is rarely sanctioned and scripture provides no basis for its normativization”.³ Women therefore became the victims of gender biased social norms and committed to the act of self killing. There were no such rituals for men. Sati was banned in 1829.⁴

In other mourning rituals a woman’s head would be shaved off and covered by a white sari. This was a way to mark the grief that the woman was going through after the death of her husband. These extremes of grief are linked to the fact that the husband was often treated as equivalent to a god and he had supreme power in the household, dominating his wife in all aspects, even after his death.

A wedded woman who has gone through all traditional rituals is given a lot of respect within the family unit as well as in the society. She is often referred to as *Kaki* (uncle’s wife), *Bhabi* (sister in-law) and *Pato* (daughter-in-law) etc., and out of respect her maiden name is hardly used, except by few elders. If a woman starts living with a man without any proper ceremony she is often looked down on and is not welcomed with much respect during gatherings and events. A young woman has to remain chaste for her husband and can only live together with him after going through the seven *phera*’s (seven rounds around the holy fire) where the couple promises each other to stay together with love and respect. To many, wedding rituals support the gender inferiority/superiority binary, as during the traditional wedding ceremony the groom

³ Gayatri Spivak, Rosalind Morris (Editor), *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) 5-6.

⁴ Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions and Third World Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 46.

leads the *phera* (encircling the holy wedding fire) four times while the bride follows. The woman follows one extra *phera* than the man, where the extra *phera* of the mandap re-emphasizes the traditional submissive role of the women as subject to her husband.⁵ Therefore it can be said that the submissive role of women is generated during the wedding ceremony itself even before she enters a new life with her husband.

Weddings are long awaited events, not only for those who are getting married but also for their parents. They all try their best to have the best wedding ceremony, better than any other weddings that the extended family may have. Families compete against each other for this. How grand the wedding is often reflects to others the status of the family. In India the bridegroom's side would march to the bride's home with much pomp and splendor and there would be much singing and dancing on the way, while the bridegroom rides a fine white mare adorned with costly decorations. Upon reaching the bride's home the family of the bride would be expected to greet the relatives with gifts, flowers and expensive fragrances would be sprinkled on them. The wedding cost, the food and any other demands made by the bridegroom's family had to be provided by the bride's family in order to safeguard their newly established relationship.

Another important aspect was the dowry system, which involved the giving of monetary gifts and other gifts of value. This was the most unfair practice in the wedding ceremonies in those days. The bride's parents would be informed well in advance of the gifts that would be required as dowry during the wedding ceremony. This would be listed down by the bride's parents, who would try their very best to collect everything before the wedding. This also made the parents resort to taking huge loans, which eventually locked poorer parents into large amounts of debt. It was shameful if the wedding procession left the wedding place without the bride because the parents were not able to provide the dowry. The bride, without any fault of her own, would be looked down at and would not be able to find a proper suitor. Getting rejected once meant that the girl would remain unmarried for a long time, perhaps forever. In the cases where the

⁵ Rohini Lata, *Connecting the Contemporary Indo-Fijian Society to the Imaginary Homeland* (Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 2009) 8.

wedding did take place but the full dowry had not been given, the daughter would not have a good married life at her in-laws. In some cases the bride is tortured and there have been instances where the women are burnt alive by the in-laws. As Talwar writes:

This dowry system thus began to have adverse effect on the society. It became a cultural crime as dowry murders started to take place in India. In a particular incident the culprits used kerosene oil and a match to burn the woman to death; the motive was easily ascribed to marital conflict arising from demands for more dowry, in cash and /or as valuables, by the new husband and his family. These violent events were reported as kitchen accidents.⁶

Weddings, therefore, were seen as opportunities to acquire wealth even if you had been poor all your life. Despite the potential pain and plight of the bride's family they could not negotiate with the cruel culture of dowry-giving. The dowry system was a societal construct but it had a huge impact on the way society functioned within it. The norms laid down by the people played differently for different families, depending on the gender of their offspring. Those with more boys in the family would often be richer as they acquired so much wealth when they got their sons married into rich families, and those with more daughters got rid of all their wealthy possessions bit by bit as they married off their daughters. The irony was that daughters often were seen as a *Laxmi* (the goddess of wealth) and similar roles were expected from them. Whichever families they were married into had their homes filled with wealth. The deserting of the parent's homes after the wedding would also mean the giving up of all happiness associated with material wealth.

The torturing and severe mistreatment of women due to the dowry system began to take its toll on young brides, who became victims of hard labor, physical abuse, mental torture and even murder and suicide. Talwar (2002) also refers to dowry as 'bridegroom price', relating it the common practice of 'bride price' which is also practiced in some

⁶ Veena Talwar, *Dowry Murder: The Imperial Origins of Cultural Crime* (New York: Oxford University, 2002) 1.

Pacific societies as well. However, the concept is purposefully altered and inverted. Bride price is given by the bridegroom's side to the bride's family as a token of appreciation towards the newly established relations but as the terms reveals that the bride price is often seen as a form of bride buying. In the case of the bridegroom, the bride's family gifts the dowry but the bridegroom is not seen as a priced item such as in the case of bride price. He is at a reasonably profitable end whereby he takes the *Laxmi* (woman and wealth).

The ideology of the dowry system thus reflects the place of women in the old Indian society. It provokes images of a market place with items on sale with price tags. Women in this sense often were also seen as a commodity. The higher the price the better the family being married into. The parents of the bride were often also seen as inferior in comparison to the parents of the bridegroom. There had to be a certain attitude in the way the bridegroom's family would present themselves as figures of superiority. The act of *Kanya Daan* (ritual of giving away of the daughter to a new family) was often referred to as the *Maha Daan* (greatest gift) which could be given. This act of *daan* (giving) would mean that the parents have opened the doors of heaven for them and have therefore fulfilled all their worldly responsibilities and have been able to wash off all the sins committed prior to this. It is again ironic that the daughter who is seen as the ticket to heaven is also perceived as a burden requiring a large dowry and the same daughter who goes through mental and physical torture after marriage.

The prejudice against women took place from birth. As soon as a boy was born there would be joy and celebration. The parents would proudly declare that they have not only been gifted with an heir, but that he has gifted them with someone who would help them increase their wealth. The birth of the girl child would cause grief. The parents would curse their fate as they would have to marry off all their wealth with the daughter and would not get anything in return. The desire for a boy child reached a point of female infanticide. Families where a girl child would be born would often kill the child at birth. There have been cases in India where every girl child born in particular area would be drowned in the village well. This issue was so prevalent that much later a

movie had been made out of it to show the severity of gender inequality. *Matrabhoomi (motherland): A nation without women* (2003), directed by Manish Jha, was inspired by a true incident in Gujerat where a particular village was without women as all the females were killed at birth. After a few years the whole village is without women and men began to search for brides from the neighboring villages. One woman, Kalki, from the nearest village is sold to a family, married to five sons and used as a sexual object. Even her father-in-law uses Kalki as an object of sexual pleasure.

Weddings, therefore, not only established a permanent bond between families, but were also seen as the process of acquiring material wealth for families of males. The dowry system was the perfect opportunity to gain status and wealth in the society. Behind the façade of a traditional wedding ceremony ran a simultaneous transfer of land, property, gold and even animals. Society, which had been built for the prosperity of the patriarch, offered little or no benefit for women. On the contrary the strict, unbending rules in the society were primarily directed towards women to benefit the men. As the word women itself is incomplete without men, society also gave little or no relevance to the existence of a woman without man. As de Beauvoir writes, “Humanity is male and male defines woman, not himself but in relation to himself, therefore she is not seen as an autonomous being but is a relative being”.⁷

The dogmatic views of a society that rested on masculine beliefs governed by the patriarch mostly held women and their rights as unimportant, and the wedding ceremony was often used as an event to further showcase the inferiority of women and her side of the family. However, with time all aspects of societies began to change and the pattern of the Indian (Hindu) society also showed elements of change. Moving out of the closely knitted society to explore the world that lay undiscovered gave a chance to see the world with different eyes. Migration, both internal and external, brought about a lot of changes in the belief system of the society as well as in the individual. Those who moved out of India to faraway lands often showed more signs of change. As years went by and a new generation of Indians evolved in a new land, it could be seen

⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Thurman (Trans), *The Second Sex* (U.S.A: Random House Inc, 2009) 5.

that a new group and almost a new race had developed. This rapidly changing society therefore slowly began to nurture its own and after lapse of time there had developed significant changes in the culture, traditional practices and the living patterns.

Traditional Indo-Fijian (Hindu) Wedding Ceremonies in Fiji

1.1. The Girit Era

The arrival of the Indians in 1879 to serve as plantation laborers under the *girit* (Indenture) system marked the introduction of a new culture to Fiji. As a breakaway from traditional family life in India, these workers quickly began to create a new traditional lifestyle. Vijay Naidu describes it thus:

As much as the Indo-Fijians wanted to protect and preserve their tradition and culture, the need to assimilate/integrate was a much greater challenge to be faced, which had a huge impact on the Indians, and they therefore slowly began to change in order to adjust to the living conditions.⁸

The varying castes and religious groups that systematically divided the group of people coming from one motherland slowly began to break as they needed to adjust to the harsh living conditions they faced daily. As the Indians came from different parts of India, they all had different living patterns and most commonly they spoke their own dialects which were often not understood within the greater Indo-Fijian community. Therefore, as the need emerged, a new plantation dialect was formed known as 'Hindustani'. Today the Indo-Fijian society has little or no knowledge of the dialect that their forefathers brought with them from India and Fiji Hindi (Hindustani) has become the common language. Traditional practices have also gone through changes. Thus "The Indo-Fijians, while retaining some cultural traits, complexes and institution that bear resemblance to those found in certain parts of India, have evolved what is definitely a distinct way of life".⁹

⁸ Vijay Naidu, *Indo-Fijian Culture in the year 2000. Pacific Cultures: Past, Present and Future. Vol 8:1* (Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 1979) 35.

⁹ Vijay Naidu, *Indo-Fijian Culture* 34.

The Hindu wedding ceremony in Fiji has also evolved out of the traditions which were brought with the *girmitya*'s (Indentured Laborers) from India, yet due to the factors such as impact of colonial culture, poverty and integration the wedding ceremony was different. The wedding ceremony, therefore, became a much more Indo-Fijian than Indian occasion. Usually the wedding ceremonies in the *gimit* era were much simpler than those held in India. Time constraints, financial status and having limited or no bond with families back in India meant that the wedding ceremony was usually centered ritualistically in a much simpler way. Weddings were also not given as much relevance, as marriages according to religion was not recognized by the colonial rule. It usually caused conflict as there had been an imbalance in the ratio of men to women. Subramani tells us that "Policy recommended the recruiting of thirty women for every hundred men; this led to conflicts and general breakdown in the social conditions, which meant the breaking down of the rigid structure of a conservative society which had taboos relating to women".¹⁰ As a result "Indenture was seen as a *narak* (hell) or *kasbighar* (brothel) where women went to those who could retain them".¹¹ It is also interesting to note that there had been also changes to the dowry system. In Hinduism, the groom traditionally attracted a high dowry but in Fiji it was the other way around because of the scarcity of girls. "Parents struggling in poverty were reduced to trafficking in girls and marrying them to those who came along with an attractive betrothal proposition".¹² Women who came to Fiji from India came from varying backgrounds. As Brij Lal explains,

Amongst the women who migrated to Fiji were widows with children, women whose husbands had left them for service abroad and did not return, young brides who had not brought sufficient dowry with them and were taunted and punished as well as domestic hands who were never married but kept during times of prosperity and tossed out when things became difficult.¹³

¹⁰ Subramani, *The Indo-Fijian Experience* (Sydney: University of Queensland, 1979) 5.

¹¹ Subramani, *The Indo-Fijian Experience* 5.

¹² RajendraPrasad, *Tears in Paradise* (New Zealand: Glade Publishers, 2004) 96.

¹³ Brij Lal, *Bittersweet: The Indo-Fijian Experience* (Australia: Australian National University, 2004) 9.

Women therefore were in a vulnerable position and marriage did not always promise them a safe and secure relationship. The small population of women as compared to men and the lack of privacy led to married and unmarried couples having sexual relationships. Marriages conducted in the traditional customs, although holding a huge relevance by the immigrants (as this was the only system of marriage they knew), received no recognition by the colonial powers. Within the immigrant community as the shortage of women often led to criminalized activities by men. “Pity or greed often led men to force their wives to provide sexual services to those men who were in need. Polyandry, in some places, became a major source of tension in the lines”.¹⁴ Although it is strictly prohibited in Hinduism, the need to meet the scarcity of women often led to such religious crimes.

Polyandrous families often held the highest number of suicides, murders and infant deaths. There had been also incidents where very young girls aged as low as ten years were married to elderly men who were in their fifties or sixties. This would not be seen as a huge issue during those days as getting a daughter married was the most important thing. Also to get a girl married at a tender age would allow her to acquire the virtues of womanhood earlier and it also provided security to the girl as parents considered a girl safer in her ‘own home’ (in-laws place). Once the daughter was married off she was no longer a responsibility to her parents.

The custom of wearing a *Mohur* (known as *sehra* in India, this is a headdress usually made of flowers to cover the face) by the bridegroom made it easier to hide his age. On the other hand the bride was draped with veil that hung from her head right up till her chest, preventing men from seeing her face. Also during the wedding ceremony the bride would have little or no say in the process. The parents or relatives would arrange the wedding, all wedding preparations would be done by the relatives and if the bride and groom were not from the same village, they would only see each other after the wedding ceremony.

¹⁴ Brij Lal, *Bittersweet* 13.

As religious texts were the only form of literature that had been brought with the immigrants from India, their major source of entertainment, such as folk songs, stories, and religious preaching were all based primarily on *Ramayana* and *Bhagvat Geeta* (Hindu religious texts). The ideal woman was often seen in the images of *Sita* (Wife of Lord Rama). *Sita* was seen as an epitome of womanhood who sacrificed the luxurious life of the palace to join her husband in exile for fourteen years and remained chaste when abducted by the demon king *Ravana*. Similar values were expected from the immigrant women; however with the severity of the hardships encountered it was often difficult to live up to the expectation. Even with such mistreatment “the ideal Indian women accepted their fate without complaint, glorified the virtues of motherhood, deferred to male authority and above all worshipped her husband”.¹⁵

For the women the idealism desired by men was impossible as the Indenture system had completely restructured their living conditions and their beliefs. Women had become sexual objects in the eyes of immigrant men as well as to their white overseers, and they “were at the mercy of their overseers and sirdars (foreman)”.¹⁶ They were vulnerable to the sexual demands laid down by them. Therefore, the women in their own community were seen as immoral. Due to this many “men regarded their marriage to women as a temporary commitment which would eventually be waived once they returned to India after the expiry of their *gimit* (agreement)”.¹⁷ Many men looked down at the Indentured women with shame; they would not reflect on or halt their own involvement in the suppression and sexual abuse of women. Women were blamed for all murders and misconduct in the society and were often harshly punished for this. Men strongly controlled and retained the patriarchal norms and women did not have much, if any, say in decision making. As such, the “difficulty of understanding the predicament of women is compounded by the absence of their voice in the records”.¹⁸

¹⁵ Brij Lal, *Bittersweet* 13.

¹⁶ Brij Lal, *Bittersweet* 15.

¹⁷ Brij Lal, *Bittersweet* 14.

¹⁸ Brij Lal, *Bittersweet* 14.

With such living conditions it was often difficult to establish a family and raise children with a single man, as family life was often unstable. However, as weddings did take sometimes take place and were witnessed by all, married women had a better chance of a stable family life.

Weddings also provided a sense of genuine relationship and a much more secure life than that held by those who were not married. Amongst the community itself, a married woman was given more respect and often called after her husband, for example *Sarju ke Aurat* (Sarju's wife). However, as the overseers only gave recognition to legal marriages and to them the context of traditional marriage did not have significance, they continued to abduct women or bribe husbands to get Indian women to spend nights with them.

1.2 Post-Girmit Era and Today

As the girmit days came to an end, those who desired to return to their motherland returned as free individuals. Those who decided to remain in Fiji were also freed from the Indenture system and could live according to their own wishes. As many people had already settled well in Fiji and had started a farm life which they were happy with, return was not favored, as people believed that Fiji offered economic stability.

This era marks a quickly-evolving Indo-Fijian society. From being poor plantation workers, most farmers acquired land from the Indigenous Fijian owners on the terms and conditions of the native lease and began a new life. Others, in search for a better life, received formal schooling and got into paid employment. The cultural and traditional practices started to take a stronger stance and weddings once again became one of the most important ceremonies. However, even after going through so many changes the subordination of women could still be seen in the wedding functions and rituals.

The complete wedding ceremony consists of *Chekni*, *Mangni*, *Tilak*, *Telwaan*, *Bhatwaan* (Pritibhoj), *Shaadi* and *Gauna*. *Chekni* usually takes place a few months/weeks before the wedding day. This is the first approach made by the bride's

family. *Chekni* means reservation and therefore involves confirming the relationship between the families. This involves the bridegroom's family visiting the bride's family to informally propose the bridegroom for the wedding. Once the bridegroom's family agrees they decide to return the appreciation by visiting the bridegroom's home with a priest to discuss the dates of the *Mangni* (Engagement). The priest first looks up the astrological chart to confirm if the birth signs of those getting married do match and whether their reunion will be fruitful. If not then a prayer ceremony will be conducted to appease the gods to bless the couple. If the signs do meet then the priest gives a date for the *Mangni* ceremony.

This was the traditional way to start a wedding ceremony, and this involved the elders of the family as well as a respected priest from the bridegroom's side. From the very beginning the bridegroom's side had an upper hand in all the decisions involved in the wedding ceremony. The idea of the bride's parents approaching the groom's family first may be seen as a way of giving respect but is actually a way of establishing inferiority in the bride's relatives. To many women today, this is seen as showing that the bride is more eager for the wedding than the groom.

This custom is slowly dying out due to factors such as time constraints and because many couples who have love marriages do not find this relevant anymore as they already know each other. However, in rural areas and with some arranged weddings this tradition is still practiced but not with the same vigor as twenty to thirty years ago. Most couples today, especially where both are working, prefer a little family gathering from both sides to finalize wedding plans. To make it short and simple, most parents leave it to those getting married to plan it themselves, and the whole wedding function revolves around this plan. The rituals are however compulsory and taken care of by the parents and elderly relatives.

Mangni (Engagement) in the traditional sense would only be an exchange of gifts between the two families. However, as the colonial influence has also diffused into the traditional Indo-Fijian culture the exchange of rings is also an obvious sight today. Also

as the legal marriage is important for formal procedures, this is usually carried out well before the wedding day as the marriage certificate has to be given to the priest before he will proceed with the ceremony. During the engagement ceremony, either the couple has a court marriage and a small function afterwards or a ceremony at home with the marriage officer coming to the event to carry out the signing of the marriage form. This *Mangni* is carried out at the bride's home and the bride's parents have to cater for this occasion.

The *Tilak* ceremony usually takes place a week before the wedding, but again due to time constraints most families today decide to carry it out during the wedding day, before the wedding ceremony. However, traditionally, in this ceremony the bride's family visit the groom's home and a small *puja* (prayer ceremony) takes place. The bride's brother and father play important roles here with the groom. As a *Shagun* (token of love and appreciation) the bride's brother puts a tilak on the forehead of the groom and hands over a coconut (this symbolizes the relationship between the two families, it shall be strong like the outer shell of the coconut but as pure and soft as the inner flesh). After this he will provide a gift of clothes and sweets whereas the bride's father will provide monetary gift. The idea of the gift which was actually only seen as a *shagun* has now become a controversial thing.

Unlike before where only something as small as twenty-five cents would be appreciated, today the figures are in hundreds and in some occasions over thousands. Some wonder whether this is the part of the dowry that the society often considers left back in India a long time ago. The bride's father is often at a difficult situation as it is commonly known that the amount is often revealed to the relatives on the day of the Tilak after the bride's family had left. It is this act that causes the father to give a lot more than what he actually intends and sometimes what he could afford to give. After this ceremony the families again meet on the wedding day while ritual of *Telwaan* and *Bhatwaan* takes place on both sides.

In the *Telwaan* ceremony both the bride and groom are rubbed with *tel* (coconut oil) by the sisters and sometimes the aunts of both the bride and the groom. This ceremony, however, is combined with the *Bhatwaan* day to avoid wasting a whole day as this is a short ceremony. In some families today as this function takes place two days before the wedding it is replaced by the *Mehndi* (Henna) ceremony and on this same day people also have *sangeet* (music) where lots of singing and dancing takes place. In the traditional Hindu (Indo-Fijian) ceremony, however, there is not such relevance given to the two.

The *Bhatwaan* ceremony is carried out a day before the wedding. It begins with a small prayer ceremony on both sides which allows the priest to bless the *Haldi* (Turmeric Powder) which will be later mixed and applied to the bride and groom. The number of *Haldi* rounds would depend on the number of sisters who are available to apply the *haldi*. Also after applying the *haldi* the sister would also carry out the *Chuman* ritual which involves using the rice grains and touching the bride and groom on the feet, knee, hand and head. This is seen as a form of blessing.

After this the *Madap* will be established. A small banana plant will be put in place by the men from both sides respectively. This plant will be decorated and then all the rituals will take place at this *mandap*. The *Bhatwaan* evening usually has a huge number of visitors, normally as much as on the wedding day. The traditional vegetarian Indo-Fijian wedding foods are cooked, for example puri, palau, potatoes and peas curry, jack fruit curry, pumpkin curry etc. This is similar to that on the wedding day, although one or two dishes are replaced.

Weddings take place during the day or at evenings. On the bridegroom's side, the sister and brother-in-law of the groom help to dress the groom and the groom provides *Neg* (a small gift, mostly money to them). After this groom seeks a blessing from his parents and elders and leaves for the bride's home in the well decorated vehicle. Unlike today, in the olden days in India the groom rode his decorated mare and a *doli* (palanquin) would be used to transport the bride to her in-law's place.

On the bride's side the priest prepares the prayer place. As the groom and his relative enter the bride's home (or any wedding venue, even a hall or temple which is hired by the bride's family) they are first greeted by the bride's father and elder men of her family with garlands. The groom is then taken in where the married women in the family welcome the groom. After this the groom is taken to the *mandap* and a small *puja* (prayer) is performed between the bride's father and groom. The guests are seated and it is notable that usually in the "Hindu wedding ceremony the men and women sit separately".¹⁹ The women usually sit closer to the *mandap* whereas the men usually sit at the back. This is ironic because according to most pundits (priests) the explanation of the wedding vows is not only for those getting married but is also a time for the married couples to renew their vows as well. For this reason it is appropriate that the couples should sit together and acknowledge the wedding mantra's and vows. However, this is slowly changing as some couples prefer to sit together and witness the wedding today.

Straight after this the bride is brought to the *mandap* by her brothers and the ceremony begins. In the olden days the brides mostly wore red saris and their faces were usually veiled. Today brides wear mostly things that are in fashion and the *sari* has been replaced by *ghagra Choli* (skirt and blouse). It is also notable that in the early days most brides were wore long sleeved, high neck blouses and the *sari* was wrapped in such a way that the waist or most parts of the body was not exposed at all.

To many of the groom's family, this would be their first point of contact with the bride and it was ensured that good first impression was made. Also the bride was often seen as the pride of her family and the parents made sure that their daughter was seen as an ideal daughter-in-law. Today most modern women follow the westernized trend of bridal dressing at weddings. Blouses are carefully designed and given in for expert tailoring. Often the blouses today are short sleeved and have patterns that expose some if not all of the back. Even the women present at the wedding follow the modernized

¹⁹ Donald Brenneis and Ram Padarath, 'About Those Scoundrels I'll let Everyone Know: Challenging Singing in a Fiji Indian Community', *Journal of American Folklore* (California: Publisher Unknown) Volume (88), No. 349, 285.

concept of wearing Saris and as a result the traditional clothing pattern has gone through major changes at the wedding ceremonies.

The first part of the wedding ceremony is *Kanya Daan* (the giving away of the daughter). Here the parents of the bride give the couple *lota* and *thali* (brass bowl and plate). First the brother of the bride slowly pours water on the small dough prepared by the pundit as the parents hands it over to the couple. This signifies the giving away of their daughter to a new family and that they no longer have similar rights to their daughter as previously. The term giving away itself equates the bride with an object who is transferred from one person to the other without having a say of her own. Many girls who are now educated and independent see this as a form of insult and therefore condemn this ritual. However, as this is an aspect too emotional to challenge, they either silently go through the process or do not have a traditional marriage at all.

After the process of *Kanya Daan* is the ritual of *Pao pujan*, where the parents of the bride wash the feet of the bride and groom. This is seen as an offending ritual for those daughters who deeply respect their parents. In Indian culture it is the young people who touch the feet of elders to receive blessings; therefore this ritual again is not taken well by many young women today. After the parents have had their turn the other relatives from the bride's side who wish to take part come as a couple or individually to take part. Not all relatives may take part in the *pao pujan*, some would only consider gifting the couple with *lota* (water vessel made of brass) and *thali* (Plate made of brass) or any other gifts that they wish to give. *Pao pujan* is usually done by the relatives closely related to the bride.

Next is the process of wedding *phere's* (encircling the holy wedding fire seven times) which holds great significance in the traditional wedding process. The groom leads the *phere's* first, this positions the bride behind the groom in the *phere's* and is also a symbol to state that the bride will always follow the groom dutifully. At this point the

folk songs are sung by local singers to complement the wedding *phere*'s. The Gayan (folk songs) "are usually local products sung in local dialect".²⁰

The putting of *Sindur* (red powder) by the groom into the parting of hair on the forehead is the next ritual. This is not exposed to the guest and a thin sheet is used to cover both the bride and groom while the groom applies the *Sindur* to the bride seven times. This is seen as something blindly being followed. In the olden days as the face of the bride was completely covered and not exposed to strangers; this process was carried out so that during the *Sindur* ceremony others would not be able to see the bride's face. This worn-out ritual is still practiced although the face of the groom and bride are totally exposed to the audience. The bride does not cover her face completely like in the olden days nor does the groom wear a *mohur* (a covering made for the groom, usually of flowers or paper decorations). Next the groom puts a *mangalsutra* (a wedding chain) on the bride. In the olden days the wedding chains were mostly made of black beads put on a yellow thread but with time this has changed to black beads put on gold chains and these costs hundreds if not more than a thousand dollars today. The *mangalsutra* ritual is a much awaited event for the women at the wedding, to gauge the price of the *mangalsutra* to reflect the economic status of the grooms' side. This has become more of an entertainment than a ritual.

Upon the completion of this process, the newlyweds proceed to the *Kobar* (a special room where a small prayer place is prepared for more rituals), however these rituals are informal. Then the male relatives on the groom's side are invited for a meal at the *mandap*. The groom sits together with the relatives as the males in the bride's family serve food. Once the meal is fully served the bride's father and his close relatives provide monetary gifts before the men begin eating. Again the giving of such monetary gift is not seen as a very harmonizing event as at some weddings the groom's families do not touch the food and the bride's family keeps giving money till the groom begins the meal. The relevance of this ritual is still unknown. To some this is also seen as a form of dowry as at some places the groom's family receives a huge amount of cash.

²⁰ Donald Brenneis and Ram Padarath , 'About Those Scoundrels', *Journal of American Folklore*, 286.

After this there is a *Shistachar* ceremony whereby the father of the bride and groom sit together as the priest explains the importance of bonding the two families. A *gupt daan* (usually monetary where the amount is concealed) is given by the bride's father to the groom's father. Soon afterward the bride is bid goodbye. As she leaves with her new family, the bride's parents gift the groom with money, furniture and beddings. Although this is referred to as a gift, most young and working class women see this as a form of dowry and detest this idea, and as a result we do not see much of this, especially in the urban areas anymore.

Gold is seen as a good omen in Indo-Fijian (Indian) culture and plays a large role in the gift exchange system in Indo-Fijian (Hindu) weddings. The bride's mother, together with the gift of clothes and sweets, also sends gold in the form of a ring or a pendant or whatever is affordable. On the other hand the bride receives saris and jewelry from her mother-in-law to be worn on the day the bride's family comes to take her back till *gauna* day.

The jewelry is seen as a blessing from the new family but in some occasions it becomes a display of the family status of the groom's family. It is often assumed that the more jewelry worn by a married woman the richer the groom's family is. "A woman's married bliss is judged by the jewelry she puts on or the material prosperity of the family".²¹

Gauna is the final ceremony of the wedding process. This usually takes place a week after the wedding day but due to the busy lifestyle nowadays it may be done earlier than this. The ceremony takes place at the bride's residence. This is the final farewell ritual for the bride who takes her belongings and leaves for good to settle in a new home. The bride's parents provide a *seedha* (gift made up basic groceries), to bless the groom and the bride in their new life. After the lengthy wedding process the bride and the groom

²¹ Majumdar, *Races and Cultures of India* (India: Asia Publishing House, 1944) 253.

finally are referred to as a wedded couple and enjoy marital life, wholly accepted by the Hindu society.

Chapter 2 Changing Values in the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) Wedding System

The contemporary generation is now facing great challenges to keep up with the traditional and religious customary practices that had been practiced by the Hindus in the Indo-Fijian society for a long time. As the overall belief system and structure undergoes changes so does the traditional and cultural practices. The wedding ceremony is one of the major areas that have undergone changes in the more than a hundred years of the existence of the community in Fiji. Many believe that the rituals are still intact; however the method of carrying out the rituals has changed. Together with this the gender roles have also changed. Women today take part in decision making actively and also play a more prominent role in organizing the wedding.

2.1 Changing role of women in the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremony

Modern women play a bigger role in decision making in the wedding ceremonies. Many people believe that in most families today women play a more active role than men. The mothers of both the bride and groom today get to be involved in the whole wedding process whether it be selecting the venue, finalizing the wedding dates or choosing the priest who will conduct the wedding. Mothers of many grooms today also attend the wedding function to bless the bride and groom. Previously this had not been a common sight. The bride too has her say in the wedding preparation. She is given the liberty to discuss the way in which she would want the wedding to be conducted. As love marriages are common today, the bride and groom usually make most decisions pertaining to the wedding function. As a result most women are now moving away from the customary gift exchange of furniture. This form of gift exchange has died out in the urban areas and is slowly dying out in the rural areas as well. Unlike before where

arranged marriages had been the preferred and dominant form and women had little choice in the marriage partner selected for them, women today are educated and independent; they view such forms of gift exchange as a form of dowry. Although the practice of dowry did not exist, the persistence of arranged

marriages inevitably meant that women were treated as commodities in the marriage market.²²

Women of the contemporary society are moving into making their presence felt and appreciated in the society and aiming to attain gender equality. Modernization and education has helped the women in the Hindu society to uplift their status rapidly.

2.2 Women and Education

Education is a source of empowerment. It allows women to find employment and earn for themselves and the family. This helps women to earn respect in the family and assists in getting equality in the male dominated Hindu society. Previously it was only men who used to be the masters in the households as they had been the sole bread winners in the family while women used to carry out the domestic tasks. Today many women hold higher authorities in the households and family members have faith in their decisions for the smooth running of the household. This improvement in status does not only remain in the household but the society as a whole gives similar respect to the women. It is interesting to note that in the early 1970's in Fiji very few women could be seen driving motor vehicles. The number of Indo-Fijian women drivers was almost nil. Today most women see the ability to drive as a form of freedom and thus we see a number of women drivers today especially those who drive public service vehicles such as taxis and mini vans. All these progresses have also led to self-confidence and women today are bold enough to choose their life partners. It is also worth mentioning that women who select their own life partners feel responsible for their decisions and even if the marriage does not work out, they are courageous enough to put an end to the suffering rather than living with it.

Educated women today are also moving away from the long wedding ceremony to a one or two day event. Time constraint is a major reason; however changes in ideologies have also played a huge role. Most women do not wish to spend huge amount of money on clothes and foods and on entertaining large number of guests. By cutting short the

²² Shireen Lateef, *Indo-Fijian Women: Past and Present* (Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 1987) 8.

time of the occasion they are able to save time and money. For most young women the simpler the wedding ceremony the better it is.

2.3 Women and Modernization

Modernization has played a huge role in transforming the Indo-Fijian society to what it is currently. Modern women are able to stand up for themselves and are given equal opportunity to express their opinions. The driving force for the women in the Hindu society today is the ability to reach out globally due to the advancement in technology. Some people today prefer to purchase wedding costumes online. Inspired by costumes worn by models and Bollywood actresses, many women desire to be dressed in the latest fashion. Most online shopping for the weddings are usually done from shopping sites from India. Unlike before when women used to purchase whatever would be available in local shops. Many online shoppers also feel that prices of costumes online are much cheaper than those sold locally. Also there are huge ranges to choose from.

Extending wedding invitation with wedding cards is also a new practice which began in the early eighties. According to Subramani “wedding card was an odiously un-Hindu custom”.²³ Prior to this a close relative of the person getting married would carry rice turned yellow with turmeric in a bag; upon reaching the house of the prospective guest he would deliver a handful of yellow rice. This has today been altered to fancy wedding cards which are also expensive. Social networking sites are also used today to send wedding invitation to relatives living at a distance. Facebook is seen as an effective source of delivering messages and the success rate of receipt of the invitation is much greater than the wedding cards sent via air mails.

The wedding decorations also are greatly influenced by the latest fashion. Unlike before where close relatives would use the leaves and flowers to decorate the wedding *mandap* (place where wedding rituals take place), today people hire decorators who use fancy lights and decorations to organize a *mandap*, this again is expensive as usually the

²³ Subramani, *The Indo-Fijian Experience* 106.

charges are between two to five hundred dollars depending on the company and the pattern chosen. Those organizing the wedding find this convenient as it saves time and the decorators take full responsibility of assembling and dismantling the decoration pieces. As the wedding takes place at the bride's place and the *mandap* is prepared by the bride's side, the bride usually uses the color of decoration materials to match the color of her wedding costume and that of the bridegroom.

Also the brides today do not depend on relatives to dress them as the new trend is to hire hairdressers and beauticians. *Mehndi* (Henna) is also an important part of dressing for which women are hired. As good it may seem to have a professional carrying out the task for the most important occasion, it certainly adds to the cost. Previously a group of young women, mostly close relatives would help the bride get dressed free of cost but this is now changing. To some extent the wedding ceremony has become a source of showbiz where people utilize the full opportunity to show-case their status in society and try their best to do better in comparison to other weddings which may have occurred in the same family before. People are prepared to go that extra length to prove that they have more potential to organize a better wedding. In comparison to this the weddings conducted in the early days, which mostly focused on the traditional aspects were much simpler and cheaper.

In the early days large leaves would be used as plates to serve meals at the wedding. The leaves would be freshly cut out on the wedding day, washed and wiped clean ready to be used as plates. After use it would be folded and later buried in waste pits. Small enamel bowls were used to serve water or juice which would be later washed and kept aside to be used at large functions again. Today this has been replaced by paper plates and plastic glasses. Although it saves the women from washing the huge number of enamel bowls, the purchasing of such materials has an added cost to the wedding ceremony.

The entertainment part of the wedding which had been previously taken care of by the folk singers in the family or neighborhood has been today replaced by modern musical

bands and wedding dancers who charge hundreds of dollars to perform for a few hours. However as guests look forward to some form of entertainment, wedding organizers need to look for alternate forms to arrange wedding dancers, hired folk singers and recently in Suva people have started to hire boys who play *Hudda-Tasa* (Drums). This was usually part of wedding ceremonies in the Northern part of Fiji but now it is being used in Suva and other urban places as well.

2.4 Weddings and Bollywood

Weddings have been hugely influenced by Bollywood. As “the Indo-Fijian population is one of the biggest consumers of feature movies in the Pacific, cinema is the dominant form of entertainment with Fiji being the ninth largest consumer of Hindi movies”.²⁴ This therefore has produced a generation highly inspired by the glamour of Bollywood. The contemporary society seeks its definition of fashion from the Bollywood movies. The costume worn by a famous celebrity on screen becomes a latest fashion in Fiji. Once a new movie releases in theatres and a particular costume is well liked, the shop owners selling clothes quickly fill their shops with similar clothes and are able to lure young men and women to their shops to buy those clothes, usually at a much higher price than its original cost. Clothes are often named after the particular actor or actress such as Kareena Sari (named after Kareena Kapoor) or Om Shanti Om Sari (named after the blockbuster Bollywood movie). Not only clothes but other important aspects of the Indo-Fijian way of life have also been highly influenced by the movies. Many people believe that movies have not only helped the Indo-Fijian population to connect to the imaginary homeland but has also influenced by altering their perspective. It has changed the way they used to see in the past to how they see it now. Movies have a potential to influence a person’s thinking, this can therefore bring both negative and positive changes.

Bollywood cinema has brought up a new era in the Indo-Fijian society. Some consider this to be the bollywoodization of the Indo-Fijian society in Fiji. Cinema has been able

²⁴ Subramani, *Altering Imagination* (Fiji: Fiji Writers Association, 1995) 116.

to slowly diffuse in the society and today it has been able to make a most prominent place in peoples' lives. As Subramani states,

In most Indian villages in Vanua Levu, Saturday night used to be set aside for Ramayan recitals, but after the arrival of Cinema, young men began to drop out of mandali(groups) because of this the religious interest was replaced by the attraction of romantic melodramas and week after week of new releases continued to decrease the number in mandali as the patrons began to frequent the cinema halls in search of a more exciting form of entertainment.²⁵

The emerging form of entertainment was however gender biased, as “the movies however were a male pleasure, a guilty pleasure. The village elders looked down on the women who frequented cinema halls. The romanticized images on screen were to be enjoyed by males mostly. There had been a stronger cultural constraint on women than on men”.²⁶ However this began to change as women too began to accompany their spouses and families to watch movies. Movies have today become a part of life. The building of new Cinema halls shows the need to have more of these. There was a period of home videos in the late eighties and early nineties which caused the closing of cinema halls as people preferred to hire video tapes and watch the movie with families at home rather than paying more at the cinema halls. This has however changed as although people do have high definition DVD players and large television screens at home they still prefer to enjoy the movies at the cinema halls.

With the huge demand for Bollywood movies as a form of entertainment, the audience did not only take the visit to cinema halls as a form of outing and entertainment, but also treated it as a learning experience as they believed that every movie has a specific story line and a specific message. Family dramas are one of the favorite selections of the female audience while men mainly prefer action. Family dramas have an emotional impact on the audience and most women follow what is being practiced by the female

²⁵ Subramani, *Altering Imagination* 116

²⁶ Subramani, *Altering Imagination* 115

leads in the movies. The ritual of *Karwa Chowth* (practiced by wives) which involves fasting on the day and praying for a prolonged life span for their husbands has been the one of the most shown ritual in Bollywood movies. This ritual has not been practiced by women in the Indo-Fijian ceremony before but today due to the influence of movies some women have began practicing this.

Wedding functions in the movies is mostly different from how the Hindu society performs in Fiji. As Bollywood movies take into account the different religions in India such as Bengali, Marathi, Madrasi, it also shows the wedding ceremony held in different ways or may be a mixture of it. As the influence of movies became stronger the practices carried out in movie weddings also began to surface in the Hindu wedding ceremonies as well. While observing Hindu wedding ceremony one will always find few altered ways in which rituals are performed, these differences would be closely associated with a particular movie scene. Soon after it becomes a part of the real wedding ceremony and then becomes a usual practice in many weddings conducted afterwards.

Hum Aapke Hai Koun (Who am I to you) which released in 1994 was one of most popular family dramas in the history of Indian Cinema. It was able to scoop most awards at almost all film awards functions that year. Rajshri productions (producers of this movie) were able to make a fortune out of it. One of the major focuses of the film was to show how the traditional wedding ceremonies take place in the Indian society. The Indo-Fijian society was able to derive two practices from the movie; firstly, the brides began to walk on flower petals which had been spread out from the bride's dressing room to the *mandap*. In some cases where there had been lack of fresh flowers, crêpe papers of different colors were cut in small pieces and spread out on the walkway for the bride. Secondly is the ritual of throwing back rice grains during the *vidai* (farewell) ceremony by the bride. This was shown by the character of the bride played by Renuka Shahane and today it has been practiced in most wedding ceremonies. The significance of the ritual is that the bride who symbolizes the goddess *Laxmi* during the wedding throws rice grains to wish her family good health and wealth. The elderly

women however confirm that during the early years of post girmit era, the relatives of the bride would throw coins on the *doli* (palaquin) of the bride in order to bless her with wealth, however many viewed this as a form of disrespect to goddess of wealth and began to put whatever they could afford in the hands of the bride during the farewell. This practice is no longer common in the Hindu wedding ceremonies in Fiji but the recently introduced ritual of throwing rice grains is very much practiced.

Another ritual that has been altered due to movies such as *Hum Saath Saath Hai* (united we stand) is the *Chudia* (Bangle) ceremony. Previously the sisters in-law of the bride and groom on their respective sides would conduct this ritual. A *thali* (brass plate) filled with water would be placed in front of the newly wedded couple and a bangle would be dropped in it. The person to get hold of the bangle first when dropped the most number of time wins. This is an informal part of the wedding process and is carried out on a humorous note. Today inspired by the movies the *Chudia* ritual is replaced by the ring. Although this is not a common sight yet, there have been some weddings where the sister-in-law drops a ring in a large basin of milky water (water mixed with yoghurt) and flowers and the bride and groom are made to search for the ring, The one who finds it will be presumed to have more authority in the family life, he or she puts the ring on their spouse's finger as form of gift.

The brides' costumes have also gone through alteration. Today most brides prefer to keep the forefront of their heads exposed in order to show off the jewelry worn on the head. Most women prefer to use veils that are made of transparent material, therefore the hair pattern and decoration is clearly visible. Previously the brides would be veiled in a way so that face is not visible in any way, later the veils were lowered to cover the upper half of the face. Today the face is fully exposed, just like the brides in the latest Hindi movies.

2.5 Bollywood: Gender Empowerment for Indo-Fijian Women

Bollywood movies as well as the Satellite television shows are also a source of empowerment for the Indo-Fijian women. Portrayal of strong character roles by famous

actresses such as Rani Mukherji in the movie *No one Killed Jessica* (2011), Rekha in *Khoon Bhari Mang – Bloody Marriage* (1988) and Aishwariya Rai in Mira Nair's *Provoked* (2006) and Nargis in *Mother India* (1938) have helped Indo-Fijian women to build confidence within themselves and improved the understanding of the women's role in the society. The place of a married Indo-Fijian woman in society was often described within the parameters of a dominant male regime. Women lacked the courage to change what they felt was wrong as it would result in challenging the male subjugated world. The movies however aided in building a certain fearless attitude of women in voicing out their opinions. The male audience however disagrees to some of the cruelties bestowed on women by the males in the society as shown in the movies, consoling themselves that movies are fictitious and the issues outlined are exaggerated. However, it is noticeable that the contemporary male generation is beginning to relate the issues to their everyday life and is careful to remain a hero in their household and not to do things that tarnish their reputation in society or specifically in their own household.

Chapter 3

Portrayal of Indo-Fijian (Hindu) Weddings in work of Indo-Fijian Writers

The relationship between literature and history is both complex and complementary. Many works of literature rest upon the facts provided in the work of historians. Most Indo-Fijian writers such as Brij Lal and Subramani incorporate in their writings the past experiences of their own or that of their forefathers to explain their present lives. The realities of life are thus problematized and explored within the space of literature, a space in which the voice of the writer implicitly engages with his or her identity. As Subramani explains:

The Indo-Fijian writer often turns to the past, particularly the past of indenture, to find intelligible patterns. Indenture has been recreated into another kind of reality ... future historians will no doubt turn to this form of emerging literature in order to understand a full range of the Indo-Fijian experience.²⁷

Amma ...the frail wooden door, a novel written by a local Indo-Fijian writer, Amitesh Deo, highlights the most important aspects of the life of Indo-Fijian women and children. His narrative is based on the ill-treatment of women and children, and explores the way in which culture and tradition work to secure the position of Indo-Fijian males. This aspect is established at the beginning of the novel which reveals how the wedding, which is seen as the most important event in the Indo-Fijian life, turns out as a drastically unfair process for Savitri's family. The wedding traditions establish Savitri and her parents as inferior and this inferiority becomes a label for Savitri who carries this all throughout her life.

Amma is an ordinary tale with no real literary merit but important in the way that it provides a space in which the writer can point out the cruelty with which people deal with everyday. As its cover states, the novel presents itself as 'the untold story' of the Indo-Fijian women. It shows the division within society on the basis of power and

²⁷ Subramani, *The Indo-Fijian Experience* xi.

money. This is often subjected on the weak and vulnerable women, shunning them in a dark corner despite the fact they make up as much of the society as men. Social consciousness plays a large role in the separations between the high and low earners in the Indo-Fijian society. While well-employed families enjoy a better and fulfilling life, the low income earners are often seen as the struggling citizens who earn only enough to feed their families. Poverty, therefore, is seen as the root of all problems and a huge contributing factor to domestic violence in the Indo-Fijian community in Fiji. The story of Amma (Mother) revolves around Savitri, who commits suicide as the hardship in the family gets intolerable. After her death, the children are left in the hands of the evil father who is almost a stranger to them. The sexual abuse of the eldest daughter Moreen (who takes the place of Amma) by the father, the murder of Chotto the eldest son who gets involved in an affair with a neighbor's wife, the social embarrassment associated with the homosexuality of the youngest son Somu and the marriage of the youngest daughter Gita to a man her father's age due to poverty, completely destroys the family. In his novel, culture and tradition play significant parts as well, as Deo tries to highlight in subtle ways the protocols of the Indo-Fijian society. The wedding process of Amma and Taji in chapter two plays a significant role in the novel in representing the typical place of Indo-Fijian women in the community.

The title of the novel '*Amma...a frail wooden door*' causes the readers to reflect on the role of a mother which is not only to give birth and bring up the children but also to protect them. A mother is seen as a door between her children and the ugliness of the outside world. In times of danger she stands in front to protect her children from danger. Why then is Savitri who plays the character of Amma is referred to as a 'frail wooden door'? She is seen as weak, a protector who has no choice but to shield her children from danger but is not strong enough to save them. She is seen as a frail door that is just placed in a frame to acknowledge its presence but does not fulfill its purpose as expected. The role of Amma is seen in a conflict with overpowering patriarchal society where on one hand she is given a huge responsibility of nurturing the children whereas on the other hand she herself needs to conform to rules of the patriarchal society. Amma

(Savitri) is also seen as the “absolute other”.²⁸ Although her role as a wife and mother demanded that she should be the most important person in her family she is never given the status and respect she deserved. Her husband does not give her the importance that a wife should get and she is almost a stranger to Taji (her husband).

The most important element of the chapter (Amma weds Taji) is the idea of *Daan* (giving of gift) and *Kanya Daan* (giving away of daughter). Looking at this chapter from a Marxist perspective, the daughter and the gift are equated, so that the daughter becomes a commodity whose exchange value and use value is determined by the groom’s mother. The gifts selected by the mother-in-law are all well planned considering the value it will have. The unrealistic demand of an expensive ring, a thousand dollars as a monetary gift and so on shows that in the façade of getting a life partner for her son, she is actually fulfilling her ambition which is to gain profit from the wedding process. Savitri is also seen as a commodity and gauged for her use, that is, how useful she will prove for her in-laws in terms of how well she is able to cook and look after the house and whether she is able to cook the fancy dishes sold in the restaurants as her son likes those dishes. On the other hand her exchange value is so low that her family has to pay the groom’s family to take her.

The groom’s family is always established as superior to the bride’s. This social consciousness can be referred to as false consciousness. People have been living with this idea for generations but this has nowhere been confirmed in the Hindu scriptures that the groom’s parents have a right to demand for things. However as the society has been ruled by the patriarch for a very long time, social rules were made to benefit them. With this in mind the bride’s family could never put their demands for things that should be given to the bride from the groom’s side. The bride’s parents could not question the groom’s parents on the value (price) of the *Mangalsutra* (wedding chain) as this was unacceptable. The ideological construct within the Hindu society allowed the groom’s family to be in charge of the full wedding plans and the bride’s family had to follow this. As shown in Amma, while the mother-in-law began with her list of

²⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, H.M Parsleys(trans), *The Second Sex* (New York: Penguin Books, 1972) 282.

demands for the daughter, Savitri's parents could not do much but silently hope that the list would end soon and that the demands would fit their budget.

The audacity with which Savitri's mother-in-law kept making demands, demonstrates the power given to her with the role she played in the wedding process. She makes the demands look ordinary by saying that "Our tradition is very simple ... during marriages, it is customary that the girl's family provides the boy and his immediate family with clothes to wear during the ceremony" (Amma 28). Not only this she also demands monetary gifts and she confirms that the bride's family presents them with a good sum by giving examples of monetary exchange from her own family. As she states

In our custom, the girl's family has to give the boys family a monetary present. My sisters [sic] daughter got married recently and she gave the boys [sic] family one thousand dollars. But that does not mean you have to give us the same...whatever you can...as long as it is not too little...otherwise you know people will talk and say he could not even give graciously for his first daughter's wedding. (Amma 29)

The power-play left the bride's family in a dilemma about how much they would be able to afford in the wedding but the one thing that was cemented by the mother-in-law was their family status. Her well-fabricated story was taken for granted by Savitri's parents who did make an attempt to pay a visit to the in-laws prior to wedding to see if all that the mother-in-law said was true. For Savitri, the mother-in-law proved to be a talented performer who was able to create a work of imagination for Savitri who was very young at that time and was instantly caught by the unbelievable prospect of living in Suva, having a handsome husband and a nice newly renovated bedroom.

The wedding was only allowed to go ahead when the demands made had been accepted by Savitri's parents, again putting the in-laws as the ruling group who had power over the whole wedding process. The idea of class, although not overtly exposed in the novel, had a significant role to play. After Savitri is married, she realizes that all her

dreams have shattered. Her new home is not better, but worse than her own home. She is not happy but cannot express this to her family. Her family had spent so much to satisfy the prospective in-laws and Savitri could not even think of going back to her family. Doing this would not only increase the burden her parents have but would have transgressed many of society's rules. On the other hand, keeping quiet about the mistreatment received by her husband not only denied her of her basic human rights which is the right to freedom but also made her weaker and more vulnerable. Savitri's status of being a wife is reduced to a sexual object. Her youthful imagination of romance and desire was swept away as her husband forced himself on her and enjoyed the sexual pleasure he was receiving, caring less about the young, embarrassed and pain stricken Savitri. Simone de Beauvoir writes that

Men need not bother themselves with alleviating the pains and burdens that physiologically are women's lot, since these are 'intended by nature'. Men use them as a pretext for increasing the misery of the feminine lot still further, for instance by refusing to grant to women any right to sexual pleasure, by making her work like beast of burden.²⁹

Savitri, therefore, does not only bring laxmi (wealth) in the form of gifts with exchange value, gives herself to be used as a domestic worker (use value) but is also there to fulfill the sexual demands of the husband which is an added expectation from her. This amounts to a surplus value that the husband receives from Savitri. However, while she gives so much she is still considered worthless. The role of a domestic worker played by Savitri increases her chances of remaining a submissive sexual object due to her total economic dependency on her husband. Providing sexual satisfaction to her husband also helps her to prove useful to her husband and help keep intact the family unit. Apart from fulfilling her sexual obligations as a wife, she finds no pleasure in the act herself.

Like Savitri there are other women who believe that the female sexual pleasures are incomplete without the male sexual organ and that thereby men are superior to women

²⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, H.M Parshley (trans) *The Second Sex* (New York: Penguin Books, 1972) 285.

and have a physical dominance over women. Luce Irigaray comments that ‘female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters’.³⁰ According to Irigaray’s research as the penis is seen as ‘the only sexual organ of recognized value’³¹ and women suffer from penis envy as they see this as a form of lacking in them. Men on the other hand enjoy a more desirable sex which makes them think that like their bodies females are subjected to psychological inferiority as well. In support of this claim Maggie Humm also argues that ‘sexuality is the site in which male power is expressed’:³²

Thus, the sexual mastery of men over women is seen as the central symbol of patterns of dominance and subordination in culture; in other words, the forms of thought and means of expression are made and controlled by men.³³

The sexual aggressiveness of Savitri’s husband in *Amma* can be understood in several ways. Firstly, strong cultural values do not allow him to have any sexual relationship before marriage and once married it seems that he owns Savitri and is at liberty to use her whenever he feels like. For Savitri their first night was something that she was looking forward to because it would have been the first time that she was actually going to speak to her husband and believed that since they were strangers, it would take a while before they would be able to enjoy a physical relationship. Her husband does not portray any similar feelings for her. There was “no playfulness, no romantic talk or pre-mating polishing” (*Amma* 34). The husband completely surprised Savitri by raping her on their first night:

As he entered her, she screamed in pain. He was so rushed that even as he pumped himself into her, she had not seen his face clearly. She tried to control

³⁰ Luce Irigaray, Catherine Porter (trans), *The Sex Which Is Not One* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977) 23.

³¹ Luce Irigaray *The Sex Which Is Not One* 23

³² Maggie Humm, *Feminist Criticism: Women as Contemporary Critics* (Britain: Harvester Press Limited, 1986) 33.

³³ Maggie Humm, *Feminist Criticism: Women as Contemporary Critics* 33.

her screams by putting her mouth against the pillow, but he only pushed harder.
(Amma 34)

The importance of the wedding is shown to highlight that the wedding vows had been taken in front of a large number of witnesses and therefore the act of *Kanya Daan* (giving of the daughter) by Savitri's parents could not be denied. The act itself demands that Savitri is a form of gift and her husband was now the owner. The wedding rituals themselves misrepresent Savitri's status as a wife. Savitri's dependency on her husband for food, shelter and for the social status of a wife caused her husband to demand things in return. Sex was the only value of exchange he could get from her to match up to all things that he was giving Savitri and the children and therefore fully utilized her sexually. There was no pride, no joy and no love in their relationship. The life that both were living was fake. Only in the society they were known as husband and wife but the essence of a marital life was never enjoyed by Savitri.

The truth of Savitri's marital life was never mentioned to her parents or siblings. Her thoughts had always been influenced by her husband and the fear of losing her family denied her freedom. The patriarchal influence on language has been another aspect that feminist critics feel has aided in the suppression of women. Men have been able to colonize women by 'phallogocentric language'³⁴ with which they have been able to influence the major aspects of everyday life such as culture. This powerful mechanism was used to subjugate women and lead them to believe that the voices they would raise against men will never get them justice but will drown somewhere in the male dominated world. In the case of Savitri, she did not have the courage to go against her husband because she saw her home and family as the only things she could call her own. Her voice therefore submerged under the hope that her silence would help secure a better future of her children.

³⁴ Maggie Humm, *Feminist Criticism: Women as Contemporary Critics* 33.

Chapter 4

Interview Analysis

The interviews conducted on the twelve individuals have been useful in collecting corresponding information on the changing status of women in the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) society. Indo-Fijian Hindu weddings are expensive, and decisions on what is to be bought and how much money is to be spent are very significant in noting differences within gender roles. The information received has been beneficial for the area of research as there is not much written information on the life of the Indo-Fijian Hindu women, therefore the interviews assisted in comparing the lifestyle of the Indo-Fijian women in the olden days to that of the contemporary women. The changing role of women has been viewed from their changing status in the wedding ceremonies.

For the purpose of obtaining information twelve individuals of varying ages and backgrounds have been selected. All the participants selected were Indo-Fijian Hindus. The reason for selecting participants from the specific group was due to the fact that this research focused on the changing roles of women in the Indo-Fijian Hindu weddings and therefore participants were required to fully understand the rituals carried out at the Hindu weddings in Fiji. However, the participants were purposefully selected from different age groups and from different backgrounds. The age of the participants ranged from twenty-one to eighty and they were selected from different parts of Fiji, with 50 % of the participants coming from urban areas and 50% from rural settings. Out of the twelve participants interviewed, there were seven females and five males. The names of the participants have been purposefully concealed and therefore pseudonyms have been used in the interview scripts (appendix).

4.1 Importance of wedding ceremony in the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) society.

One hundred percent of the participants agreed that the wedding ceremony is an important ceremony in the Hindu way of life. However, the participants had conflicting views on the Hindu wedding ceremony in Fiji. The younger women feel that weddings are a fabricated and complex event as they are unable to understand the significance of specific rituals. Many feel that most rituals require the bride and her family to provide

for the wedding expenses but it is not known as to why the cost should only be taken care of by the bride's family. Some participants mention that the wedding rituals are significant and it is worth learning what the rituals signify. Eighty year old Sukh Raji believes that the younger generations fail to understand the importance of wedding rituals that is why they do not give it any importance. This is correct in the case of twenty-two year old Kavita who does not take interest in the rituals because she does not understand its importance. However, Archana mentions that every ritual in the wedding process has importance and provides a learning experience to the bride and groom. She highlights the importance of *seel* and *loda* (pestle and mortar) ritual. In the wedding ceremonies the priest advises both the bride and the groom that just like the pestle and the mortar needs to be used together in order to fulfill its purpose which is to grind things, in the similar way the husband and the wife both need to work together in order to achieve success in life. The status of women is therefore deemed equal to men. Many women, however, believe that this is not the case after the marriage and the *seel loda* ritual actually become a metaphor to the inferiority of women to men. As the *pundit* (priest) does not specify the masculinity and the femininity of the *seel* and *loda* during the wedding ceremony, many women who are treated unfairly to men say that the women symbolize the *seel* (on which the grinding takes place) and men symbolize the *loda* (which is doing the grinding) because men need women to be there to take all the burdens, be ground down, and still work for the men without any complaint.

4.2 Equality of women in decision making

In contrast to the idea of inferiority posed by females, male participants believe that wedding rituals are not biased and that women get equal opportunity to show off their clothes and family status and today women are more active in organizing the wedding rituals which indicates that they have better say in the households today. All male participants agreed that they always include their wives in making decisions.

Many women are today working and providing equally for the family members therefore it is important to include them in decision making and obtain their opinion on all matters concerning their family. Women's opportunity to enhance their status in the

household therefore depends on their ability to work and earn equally to men. Many women believe that inequality within the household is due to the women's lack of ability to get into paid employment and those that are able to obtain this status are mostly those who have a sound educational background and are thus able to support the family financially. Women's dependency on men is thus seen as a reason for gender inferiority. However it is also important to note that there are some men who do not allow their wives to get work outside and earn due to the fear of orthodox societal belief that women only get into paid employment if men are unable to provide for the family.

Some men therefore fear that the working wife might over rule him in the household matters and take his position. With a little improvement in the social status of women, many men feel ignored or rejected in the household. Many men feel that the rise in the status of women does not only bring equality between the two genders but sometimes is biased towards women. In organizing important occasion such as weddings in the Hindu society in Fiji, some men feel that women are getting better opportunity at decision making. Ram Sumer for example makes discrimination when he mentions that "women are asking for equality but they are already equal or probably more than equal." He feels that women do not realize the rights given to them and explains that women tend to use the rights to equality given to them as an element to show that they are superior to men. As discussed earlier, this is a good example to justify the fear that men begin to develop as the status of women rises in any particular society. It has been however agreed by all female participants and many male participants that women are now actively involved in the decision making in their household and today occasion such as wedding are mostly organized by women.

4.3 Changes in Wedding Ceremonies Organized by Women

As women have become more active in the way Indo-Fijian weddings are organized there have been significant changes to the wedding experience. Firstly as many young women today prefer to choose their own life partners and due to the fact that many young women are into paid employment today, they prefer to organize the wedding ceremony which is suitable for them. For example most women prefer to have a simple

wedding ceremony with few guests so that the guests can be easily catered for. Generally, women believe that most of the laborious tasks in the wedding ceremonies are done by women; therefore they prefer to have a smaller number of guests. The number of days allocated for the wedding ceremonies is also decreasing. Most working women feel that it is more important to go ahead with the important rituals and minimize irrelevant activities in order to save time. Some women prefer to combine the rituals and have a week's occasion in two days. This not only saves time but also saves a lot of money since most weddings are organized in halls which need to be hired for a number of days. Since the wedding venue is arranged by the bride's family, this increases the cost of the wedding ceremony. Some women view that since the guests from both sides are invited at one particular venue, the cost should be equally shared by both families. In this was there would be fewer burdens on the bride's family, considering the fact that some people also provide expensive gifts to the groom's family. However as this has been a tradition for more than a hundred years now, it has become a common practice.

Modern women also get an opportunity to select what they would be wearing at the wedding. Again as most women are earning for themselves, they are able to purchase whatever they like. Unlike before when parents made decisions on what the bride would be wearing today women choose to buy trendy and fashionable costumes mostly inspired by Bollywood. It also observed that unlike before where women were draped from head to toe which left many women feeling uncomfortable, today many women prefer not to wear long veils to cover their face. Most women prefer to have their face exposed so that guests are able to see and admire them. Even the veils that are used to cover the heads are mostly transparent which allows people to see the beautiful hair patterns. This is fair because there is no point in covering the face and head as women spend hundreds of dollars on hairdressers and beauticians. Women who attend the wedding ceremonies are also able to wear fashionable blouses today inspired by latest fashion. The high necked blouses of the past have been replaced by deep necked and backless blouses of today. Unlike before, this is not seen as disrespectful as it has become common in the wedding ceremonies. A conversation with an elderly relative

provided me with a very interesting account of the acceptable form of dressing for Indo-Fijian women as dictated by the elderly women in laws. She had been in a rush and therefore forgot to wear a vest under the blouse. As the sari was well draped around her neither she nor her in laws realized this. However at one point in the ceremony she raised her hand and this left a small portion of her waist exposed, her mother-in-law who was a few meters away informed her son on this and he instantly walked her few kilometers to their home to wear a vest. By the time they got back the major rituals were almost over. This account of her experience instantly makes one realize that in this aspect there has been a significant improvement in the status of women as women today choose to wear what they want and there are not many cases where the mother in-law would have any issues with the dressing as the rules on how women dress is not as rigid as they had been in the past. Women no longer stick to dress-codes of the family like they used to in the past as the modern women believe that clothes do not determine the value that they have in the family.

4.4 Love Marriages versus Arranged Marriages.

All the participants interviewed believed that in comparison to arranged marriages the numbers of love marriages have significantly increased in the past decade. This ratio was not common maybe about twenty years ago. It is believed that previously women were mostly not consulted and marriages were mostly arranged between the families. Many elderly women share that they were only able to see their husbands after the wedding. Sukh Raji speaks about how men and women did not see each other before the marriage and trusted the decisions made by their parents. In the past love marriages were seen as against the custom and it was uncommon for women to question their parents on this issue. The patriarch made decisions on behalf of the family and women did not dare to go against this. Those who did often feared punishment or being disowned by the family. It was also rare that women who went against their families got any respect at their in-laws place as well. It was also interesting to note that the young men falling in love could not keep up to the promises made to their lovers as they themselves could not go against the unbending rules of the society. Once the decisions were made, everyone in the family had to follow this. As families were seen as a form

of security and identity, it was often difficult for men to go against this and therefore love relationships were mostly not given a higher priority than their family. Kavita shares a very interesting event in her family. She mentions that her “uncles had to seek assistance from relatives to turn their love marriages into arranged marriages as their father was not in favor of love marriages.” Many elders believed that allowing young people to have love marriages would destroy the traditional values of the family. As decision making was always in the hands of the head of the family who would no doubt be a male as women were not given such position in the conservative families.

4.5 Changing Gender Roles in the Wedding Ceremony

Specific gender roles have been played at different rituals in the Hindu wedding ceremonies for many years. However, it has been noticed that these roles are slowly changing. Archana believes that although roles are changing there are specific roles that will be played by men and specific roles played by women in order to have the task carried out with ease. For example women are not expected to build sheds for the wedding and men are not expected to knead and roll the dough for *puri* although some men do help in the frying part. Priya mentions that although the gender roles are important, she agrees that the roles are changing subject to the availability of the particular person to carry out the task. As Vidya Ram mentions previously a mama (mother’s brother) would do the *Imly ritual* before the bride gets ready for the wedding. This was a specific role of the mama but today if the mama is not present a mami (mama’s wife) can carry out the ritual. Women’s roles are therefore given equal importance to the men in the wedding ceremonies today.

Even when it comes to organizing the wedding, previously males had the upper hand in how it should be organized. Most female participants however believe that today women are doing very well at organizing the weddings and some also believe that women are doing much better than males. On the contrary this is not taken well by participants such as Ram Sumer. He shares an experience about the wedding for his children whereby he organized everything and consulted his wife on certain issues. He believes that organization is done better by males and if given to the women they tend

to over-spend. He also mentions that gender roles have changed in the Hindu society. He feels that women have been given equality and some times more than men. He condemns this idea by saying that it is not a question of equality where women would do something good for the society; women want more rights than men to prove themselves superior in their households. In contrast to his comment, Akaash shares an experience where a “mother took the full charge of her daughter’s wedding ceremony as her husband had passed away years ago but the ceremony was so well organized.” Ram’s comment therefore is inappropriate as he views the improvement of womens’ status as a threat to male dominance over the society but fails to realize that the equal rights given to women in the society today is not to prove women superior but to allow them to share an equal space with men.

Sukh Raji explains that changing gender roles in the weddings have been first and foremost beneficial for the brides. Firstly they are well informed about the person that they are marrying and are also aware about his family. Secondly, today they have the right to say no if they are not happy about the alliance. Also they take full control of how they want the weddings to be conducted. She shares how bride and groom did not see each other until they were married as all arrangements were done by the males in the family and the marriage was also fixed by them. Another elderly woman shares how she was married to a man old enough to be her grandfather. She was thirteen when she was married off to a fifty-five year old man whose first wife had died and he had six children who were all older then her. She had not seen him before the wedding and was not happy with what she saw afterwards. Her husband was bald and hardly had any teeth. Together with this he was not as rich as he had told her father and she was made to do all the farm work. He died at the age of sixty two leaving her with three of his children from his previous marriage and three children of their own to look after. She struggled to support the family but could not remarry as this was not favored by the society. She mentions that she also did not get any marriage proposals because men were selective and would not wish to share the burden of bringing up the children. She was however a courageous women who was able to raise the children on her own.

On this note the changing gender roles are helping women to raise their voices and allow them to say no to any injustice while on the other hand it gives them more authority to decide what they want in a life partner and how they want their special wedding day to be organized.

4.6 Factors causing changes in the status of Indo-Fijian women in the traditional Hindu weddings in Fiji.

4.6.1 Migration

Migration of Indo-Fijians overseas has been a contributing factor to the changes that have and continue to take place in Indo-Fijian society. Kavita believes that moving out of Fiji has been a strong turning point in the lives of Indo-Fijian women as it gave them more freedom and allows them to make their own decisions. To some extent many women feel that due to migration the status of women has significantly improved as the cultural values are not as strongly imposed on them as compared to those living in Fiji. Inter-racial and Inter-religious marriages are common with Indo-Fijian women who have migrated overseas as they are able to voice out their desire to marry people they love without racial or religious restrictions.

4.6.2 Education

Education has also been an empowering agent where cultural practices are concerned. Women have been able to identify their potential in the economic sector by acquiring formal education, and this has also given them more power to speak their minds and make decisions. Kavita points out that education has allowed women to be more stable financially and therefore decide how much they want to spend at the weddings. Modern women seem to regard the idea of inviting hundreds of people to the weddings as a waste of time especially when legal marriages serve the purpose of declaring a couple husband and wife. Divya also agrees that paper marriage (legal marriage) is today preferred to traditional marriages as women are more comfortable with simpler wedding processes. On the same note Saagar has actually shared a distinct idea. He feels that education has actually allowed women to make informed choices, the idea of gifting

furniture and other things which is seen as a form of dowry has been eradicated from wedding functions because educated youngsters feel that this is insulting. Shaneel comes up with a very important point where he says that education has changed the way women think and feel. He says that in the olden days people respected the wedding vows and always worked in favor of it. Promises were kept at any cost. Women suffered mostly due to this belief, no matter how much they would be abused or tortured by their husband and in-laws, they feared to leave the families they were married into due to the fear of social stigma on themselves as well as their parents. Education therefore has allowed them freedom to make decisions. Shristi also sees that education has actually changed people's perspectives. Educated women today are more ambitious in the economic aspect and therefore most women only consider carrying out important rituals that they are comfortable with as education has changed the way they see things today.

4.6.3 Modernization and Fashion

Modernization and Fashion can be closely interlinked to education. Education is actually the most prominent player to bring about the effects of modernization and also cause changes in the trend of fashion. Modernization has actually caused people to be more accepting towards what the new generation of women consider appropriate, without restraining to the traditional norms of the society. Priya makes an important point that changes in beliefs allows women to be more open minded about their relationship. Dating is a fashion today and young people support the idea as they feel that it is really important to know each other well before making any commitments. This is especially beneficial for women as they are the ones who will be moving into a new household and should be sure that they are comfortable with the family and more importantly see that the family is comfortable with them. Modernization also has an impact on the elder women in the household as well. Most modern mothers-in-law no longer treat their daughters-in-law like many women used to in the past. This is due to the fact that family units are much smaller; therefore all women in the household rely on each other to carry out tasks. Also women are well aware of their rights and would not tolerate any mistreatment.

4.6.4 Impact of Bollywood

As Bollywood movies are a major source of entertainment for the Indo-Fijian society, one hundred percent of the participants believe that Bollywood movies play a huge role in changing the way Hindu wedding ceremonies are conducted in Fiji and have also assisted in bringing about changes to the status of women in the Indo-Fijian society. Whether it is clothing or rituals, anything new shown in wedding scenes in the movies soon becomes a fashion in Indo-Fijian weddings. Participants have identified several practices such as throwing back of rice grains and having a path covered with flowers for the bride to walk on as she walks to the *mandap*. Both the practices have been taken from the Bollywood movies. Bollywood movies have not only introduced new practices in wedding system but have also encouraged women to uplift their status in the society. Unlike before, Bollywood movies today promote the idea of having female characters to play central roles. A movie such as *Kahani* (story) which was released last year (2012) shows the strength of women in the society. The character of Vidya (played by Vidya Balan) strongly inspires women that they possess the power to demand answers from the society to the injustice they face. The strong female characters are an inspiration to Indo-Fijian women audience as well. Bollywood therefore is seen as an important factor that inspires Indo-Fijian women to value their importance in the male dominated Indo-Fijian society.

4.7 Gift and Monetary Exchange: A Gender Bias Concept

As more women are today demanding to know why some rituals are gender biased, there has been considerable change in the custom of gift exchange. Traditionally, most men believed that they were lessening the burden of the parents by marrying their daughter, and that it was therefore important to receive something return. In the post-girmit era, women received formal education much later than men, it was therefore highly unlikely that women would be able to earn for the family. Men therefore saw themselves superior to women in this aspect and this proved the women and her family inferior to the men and his family. The bride's family often felt obliged to give as much as the groom's family would demand for. They would try to meet the demands in order

to maintain good will between the two families and mostly so that the daughter would be treated well in the household. The family also believed that the in-laws would be responsible for taking care of her and feeding her for life, therefore the exchange in this way was seen as a payment by the parents to the in-laws who would be in charge of her after marriage. The domestic chores that the bride would carry out were not worth a value of exchange although she would spend all her life serving the in-laws.

All the participants interviewed believed that the concept of gift exchange is not fair. The ideologies are changing as many women are well educated and are earning equal to men today. They do not see themselves as a burden but rather as someone who contributes an additional source of income to the new family. In agreement to this statement Shaneel and Priya also believe that the system of giving gifts which they see as a form of dowry is slowly fading from the wedding ceremony. Shaneel highlights that in the wedding process the bride's family gives so much in comparison to that given by the bridegroom's family. This is actually unfair as he believes that it is not a crime to have a daughter and parents should not be punished for this. Sukh Raji shares her own experience and it is interesting to note that instead of expensive gifts, cows were considered as gifts of value in the past. She informs how her family gifted five cows at her wedding to the groom and this tradition was carried forward when her daughters got married. Four of her five daughters were given a cow each as a gift. This is similar to the dowry system in India where animals were also given as part of the dowry. Akaash justifies this by mentioning that he sees gift exchange as a form of dowry. He also mentions that gift exchange has become a sought of fashion and is used to judge the status of each other's families. Shristi also shares an experience on her uncle's wedding and how he got a truck full of gifts. She believes that it is a form of dowry but is pleasantly known as gift.

Monetary exchange is a must at the Indo-Fijian Hindu wedding ceremony. Whether it be only a small amount or a large amount depending on the financial background of the family, people however exchange money in almost all the rituals in the wedding process. Kavita explains how the small rituals that involve monetary exchange actually

make the wedding processes entertaining. She mentions the funny act of hiding the groom's shoes by the sisters-in law. However she does agree that while there may be no or little monetary exchanges on one occasion there are some occasions where the bride's family provides a larger sum and this is not fair. Saagar believes that the act of exchanging money is a form of entertainment and should be taken lightly, however some people see this as a form of competition and give out more than they could afford. According to Narend all that is required to fulfill the rituals is only twenty-five cents. As practiced in the early days, twenty five cents was put together with gifts or given as a monetary gift and people appreciated it as long as the rituals were completed. Today, it has become a fashion to give more and this actually puts a bigger burden on the bride's family. Shaneel believes that this is not fair especially as the bride's family caters for the food and venue for the wedding day, to provide monetary gift actually adds to the cost. Divya mentions that monetary gifts are seen as a token of love but people from the groom's side see this as an opportunity to get more cash.

Archana shares two contrasting incidences at the wedding both on the same scenario where the groom and his family sit down to eat at the *mandap*. It is a tradition to put forward some money to the groom and his male relatives after which they begin their meal. Archana mentions that in one particular incident where the groom was adamant not to begin his meal until he had received enough cash. The bride's father and his close male relatives kept giving money and at last the father had to give another twenty dollars in order to have the groom to begin his meal. On a separate incident the groom began his meal without waiting for any monetary gift. Akaash believes that monetary gift exchange is a ritual that has been practiced from a long time but it was not seen as burden. Today some people have started to abuse that ritual for financial gain. Shristi also shares an experience from her own family when her uncle got married. The *tilak* ritual as mentioned in chapter two is a custom where the bride's father gives a monetary gift to his son-in-law to be. He may give as much as he wants as this is a symbol of love for the newly established relationship. However in this case the expectation was high as the bride belonged to a rich family but the amount that was given was not as expected and women began to gossip about it. This is sad because first of all the amount should

never be revealed in public. Secondly the gift is seen as a blessing which cannot be compared with material wealth. Vidya mentions that although the giving of expensive gifts such as furniture by the bride's family is disappearing this is now given in form of cash in some weddings and it is slowly becoming a trend in the wedding ceremonies. She believes that this should stop as it becomes a burden on the bride's family especially those who are poor considering that the Indo-Fijian weddings are so expensive already.

Conclusion

Wedding ceremonies are an important part of the Indo-Fijian Hindu lifestyle. Research has revealed that people view Indo-Fijian weddings as an expensive occasion where the rituals carried out demand expensive gift exchange as well as monetary exchange over the period of the wedding process. The bride's family is obligated to fulfill all the demands that have become a part of wedding rituals. As highlighted earlier, gift is a euphemism used to cover the huge financial demand that is placed on the brides' family and some people see it as a form of dowry. It has been interesting to note that once a marriage proposal is approved, not only the bride but the bride's family is viewed as inferior to the groom's family. Wedding ceremonies have therefore been labeled as gender biased by women, who believe that traditions and customs work largely in the favor of the men. Indo-Fijian women believe that for a long time wedding ceremonies have assisted in reinstating the inferiority of women due to gender. These aspects have been linked to the novel *Amma...the frail wooden door* which has been the primary literary text for this research work. The wedding ceremony of *Amma and Taji* (Chapter two) highlights the gender biasness in the Indo-Fijian community and shows how the bride's family is often treated in an unfair way. This novel prompts readers to uncover 'the untold stories' of the Indo-Fijian society which discriminates women due to their gender. An interview was carried out on a group of Indo-Fijian Hindu participants to find out if gender discrimination did exist in the Hindu wedding ceremony.

This results obtained is closely linked to the ideas specified in *Amma*. Participants have revealed that Indo-Fijian (Hindu) weddings are sexist but they are now slowly changing. The research has been able to offer new findings that over a period of time women have undergone changes and this is reflected in their improved status at the wedding ceremonies. Modern women despise the idea of being labeled as inferior and have worked hard to get rid of this label which had been repressing them since the gimit era. Significant factors such as education, migration and modernization have enabled women to enhance their status in the society. These factors have not only changed the status of women they have also helped in changing the way men view

women in the Indo-Fijian society. The idea of gender specified roles are also changing in the Hindu weddings today. Men and women exchange roles in order to carry out the wedding ceremonies well. Men do not hesitate to help women with the cooking and women on the other hand help to decorate the wedding *mandap*. Gender roles are also exchanged in order to carry out the rituals as well and are not as strict as before. Those carrying out the ritual also do not view it as a gendered task and people freely do what they think is right.

While the process of change has already begun and has been able to alter the perspective of some men, there are others who are still not ready to accept women's equality in the society as yet. It is important to note that the factors of change mentioned may not be relevant to certain men therefore their belief on the role of women in the society remains unchanged. It may therefore take some time for the Indo-Fijian society to completely accept the importance of women and acknowledge them as equal. Women's organizations in Fiji play a huge role in assisting women to recognize their rights and to help improve their status.

On the whole weddings are seen as one of the most important traditional ceremonies and if women have been able to bring changes to their status in such an important ceremony then there is hope that they will be able to bring changes to their status in the other areas currently dominated by the patriarch.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Interview Transcript

Participant Information

Name: Kavita Chand

Gender: Female

Age: 22

Place of residence: Suva

Questions:

- 1. Do you think a wedding is an important ceremony in the Hindu way of life in Fiji?**

Yes, it is important. Wedding is the most important thing especially in the life Indo-Fijian women as in the Indo-Fijian society marrying off a daughter brings pride to the bride's family and the women who do not go under this process are often thought to be of a bad character and have lots made up stories told about them in the society.

- 2. How would you describe an Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremony in 5 words or less? Please elaborate on your answer?**

It is a complicated and fabricated event. To be very frank with you, I as a young person think that a Hindu wedding is very complicated. There are so many things performed. I am lost half the time. I think only the elders, to be honest really old people, thoroughly understand what's happening there. We just watch and come back.

- 3. In your opinion do you think that the way that wedding ceremonies are carried out today is different to how they used to be carried out 15-20 years? If so do you think there have been major changes or only minor changes?**

Yes, there have been changes. I think minor changes such as hiring of the venue. People have marriages in halls.

- 4. Which part of the wedding ceremony has undergone major changes?**

Speaking from experience, all the weddings that I have attended from the past two years had very few guests invited. Only the very close relatives would be present and some close friends. Now there is a trend in the city side that if you think you will attend the wedding you should call and let the organizer of the wedding know so that that individual can book a place for you. Halls are hired after ensuring how many people are to come. That I think is a major change. I

did notice that before lots of people were invited. I guess now people want to stop spending unnecessarily.

5. Can you identify some of these changes?

Yes, in my sister's wedding only a few people were invited but the wedding took place in the hall of a resort. So in order to cut cost we invited only our close relatives and my sister's close friends.

6. In your opinion which of these changes are good and should have taken place, and which of these are bad, and should not have taken place?

I think this change is good because in my experience I think the more people you invite the more complaints they will make. In my brother's wedding, a lot of people were invited and they were complaining that food is being served late, the benches are not set properly, it is really hot and fans are not set up etc. So to avoid all that, in my sister's wedding we only invited close family and friends and had a beautiful and peaceful wedding without any complaints.

7. Can you suggest some ways in which these changes have positively/negatively affected the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) society?

Yes. I think it has positively affected the society because people have understood that there is no point in arranging big weddings and inviting hundreds of people because never mind how well organized the wedding is they will always pin point something. As much as I know, weddings in India, at times of our forefathers took place this way. The history says that the indentured labors were the poor people of India who came to Fiji in search for a better life. So the poor people would only have little feasting and invite close family members so that they can spread the news that the daughter or the son had been married. The same is happening now. We are back to where we started from.

8. In your perspective are there more love marriages or arranged marriages?

There are more love marriages. I myself am in a relationship and will get married in a year.

9. Is this similar to the ratio that one would have achieved 20 years ago?

It might not be similar but we can say that it is a half of it. My parents had a love marriage but my grandparents had an arranged marriage. The story of that time is actually something else. Speaking from experience, two of my uncles fell in love when they were young but since my paternal grandfather wasn't in favor of love marriages it was obvious that he wouldn't allow my uncles to marry their love. So my uncles took help from their aunties and asked her to talk to the girls' parents and later come and tell my grandfather that a proposal has come for marriage. Precisely they had a love-arranged marriage!

10. How would you relate the changes in traditional wedding ceremony to:

- a) **Migration of Indo-Fijians overseas**
- b) **Education**

c) Modernization

d) Fashion

Migration I think has been lucky for the females. The females were given more freedom once they went out of Fiji. They had the freedom to choose their life partners. From there they started changing the traditional system of marriage; mixed with a bit of overseas system of marriage. Education has empowered women especially to make right decisions about their weddings. They wouldn't spend hundreds of dollars on unnecessary things. They are least bothered who thinks what and most importantly no one can now force them to get married to anybody. They have been informed of their rights. The weddings have become shorter and young people prefer paper [legal] marriage. I would also choose paper marriage. Fashion and modernization has brought more fun and entertainment. To be precise before old men and women would get angry if a man dressed as woman would dance in weddings. Now it is fashion. Weddings seem incomplete without them. They are now a form of entertainment. Now they are also given a place in the society and this is solely because of modernization; Modernization of thoughts. People have put old thoughts in bag and locked them away forever. Some people say that the mixed genders blessings always proved to be true. So in a way they are auspicious.

11. Do you think the specific gender roles within a family during weddings are important? Why?

No, I don't think gender roles are important. People should share responsibilities and not just dump things at one another. How does gender difference change anything? By the time my sister got married my fua's (dad's sisters) died. Some close friends did the fua's chores and their husbands equally took part. Nothing inauspicious happened. Gender only causes drifts.

12. Do you think that the gender roles have changed in weddings? If so, how?

Yes, as I mentioned earlier my dad's friends and their husbands performed the tasks that a Fua has to perform in a wedding. So yes gender roles have changed. Man can do what women do and vice versa. No women organize weddings and men follow instructions. In my experience I attended a cousin's wedding and I saw that the person who was doing her mehndi was a male and he did it as perfect as any female would do. My dad and other uncles washed dishes and even swept. All this is normally done by females. My mum helped in the decorations. This is normally done by the teenage boys.

13. How would you describe the economic status of weddings today compared to the past?

It is more expensive to conduct a wedding now because the prices of things are very high. The hiring of venue costs a lot. The weddings now are grand. Everything is supposed to be just perfect and to be perfect costs a lot. In olden days, things were cheap and the bride's uncles and aunties would contribute

little amounts of money in the wedding. Now it is the total responsibility of the bride's parents. No one would help unless there are real financial constraints. In such cases, parents also take loans.

14. What is your opinion on the Hindu weddings in which one of the couple does not speak/understand Hindi?

That person should be explained everything before so that he doesn't face any difficulties during the wedding. People scare the non hindi speaking person more by staring at him. I have noticed this many times and when that person makes a mistake they would laugh at him. So to avoid this he should be explained everything before.

15. What is your perspective on the gift exchange in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

I think it is a good thing. It is a good way of assessing who had attended your wedding. Gifts are a form of blessing. However, it is not that important to always give gifts. The dowry system has been eliminated. So the gifts are simple and I think it is enough. However gift exchanges between the bride and the grooms family is a very costly affair and should not be taken seriously.

16. What is your opinion on the monetary exchange between families from both sides in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

It is a form of entertainment and blessing. When the groom takes off his shoes to go inside the mandap, the bride's sisters hide his shoes and get money out of the groom. So, it is just fun and mischief. Little amount of money is exchanged. Sometimes it is not exchanged at all. There was nothing of this sort in my brother's wedding but I do agree that in some weddings the money exchanged is a form of burden especially on the bride's family.

17. Do you think Bollywood movies play a role in the transition of traditional Hindu weddings in Fiji? If so, how?

Yes, definitely. Bollywood and even television serials play a huge role. Girls would want to wear Archana sari and Abha sari in weddings. Children keep practicing a Bollywood number, the very same choreography of a wedding song and dance on it. The folk songs are also getting replaced. Bollywood is a big thing in the wedding now.

18. If given opportunity, explain what are some of the things you would change in the way traditional Indo-Fijian weddings are conducted?

I would want the priests to explain in simple terms what the wedding vows means because there is no point in attending weddings if you don't know what is going on in it. It should be clearly and simply explained and the reason behind performing that activity and what it signifies should also be explained.

19. What do you perceive on the future of Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremonies? I think will get more complicated for young people if things are

not well explained. More and more of us would prefer court marriages. I think someone should write a book for us which explains every step of the wedding ceremony. In my heart I do know that wedding is something beautiful but it would be more meaningful if someone could thoroughly explain all of it to me.

Interview Transcript

Participant Information

Name: Saagar Prasad

Gender: Male

Age: 29

Place of residence: Suva

Questions:

- 1. Do you think wedding is an important ceremony in the Hindu way of life in Fiji?**

Weddings are quite important in the Indo-Fijian setting as they are a celebration to mark the new bond which is to form between two, previously distinct, families; and given the size of Indian families, it serves as a occasion through which both families meet and are introduced to the 'new inclusions' to the family.

- 2. How would you describe an Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremony in 5 words or less? Please elaborate on your answer?**

It is a festival. The reason I say this is because, a Hindu wedding ceremony has so many rituals going on (even if not at once), there is such a big crowd and it's an occasion people attend to eat, drink and enjoy (frankly speaking), one can easily be mistaken that it, indeed, is a festival.

- 3. In your opinion do you think that the way the wedding ceremonies are carried out today is different to how it used to be carried out 15-20 years? If so do you think there have been massive changes or have there been only minor changes?**

There is definitely a difference. The changes, in my opinion, have been only in the amount people spend on the wedding. The rituals, sequence of events, even the vows, are quite the same. Therefore, I think there have been mostly minor changes.

- 4. Which part if the wedding ceremony has undergone major changes?**

I feel that the only part which has changed dramatically, as stated earlier, is the amount of money people spend on the wedding preparations, suits, food, etc. The actual ceremony is very much the same. Something I picked up while attending a friend's wedding in Labasa, was that (according to the Pundit) the bride wore the Sari given to her by the groom's family on the wedding day, in

the old times. The procession would arrive and someone (not sure who) would take the Sari to the bride and the bride had to put that on and get married. This has changed (and has become the most expensive 'part' of the entire wedding – the bride's Sari).

5. Can you identify some of these changes?

I have already stated one particular change under question 4. Other changes include; the abolishment of the Dowry system, people choosing to condense the wedding into 2 days instead of the usual 1 week, marriage into another Caste.

6. In your opinion which of these changes are good and should have taken place which of these are bad, those that should not have taken place?

The condensing of the 1 week affair into 2-3days is one of the best changes for me. It is very much in accordance to the fast lifestyle we are getting used to now. The removal of Dowry and Caste are other notable advances. One on hand, we are trying to save time, and on the other, we are spending more money than is required just so people attending "talk about the wedding for a long time". This doesn't matter if one is very wealthy, but the pressure of measuring up to the 'in-laws' puts many middle classed people in a lot of debt, thus is not a good change. I remember very well a few 'figures' I heard proud fathers boast about in their daughter's weddings; \$5000, \$8000 and even up to \$14,000! Even if marriage is a 'once in a lifetime' event, \$14000 is just too much for a suit one puts on for a day! Also, there are some that prefer to invite a few important people to their wedding and yet others who just have to invite the entire human race (so to speak)! I personally think that saving a bit of money and inviting selected people is much more economical and if I'm not mistaken, weddings in the past were just like this.

7. Can you suggest some ways in which these changes have positively/negatively affected the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) society?

Negatively, there may be significant culture loss due to the condensing and 'improvising' being done with/to the rituals.

8. In your perspective are there more love marriages or arranged marriages?

In comparison to the past, the number of love marriages has increased quite a lot. However, the number of love and arranged marriages, in my view, is almost equal, probably with love marriages having a slight edge.

9. Is this similar to the ratio that one would have achieved 20 years ago?

There is no way the ratio is consistent with our society 20 years ago.

10. How would you relate the changes in traditional wedding ceremony to:

a) Migration of Indo-Fijians overseas :

those that have had a chance to see weddings of other religions overseas would know how their 'close friends and immediate family only' weddings are. This may be one factor some people are reverting to the original number of invitees.

b) Education:

we don't need to be rocket scientists to figure out that the educated (usually) make informed choices and therefore, I would most strongly relate most of the changes like removal of dowry and inviting lesser people to education. On the contrary, more education=better job=more money to spend, thus education (even if indirectly) may be related to people being able to spend more and actually doing so.

c) Modernization :

I relate this to having effects such as; using the English language to explain things more clearly to those in attendance. The Pundit I had mentioned about earlier used this technique to explain to the crowd all that was going on. He said a mantra, then a Hindi translation and then related it to life in English. This was really a good technique!

d) Fashion :

Many girls see their wedding as a means of spending 'to their full potential' and a time to be as impulsive as possible! I have seen many cases in which the bride already knows what she wants to wear even without knowledge of the availability of the dress. This is the most modest work of Fashion. In my experience, women are at their best visual and memory abilities when it comes to spotting clothes and accessories and this reflects in their wedding attire.

11. Do you think the specific gender roles within a family during weddings are important? Why?

Yes, they add life to the, otherwise, not so lively ceremonies.

12. Do you think that the gender roles have changed in weddings? If so, how?

Gender roles are just as they used to be. However, some other less related things have changed. For example, there are people from the grooms family the bride can never speak to, this is changing and I believe will soon disappear.

13. How would you describe the economic status of weddings today compared to the past?

As I have stated earlier, we tend to spend much more on weddings now as compared to before. This could be due to the high cost of living but has some unnecessary costs associated as well.

14. What is your opinion on the Hindu weddings which has one of the couple who does not speak/understand Hindi?

I view it as a sign of progress. It means that now we are breaking free from the culture of marriage in the same race and religion. This is most definitely due to the amount of freedom given to children nowadays.

15. What is your perspective on the gift exchange in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

It may be a way of showing love, but I see it as a means of showing off! Some families use this ritual as a means of earning a few extra dollars.

16. What is your opinion on the monetary exchange between families from both sides in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

It is an exchange between families whereby they present money to each other as a form of gift and entertainment. Some families at times show off by giving a lot (which is actually 'overhead expense')

17. Do you think bollywood movies play a role in the transition of traditional Hindu weddings in Fiji? If so, how?

Without a doubt they do. Generally speaking, the bride usually sees what she is to wear on her wedding day inspired by the films.

18. If given opportunity, explain what are some of the things you would change in the way traditional Indo-Fijian weddings are conducted?

I would want people to concentrate less on other parts of the wedding and focus more on the traditional ceremonial part of the weddings.

19. What do you perceive on the future of Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremonies?

I believe there will be a lot of changes in the future. Looking at the way things have changed in the present time I think there will be a lot more changes in the future.

Interview Transcript

Participant Information

Name: Narend Prasad

Gender: Male

Age: 59

Place of residence: Suva

Questions:

- 1. Do you think wedding is an important ceremony in the Hindu way of life in Fiji?**

Yes, it is very important.

- 2. How would you describe an Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremony in 5 words or less?**

Please elaborate on your answer?

It is a very important event.

- 3. In your opinion do you think that the way the wedding ceremonies are carried out today is different to how it used to be carried out 15-20 years? If so do you think there have been massive changes or have there been only minor changes?**

In my knowledge there have been some changes.

- 4. Which part if the wedding ceremony has undergone major changes?**

The cultural part of the wedding is still around. Only the extras have changed.

- 5. Can you identify some of these changes?**

Dances and songs have changed. There have been a lot of influences from movies.

- 6. In your opinion which of these changes are good and should have taken place which of these are bad, those that should not have taken place?**

As times change, young generation comes so there will always be changes. The system of wedding will not change as long as the Hindu culture survives but there will be changes in other things such as folk songs and dances. The wedding itself will not change.

- 7. Can you suggest some ways in which these changes have positively/negatively affected the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) society?**

Well it has affected the society because nowadays people find it very easy to get rock bands and DJ's. It attracts the young people and they dance and make the night alive. Everyone enjoys. So its good because people enjoy but it is bad because the traditional songs have been replaced.

8. In your perspective are there more love marriages or arranged marriages?

If you talk about Indian weddings then I think there are more arranged marriages.

9. Is this similar to the ratio that one would have achieved 20 years ago?

No, we have many young people who arrange their marriages themselves.

10. How would you relate the changes in traditional wedding ceremony to:

- a) **Migration of Indo-Fijians overseas**
- b) **Education**
- c) **Modernization**
- d) **Fashion**

Well, the wedding ceremony itself has not changed due to all of this but other items have due to time and financial constraints. There will always be such changes taking place.

11. Do you think the specific gender roles within a family during weddings are important? Why?

Yes, these roles are very important. It is very difficult to get close relatives nowadays. The main reason for this is that a lot of immediate families have migrated so immediate families are replaced by friends and close people.

12. Do you think that the gender roles have changed in weddings? If so, how?

If you get specific people, for example, biological aunts, it is ok for someone close to perform the same role as them because at times it is difficult to get immediate families. They are unable to attend the wedding.

13. How would you describe the economic status of weddings today compared to the past?

It is very expensive. Not the cultural part but when buying ornaments such as gold. As we are aware that gold used to be cheap but now it is very expensive.

14. What is your opinion on the Hindu weddings which has one of the couple who does not speak/understand Hindi?

The best thing to do for the one who does not understand Hindi is to get him/her to understand all the rituals that will be taking place so that he understands well.

This will avoid all the fuss. The person before getting married should be well explained and fully versed with the culture, traditions and the whole system.

15. What is your perspective on the gift exchange in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

It is not a customary thing. In Fiji it hardly happens but as parents whatever a parent can give to the child is all that is taken.

16. What is your opinion on the monetary exchange between families from both sides in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

As far as we in Fiji are concerned, we do not have much role of monetary exchange but to keep good relationships we do give. For example, in Gupt daan, \$1000 or \$100 is not necessary. Only twenty-five cents will do. It is very well taken by the other party. In Fiji we do not have any fixed amount that we should give because in Fiji twenty five cents does all the work.

17. Do you think bollywood movies play a role in the transition of traditional Hindu weddings in Fiji? If so, how?

Yes, indeed. Bollywood has ruined the whole culture and tradition. In weddings nowadays when you cannot get a folk singer you will see that people play CD's from bollywood movies and young people dance.

18. If given opportunity, explain what are some of the things you would change in the way traditional Indo-Fijian weddings are conducted?

In Fiji I don't think there is much to change because the change has already taken place. The dowry system has already changed; expensive gifts and monetary gains have disappeared. There is not much change. The cultural part of the wedding has not and will not change. This cannot change because it has been rooted into the Indian people right from the beginning, the very day they were born.

19. What do you perceive on the future of Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremonies?

If the parents are committed to their children and make sure that their children learn their language, they are able to read and write in Hindi, it does not matter if they have graduated with whatever kind of degree they will still know their religion and the weddings will still take place according to Hindu customs and religion.

Interview Transcript

Participant Information

Name: Shaneel Prasad

Gender: Male

Age: 34

Place of residence: Nadi

Questions:

1. Do you think wedding is an important ceremony in the Hindu way of life in Fiji?

Yes it is important. It is more important than other ceremonies in the Hindu way of life in Fiji.

2. How would you describe an Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremony in 5 words or less? Please elaborate on your answer?

It is an interesting and happy occasion. There are many things in a Hindu wedding. Mehndi, haldi, sangeet all of it are very interesting to watch. It makes one feel happy and special; especially the bride.

3. In your opinion do you think that the way the wedding ceremonies are carried out today is different to how it used to be carried out 15-20 years? If so do you think there have been massive changes or have there been only minor changes?

Yes there have been changes. There have been both major and minor changes.

4. Which part of the wedding ceremony has undergone major changes?

The dowry system is no longer there. This is the major change that has taken place. This was a big problem in the past in Fiji as well.

5. Can you identify some of these changes?

Even though it wasn't called dowry, the bride's parents would give furniture and even food items when the bride leaves for her in-laws place. That has changed.

6. In your opinion which of these changes are good and should have taken place which of these are bad, those that should not have taken place?

I think this change is good and should have taken place. It is not a crime to have a daughter so no parent should be punished by having to give so much when they don't even have the status to give that much. Sometimes parents would give

so much that they wouldn't have anything left later. They are not able to marry their other children because the first wedding took everything that they had.

7. Can you suggest some ways in which these changes have positively/negatively affected the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) society?

It has positively affected the indo- Fijian society. Women are given equality. They now take full control of their lives. However, as a male I think at present women are trying to overpower men. They have equal rights now but I think they are in search of something else.

8. In your perspective are there more love marriages or arranged marriages?

There are more love marriages. Arranged marriages are still there but are very small in number.

9. Is this similar to the ratio that one would have achieved 20 years ago?

No, I don't think the ratio was similar. People at that time wouldn't speak. Even if they loved someone they wouldn't go against their elders. Times have changed. Education has empowered people to speak for themselves and their rights. More and more people are getting educated now. This wasn't the case 20 years back. Education wasn't a priority then.

10. How would you relate the changes in traditional wedding ceremony to:

- a) Migration of Indo-Fijians overseas**
- b) Education**
- c) Modernization**
- d) Fashion**

A lot of indo-Fijians have migrated overseas. I think the wedding rituals haven't changed due to this. Other things in weddings have changed. Some people who have migrated and want to marry someone of another culture usually have a few ceremonies conducted in Hindu wedding style and some of that other culture. Last week I attended a wedding. The bride was a resident of Australia and she was getting married to Muslim man of Australia but since both their families were in Fiji they decided to get married in Fiji. So the mehndi and the haldi ceremonies performed by both the bride and the groom but the wedding was conducted in Muslim. Indo-Fijian wedding has its own importance and many people didn't like the idea of leaving half of the marriage undone. They believe it is not good for the couple. Education has changed the way people think and feel about marriages. There are certain things that people do not consider important personally, such as the vows. They believe if the wedding doesn't work out then what is the importance of the vows. People at olden days respected their vows and we have seen that their marriages were for life long. They believed in re-incarnation also believed that these vows are for all the seven births. They would want to be with the same person for all seven lives. This is where the concept of soul mates has come from. Modernization I think has to do with technology. Before people would come and attend the weddings.

Now there is skype. There is no need to come. Just log on to skype and you can see the wedding. Fashion affected traditional weddings in a negative manner. A bride is supposed to be dressed in a respectable manner. Nowadays the brides have their blouses designed. The wedding which I attended last week had the same story. The brides blouse was sleeve less. Red is the auspicious color and brides have always worn red in their weddings. Now brides wear green, pink blue and all other sorts of colors. A wedding doesn't look like a wedding. It looks like an engagement or a party

11. Do you think the specific gender roles within a family during weddings are important? Why? *Yes it is important to ensure that all the rituals are carried out in the traditional way, for example there are specific gender roles that are played by the women folks such as applying the haldi and doing the lawa and specific gender roles played by men such as the brides brother pours the holy water while the parents of the bride do Kanya Daan. However there some gender roles that have changed with time. For example today we have more men who sing the wedding songs and it has become more visible that if there are not enough brothers in the family then the sisters bring the bride to the wedding mandap.*

12. Do you think that the gender roles have changed in weddings? If so, how? *As above gender roles have changed accordingly to how people see the situations that they are in today. Also as compared to the past where people used to have many children today the family units are much smaller therefore people need to help in the rituals so that they can be carried out properly without focusing much on who is doing the task.*

13. How would you describe the economic status of weddings today compared to the past? *Today, I believe weddings are more lavish social events that families look forward to. The better the wedding ceremonies are the more pride it brings to the family. Everything from jewelries, gifts, clothes, decoration, music to small things like how the lunch tables and benches are organized and decorated needs to be looked at. It is very important for guests to give good comments to how the wedding was organized all though most guests would always pick out one thing or the other that they feel good have been done in a better way. Guests are always given the equivalence of god (atithi devo bhava) but sometimes it is hard to tell how satisfied the guests have been with your hospitality.*

14. What is your opinion on the Hindu weddings which has one of the couple who does not speak/understand Hindi? *The wedding mantra should be translated, if one of the couple does not understands Hindi then there is no point to nod in agreement of the wedding vows that he/she does not understand. It is almost like fooling yourself in the midst of hundreds of guests. I believe translating the wedding mantra in English or Fiji Hindi will also help those who speak Hindi understand better as Fiji*

Hindi or English is the more common language and therefore is easily understood. Mantra's are in Sanskrit and its an irony that out of the hundreds of guest that are present none of them apart from the pundit will know what the mantras are all about.

15. What is your perspective on the gift exchange in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

I think that gifts were exchanged as a form of appreciation between families in the past, however today it is more in the form of competition. The bride's family tries their best to provide valuable gifts to please the groom's family and sometimes this leads to overspending. Therefore the focus of gift exchanges have moved from an informal way of appreciating newly formed relationships to actually showing the family status.

16. What is your opinion on the monetary exchange between families from both sides in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

I think gift exchanges are okay but when we talk about monetary exchange it is mostly done by the bride's family which adds to the cost of the wedding. Considering that the wedding venue, food and most other things for the wedding are provided by the bride's family, gifting money will increase the burden, especially if one is poor.

17. Do you think bollywood movies play a role in the transition of traditional Hindu weddings in Fiji? If so, how?

Yes, it definitely plays a role. Speaking with experience, when my close friend got married last year she went online and searched for the person who had made the famous movie actress Kajol's mehndi. This actress had very beautiful mehndi done. My friend searched for the same design and had it made on her hands and legs. She even had the same hair style as Kajol because Kajol is her favorite actress. All of Kajol's songs were playing in the wedding and her dressing style was copied by my friend.

18. If given opportunity, explain what are some of the things you would change in the way traditional Indo-Fijian weddings are conducted?

I would like to change the ritual where the bride's parents have to wash the groom's feet. It is a ritual which shows that the bride's family is inferior.

19. What do you perceive on the future of Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremonies?

I think it will always be a happy occasion but definitely it will keep on changing as time goes by.

Interview Transcript

Participant Information

Name: Divya Prasad

Gender: Female

Age: 22

Place of residence: Suva

Questions:

- 1. Do you think wedding is an important ceremony in the Hindu way of life in Fiji?**

Yes, I think it is very important. I believe it is the most important ceremony in the Hindu way of life in Fiji.

- 2. How would you describe an Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremony in 5 words or less? Please elaborate on your answer?**

It is a bright, colorful, joyous occasion. All the rituals are bright. It is a happy environment and I would say stressful too (at times)

- 3. In your opinion do you think that the way the wedding ceremonies are carried out today is different to how it used to be carried out 15-20 years? If so do you think there have been massive changes or have there been only minor changes?**

Yes, I think some of the things have changed. There have been massive changes in some things and minor changes in others.

- 4. Which part of the wedding ceremony has undergone major changes?**

I believe all the rituals which are performed as part of entertainment. Wedding rituals have not changed. It has remained the same throughout.

- 5. Can you identify some of these changes?**

These changes include the substitution of the folk songs with bollywood songs. People now prefer to have marriages done in halls and very less have them at homes, especially in city sides. In towns I suppose they still choose to have marriages at home. Before the family members would all gather at one place and do all the work themselves however, today people prefer to pay for the decorators, cooks, someone to dress the bride and for other things as well as they believe it is less work load.

6. In your opinion which of these changes are good and should have taken place which of these are bad, those that should not have taken place?

I think folk songs symbolize weddings. Every song has its own meanings. From the groom arriving to the bride departing, each activity in between has a folk song which explains what is being done in that particular ritual. The substitution of the folk songs should not have taken place. It has transformed marriages into any other party or entertainment. Other changes are alright because people choose to have everything done smoothly and it doesn't really affect the wedding in any way.

7. Can you suggest some ways in which these changes have positively/negatively affected the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) society?

It depends on how the society accepts these changes. As far as I know, I believe that the folk songs had their own importance and if bollywood songs maintain themselves firmly the folk songs will soon die out in Fiji. This will be very sad. This is certainly a negative impact on the traditional wedding ceremonies.

8. In your perspective are there more love marriages or arranged marriages?

I think there are more love marriages.

9. Is this similar to the ratio that one would have achieved 20 years ago?

No, definitely not.

10. How would you relate the changes in traditional wedding ceremony to:

- a) **Migration of Indo-Fijians overseas**
- b) **Education**
- c) **Modernization**
- d) **Fashion**

I believe migration has had a lot of influence on the weddings. People go abroad and try to inculcate the ways people there conduct weddings into our wedding systems here in Fiji. As such we have seen difference in weddings. For example, one of the weddings which I recently attended had this new trend. The girl's close family members were giving gifts to all the guests. This is something which is not common in Fiji.

Education has also caused many changes. Educated people do not want to spend a lot. Some do not believe in weddings. They prefer paper marriages or nowadays live-in.

Modernization and fashion I believe follow same suite. People are more concerned about what they wear. It should be expensive. In some cases it doesn't matter how ugly costumes look as long as they are expensive. On the contrary some invited guests wouldn't want to wear traditional clothes.

Girls want to wear miniskirts and shorts in the weddings.

11. Do you think the specific gender roles within a family during weddings are important? Why?

Yes, they are important. They are a way to let guests know how every individual is related to the bride or groom because in the weddings every person who is a family member to the bride or groom has a specific role assigned to them. For example, the bride's sisters are supposed to hide the groom's shoes. It is a custom. Women have their own duties to do and men have their own. This allows things to run smoothly.

12. Do you think that the gender roles have changed in weddings? If so, how?

Yes, women nowadays are more efficient and are able to organize and conduct things properly. Men also follow the instructions given by ladies and the wedding takes place in a proper manner, just as a man would organize.

13. How would you describe the economic status of weddings today compared to the past?

I think weddings today are more expensive to conduct. This is so because of the inflation. Gold is a very important gift in a wedding which all parents give to their daughters. The price of gold has increased tremendously. So it has become more difficult for the parents to conduct weddings.

14. What is your opinion on the Hindu weddings which has one of the couple who does not speak/understand Hindi?

The person who does not understand Hindi should be informed about all the rituals before the wedding takes place. In my experience, I have seen some weddings where one person is non Hindi speaking and the priest translates the wedding mantras.

15. What is your perspective on the gift exchange in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

I think it is a good thing. It is better than the dowry system.

16. What is your opinion on the monetary exchange between families from both sides in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

There is a little monetary exchange, just a token of love. People give a little and receive a little but some families from the groom's side take as an opportunity to get more cash.

17. Do you think bollywood movies play a role in the transition of traditional Hindu weddings in Fiji? If so, how?

Yes, they definitely do. Firstly, the folk songs are replaced by bollywood songs. Secondly, it is now seen that when a girl departs she throws handfuls of rice. This has been copied from the movies. People want to have weddings on large scales like the way it takes place in movies.

18. If given opportunity, explain what are some of the things you would change in the way traditional Indo-Fijian weddings are conducted?

I would want the groom's mother to be allowed to attend the wedding. As it is, the groom's mother is not allowed to see or attend the wedding. She must stay home. I believe the woman who gives birth to her son should be allowed to watch the wedding taking place.

19. What do you perceive on the future of Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremonies?

I believe that this totally depends on the young generation. If they are able to learn and uphold the Hindu way of weddings, this ceremony will be carried into the future and will hold the same importance. However, if the young generation does not see the importance of weddings it will disappear in years to come.

Interview Transcript

Participant Information

Name: Archana Singh

Gender: Female

Age: 39

Place of residence: Sigatoka

Questions:

1. Do you think wedding is an important ceremony in the Hindu way of life in Fiji?

Yes, I think it is important. It is so because it is a time when all family members, those in Fiji and those who are in overseas meet. Some meet after ages because wedding is a special occasion.

2. How would you describe an Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremony in 5 words or less? Please elaborate on your answer?

It is a happy, interesting and colorful occasion. People are really happy, the decorations and rituals are very interesting. You will find that every ritual has its own importance and that everything that we use in life or basically practice in life has some meaning. For example, the 'seal loda' ritual explains us that without one the other is alone and doesn't have a meaning. This implies to the husband and wife that without the wife the husband is incomplete and vice-versa.

3. In your opinion do you think that the way the wedding ceremonies are carried out today is different to how it used to be carried out 15-20 years? If so do you think there have been massive changes or have there been only minor changes?

Yes, I believe it has changed. There have been massive and minor changes. Here we would basically talk about the things that circumscribe the wedding. If I may relate to my experience, I recently attended a wedding and it was stated in the wedding card that all the females are supposed to wear either red or gold attire and the males were supposed to dress in black. This was something new for us here in Fiji. Since the family came from Australia, they had inculcated this new idea into our wedding system. We in Fiji never have this type of wedding and honestly it was more like a party than a wedding.

4. Which part if the wedding ceremony has undergone major changes?

Nothing in the cultural part has changed but as I said earlier the things which circumscribe the wedding ceremony has undergone changes.

5. Can you identify some of these changes?

Well, people now eat in paper plates. Before, people were served on leaves. Weddings took place at homes, now it is performed in halls and temples. People's thinking has also changed. Their decision as what to wear has changed.

6. In your opinion which of these changes are good and should have taken place which of these are bad, those that should not have taken place?

I think the changes that have taken place are good. The marriage takes place conveniently. It is hard to find fresh leaves since people eat on wedding day; the leaves need to be fresh and not wither. In olden days all these necessary things were planted at home and were convenient for people at that time. People prefer paper plates now and it is good because it is easy for them. In my wedding, my parents used all the tin plates for the guests. After the wedding they had a lot of trouble cleaning and washing. The family members were really tired and did not have the strength to do any work, however, they still had to clean up!!

7. Can you suggest some ways in which these changes have positively/negatively affected the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) society?

Some of it has positively affected the society. As I mentioned earlier it is convenient for them. On the contrary, the idea of wearing western clothes in Indian weddings is still not acceptable in our Indo-Fijian society. The culture is such that the type of attire reflects the family ideas and the thoughts that are instilled in the children by the parents. So it brings about a negative view about the person who doesn't wear a traditional sari or Kameez. This is more noticeable for women only. Men are not forced to wear a Sherwaani or Jodh puri. It is okay if they wear a suit but if a woman wears a dress or a skirt and top then she will be the hot topic in the wedding.

8. In your perspective are there more love marriages or arranged marriages?

I think there are more love marriages but arranged marriages still exist. Some families in Fiji are poor. When a proposal for the girl comes from overseas they want to get her married so that she can go abroad and live a happy life. In my experience, many of my cousins have been married off this way. However, for one it did not work out. After her marriage she found out that her husband already had more than one affair and had married her only to make her work as a house girl, to do the house chores. This I believe is a drawback of arranged marriages.

9. Is this similar to the ratio that one would have achieved 20 years ago?

There were love marriages in olden days too but definitely not as much as the arranged marriages. People have now learned to fight for their happiness. Children before would never imagine to go against their parents decision.

10. How would you relate the changes in traditional wedding ceremony to:

- a) Migration of Indo-Fijians overseas**
- b) Education**
- c) Modernization**
- d) Fashion**

Migration has affected the weddings. As mentioned earlier about the dress code. Education..yes of course. As people are getting educated they prefer to have court marriages. They now understand the value of money. Money is so important now days and I believe it is good if they save that money and plan for their future rather than having a grand occasion. Fashion and modernization come together. People of different races are getting married. Some people in my family are married to people of other races too. I think this is good. If people from other races become family members, thoughts changes, new ideas come in. More importantly everyone has the right to choose their life partners and modernization has made this possible in the Indo-Fijian society as well.

11. Do you think the specific gender roles within a family during weddings are important? Why?

Yes, gender roles are important. Females have their own tasks to do and males have their own. I think this is important because there are some things that the males can manage well and other things which the females can manage well. For instance, if you ask a man to do the mehndi he will not be able to it as good as a female would do. Equally, if you ask a female to put up a shed, she won't be able to do that without the help of the males.

12. Do you think that the gender roles have changed in weddings? If so, how?

Yes, in olden days we saw that men were the heads in the wedding. They would control everything. Now women control everything. We can see this in the cities. They handle almost everything and the wedding takes place beautifully. Now instead of women cooking, men do the cooking and women help with the decorations. Now males and females help each other rather than exercising rights and telling each other that 'you have to do this and you have to do that'.

13. How would you describe the economic status of weddings today compared to the past?

I think it is equal. Nowadays people spend more on the venue, seating arrangements, reception party, clothes and decorations. In olden days, parents would have to buy wardrobes, dining sets, beds etc... to give in their daughters weddings. My parents also did this. Not that the grooms family would ask for all this, parents at that time gave all this. It was a trend. Normally in the villages

but in the cities this wasn't that common at that time. Now it has been wiped off. Similarly in the villages, it is not practiced anymore. I think this is the fastest change that has occurred in the weddings.

14. What is your opinion on the Hindu weddings which has one of the couple who does not speak/understand Hindi?

Well, the best solution to this would be to translate the wedding mantras. In other times I have noticed that two weddings take place. One would be a Hindu wedding and other would be a Christian wedding.

15. What is your perspective on the gift exchange in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

The bride's family normally gives gifts in terms of gold to the bride. Other small rituals also include giving of gifts. For example, in Gupt daan, the bride's family puts a gold pendant or gold ear studs inside a dough and places that on the 'lota'. This is received by the grooms mother or fua. Otherwise the gifts are received by the guests. I think gift exchange is a normal gesture. It is a happy occasion and the newly wedded couple should receive something to as a blessing to start their new life.

16. What is your opinion on the monetary exchange between families from both sides in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

Yes, monetary exchange takes place from both sides. The bride's sisters have a task of hiding the groom's shoes so when the groom is ready to take the bride and asks for his shoes, the bride's sisters would not give it until the groom gives them money. This does not have to be a huge amount. Just a little amount would do. It is a sort of joke for entertainment in the wedding. The bride's family also gives a little amount in the tilak ceremony. However, some people start talking about the amount of money received. They always want more money to be given. In my experience, there was a wedding which I attended and the bride's parents were poor people. There is a ritual that when the groom sits to eat in the mandap, some of his uncles and brothers or cousins should also sit with him to eat and they will only start eating when the bride's father or other family members come and put some money before their plates. In this particular wedding, the bride's family kept putting money, coins at first and notes after, but the groom's family did not eat. They started after the groom father had a total of \$20 put before him. On the contrary, in another wedding, the groom's family did not wait for the money. As soon as the food was served they started eating. It was later realized by the bride's father that no one had put money so he quickly put \$5 each in front of all of the people who ate in the mandap.

17. Do you think bollywood movies play a role in the transition of traditional hindu weddings in Fiji? If so, how?

Yes, they do. The easiest and commonest example that I can give you is the folk song. The bollywood songs have fully occupied its place in the weddings. Children wouldn't dance on folk songs. It is only the bollywood song which

would make them want to dance. Folk songs have their own importance yet I think this is disappearing in wedding now. We would find them in the village weddings but it is not very common in the cities now days. Another thing is the placing of the tikka on the forehead. Now days when the priests put the tikkas on the forehead people place on hand behind their head. This is copied from bollywood. This seriously never used to happen in indo- Fijian weddings. Adding onto that, brides want designer sarees, bridal wear which look similar to those worn by actresses, same make up worn by actresses. It is getting common.

18. If given opportunity, explain what are some of the things you would change in the way traditional Indo-Fijian weddings are conducted?

I would want the weddings to be simple, the main rituals to be carried out simply and in a proper manner and for children to understand that the rituals are more important in a wedding than any attire or make up.

19. What do you perceive on the future of Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremonies?

I think it will keep changing. The ceremony (mantras and chants) wouldn't change but other things will change. People will have weddings in whatever way it is convenient to them. We will definitely see a lot of legal marriages. Maybe marriages will take place among family members and there will be big parties for the guest later. Change will be constant.

Interview Transcript

Participant Information

Name: Priya Lal

Gender: Female

Age: 40

Place of residence: Labasa

Questions:

- 1. Do you think wedding is an important ceremony in the Hindu way of life in Fiji?**

Yes, it important. However, I don't think many people understand its importance.

- 2. How would you describe an Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremony in 5 words or less? Please elaborate on your answer?**

It is a promise for life. An indo-Fijian wedding has many examples which tell people that the couple who is getting married is incomplete without each other. It is where both individuals promise each other that they will be with each other till death comes. Promises are made. Vows are taken. It is believed that your life partner will always be with you.

- 3. In your opinion do you think that the way the wedding ceremonies are carried out today is different to how it used to be carried out 15-20 years? If so do you think there have been massive changes or have there been only minor changes?**

I think there have been minor changes because weddings are conducted the same way. Only thing that I have noticed is that there fewer guests in the wedding today. Weddings are organized in a proper manner, in a better way.

- 4. Which part of the wedding ceremony has undergone major changes?**

I don't think anything has undergone major change but little changes. It depends on how people think.

- 5. Can you identify some of these changes?**

Yes, we can say that people now inter-marry, there is no dowry system and women are given a better place in the society. They are not given away like pigs but treated much better and have been given an option to decide for themselves.

6. In your opinion which of these changes are good and should have taken place which of these are bad, those that should not have taken place?

I think all the changes which I have mentioned are good and should have taken place because all those things were a stigma in the society. Every person should be given equal status regardless of the skin color, race, religion and gender.

7. Can you suggest some ways in which these changes have positively/negatively affected the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) society?

Yes, they have positively affected the society because it has changed the society's mindset. One of my lady friends mother-in-law always looked down at her because she was a dark skinned person and her husband was light skinned. Her mother-in-law always thought of her as a disgrace to the family but she was really skilled at cooking. All the family members and other guests who would visit them always suggested her to open a restaurant. She did that and now she is a very rich lady. Even her mother in law is proud of her now. Her mother-in-law saw that other women were treating their daughter-in-laws very well. So she changed her ways too.

8. In your perspective are there more love marriages or arranged marriages?

There are more love marriages. I had an arranged marriage but all my children had love marriages. We were okay with that.

9. Is this similar to the ratio that one would have achieved 20 years ago?

No, I don't think it is similar to the ratio that one would achieve 20 years back. At our time arranged marriages were really famous and im proud to say that arranged marriages work really well. I would say they work much better than love marriages.

10. How would you relate the changes in traditional wedding ceremony to:

- a) Migration of Indo-Fijians overseas**
- b) Education**
- c) Modernization**
- d) Fashion**

I don't think all this have necessarily changed any ritual or custom. People have only changed their priority. They would now spend more at the things they would usually save more in and save more in the things they would usually spend more in. For example, brides spend more on their makeup and dressing rather than spending on decorations and food. The couple which is getting married would already be in a relationship. They would know each other from years and then get married. They would study, work and save enough and take the financial responsibility of their weddings. Parents do not have to worry at all.

11. Do you think the specific gender roles within a family during weddings are important? Why?

Yes, gender roles are important for people to know how each person who is a close family is related to the bride or groom. Each person has a role assigned according to their gender. For example, the Fuas', as they are ladies are supposed to do the lawa and the matkarauwa. The brothers are supposed to bring the bride out of the room. The Bhabis' are supposed to be with the bride and look after her throughout the wedding.

12. Do you think that the gender roles have changed in weddings? If so, how?

Yes, they have changed. Now, even the brothers hide the groom's shoes. It doesn't necessarily have to be the sisters. The sister and brother-in-law can make the 'peedha' (the bench on which the groom and the bride will sit on), it doesn't have to be the Fua and Fuffa anymore.

13. How would you describe the economic status of weddings today compared to the past?

It is more expensive to conduct a wedding now. It was not that expensive before. People used woods and open fire places to cook. Now most people use gas stoves. The price of gas is so high. Jewelry is so expensive and gold is the most important thing in weddings. People would want to see how much gold was worn by the family.

14. What is your opinion on the Hindu weddings which has one of the couple who does not speak/understand Hindi?

Everything should be translated. It wouldn't only help that non Hindi speaker. It would help everyone.

15. What is your perspective on the gift exchange in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

I think it is not compulsory. Whatever can be given with love should be accepted with love. The only bad thing about gift exchange is that people start having expectations that so and so gifts would be received.

16. What is your opinion on the monetary exchange between families from both sides in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

Mostly, whatever is given is accepted by both families. Sometimes there is a competition on who gives more. Money is goddess Lakshmi. The goddess of wealth and I think money should be used wisely to safeguard wealth and also to respect goddess Lakshmi.

17. Do you think bollywood movies play a role in the transition of traditional hindu weddings in Fiji? If so, how?

Yes. Folk songs are replaced by bollywood songs. Before men used to wear suits in weddings, now they wear sherwaanis and jodhpuri suits. All this is copied from movies. The turban is also worn. There are now fancy shoes (The ones with

the ends sharp and lifted).They look more like a kings shoes worn in ancient times.

18. If given opportunity, explain what are some of the things you would change in the way traditional Indo-Fijian weddings are conducted?

I would want it to be simpler in terms of the number of days used during a wedding function.

19. What do you perceive on the future of Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremonies?

I think that many things will change in the future and we will be conducting marriages in a different way altogether however the actual ceremony and rituals will not change.

Interview Transcript

Participant Information

Name: Ram Sumer

Gender: Male

Age: 52

Place of residence: Savusavu

Questions:

- 1. Do you think wedding is an important ceremony in the Hindu way of life in Fiji?**

Yes, definitely it is very important.

- 2. How would you describe an Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremony in 5 words or less? Please elaborate on your answer?**

It is an important event. It is very important because for two individuals to live together as a couple without getting married was and will never be acceptable. To start a family wedding is the first and the most important step. The Hindu society doesn't accept a relationship which exists without the bond of marriage. It is bright in terms of that it has a lot of different activities carried out through out. The wedding normally span over months and weeks but now it is only a week or less.

- 3. In your opinion do you think that the way the wedding ceremonies are carried out today is different to how it used to be carried out 15-20 years? If so do you think there have been massive changes or have there been only minor changes?**

Yes, there have been changes. I think major changes. From the venue to the clothes and even the rituals I think have undergone major changes.

- 4. Which part if the wedding ceremony has undergone major changes?**

In my perspective, I think the rituals have now become shorter. As I stated earlier weddings now span for only a week. Just imagine, from months now down to a week. I think there cannot be a better example of a major change which I can give you. The reason behind this is that people now want to carry out only the most important rituals. Other small rituals are skipped.

- 5. Can you identify some of these changes?**

The bride's family members were supposed to gather months and weeks before the wedding day. From here people would be assigned several duties. The

wedding cards at our times did not exist. Invitations were given in a different way. Home grown and homemade haldi together with two or three grains of rice were given to people as an auspicious form of invitation. Every known family was visited. All this took weeks. Now cards are posted and people prefer to make phone calls. The immediate family members at times arrive only a day or two before the wedding day. This also happened in my youngest daughter's wedding. Her older siblings living in overseas arrived a day before her wedding day.

6. In your opinion which of these changes are good and should have taken place which of these are bad, those that should not have taken place?

I think the time span getting shorter is not a good thing as people are unable to fully enjoy a wedding. Half of the rituals are left out; people only seem to rush around.

7. Can you suggest some ways in which these changes have positively/negatively affected the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) society?

I think it has negatively affected the indo-Fijian society because the Indian society has always been based on the underlying rituals and principles of the past. If things keep on changing this way the society would soon have nothing left on which they can base their culture and religion. They will once again have to build their identity. As we know many things have already changed and we also know that all this will not come back. People who used to practice the rituals in a proper manner have died and the young generation doesn't know much of it. They just do what they know and if this is shortened anymore then it is obvious that the indo-Fijian society will be at the verge of losing most of what it has.

8. In your perspective are there more love marriages or arranged marriages?

If you are talking about the present then I would say that there are more love marriages.

9. Is this similar to the ratio that one would have achieved 20 years ago?

I myself had a love marriage. My wife's parents were against our relationship because at that time love marriage wasn't a common thing. Girls particularly couldn't speak against their parents. The ratio was no where similar to what it is today. Our children had all the freedom to choose their life partners.

10. How would you relate the changes in traditional wedding ceremony to:

- a) Migration of Indo-Fijians overseas**
- b) Education**
- c) Modernization**
- d) Fashion**

Yes, migration has affected the wedding ceremonies. People who migrate overseas do not wish to have traditional marriages. Speaking with experience I have heard from a lot of people that children in overseas have open relationships. They go out with whoever they want and this goes on for

months only. Then they want to come and get married to someone in Fiji, Girls especially. Girls marry them and go overseas just to find out that they have been brought there to look after the boys elderly parents while the boy himself already has wife and kids. This is the same for the boys too. This concept has totally ruined the meaning of a traditional marriage. Marriage means that you will be faithful and loyal to one person all your life and promise to give them all the happiness in the world. I don't see that happening now days. People walk out with whom they think they love for the moment!

Education of course has taught people that happiness doesn't lie in material things and that I think is a contributing factor that has changed many things in the weddings. People want to go on with short simple marriages. They want to save. In our times weddings had to be grand. People should see that you are married so that in future rumors of girls eloping could be ignored. Modernization has brought class into weddings. People should eat in good plates; sit on benches and tables, served tissues and packed sweets. In my wedding, invited guests sat on the ground to eat and sweets at that time were not served. Only food was served.

Fashion has been there all the time. Women as usual want to dress better than each other. Their makeup and dress has always meant more to them than what actually happens in the wedding. Some women seriously believe that the more expensive things they wear make them look even prettier. It is about time women should change their thoughts.

11. Do you think the specific gender roles within a family during weddings are important? Why?

Yes, gender roles are important. Men have always been organizing weddings and I think it is better if this trend continues because it will be hard for a woman to control everything since wedding is a big responsibility. However, women do believe that they can still organize things better. In my experience I have seen that women have organized weddings but personally I don't think that it was as good as a man would do. I organized all my children's weddings according to my taste and preferences and there was nothing that anyone could complain about. My wife also conveyed some of her wishes which I did take into consideration; otherwise everything was according to my thoughts. Women have other things which they have to do. Organization is better when done by a man. I have also seen that when given an opportunity, women tend to overspend on unnecessary items.

12. Do you think that the gender roles have changed in weddings? If so, how?

Yes, they have changed. Women are now asking for equality. However, I do believe that women are equal, or probably more than equal. They just don't realize the rights given to them. I think what they are trying to do now is to prove themselves superior to males.

13. How would you describe the economic status of weddings today compared to the past?

It depends on how grand the wedding is yet things are more expensive now. In my wedding, all home grown things were used so all we had to do was to make a shed and buy new clothes. Now people also have to buy other things. Some hire halls. So yes it is more expensive to have weddings now.

14. What is your opinion on the Hindu weddings which has one of the couple who does not speak/understand Hindi?

Intermarriages are good. Everything should be explained to that person before the wedding commences.

15. What is your perspective on the gift exchange in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

It is a good thing. In my wedding a lot of gifts were given. Everything which is given is of use to the newly wedded couple. In my case, many gifts filled my up kitchen. So you would know that they were dining sets, glasses etc. The bride's family I think gives more. In wedding no gift exchange took place between our families because I was against accepting any wardrobes or mattresses. We only accepted what the guests gave and some of it was given to our poor neighbors in the village as I thought they were in more need of it than us.

16. What is your opinion on the monetary exchange between families from both sides in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

I do not approve of it. It sometimes causes arguments or dislikes between families. I believe that wedding is a bond of love and respect and money as we all know can influence the most respected persons thought as well. So it is better to not have any money dealings. Instead of money I think little gifts of appreciation could be given. It would look better too and no one can complain that less money was given or compare the amount of money given with other weddings. This was what I did in my both daughter's weddings and everything was a smooth sail.

17. Do you think bollywood movies play a role in the transition of traditional Hindu weddings in Fiji? If so, how?

Yes, ofcourse. The bridal wears are named now days. The best saris would be named after the most famous bollywood actresses and the prices would also be so high. Another ritual which I noticed is that in Punjabi weddings the bride should wear bangles with dangling attached to it (below). She must shake her bangles above her sisters and if it falls on one of them it means that she would be getting married soon. This is copied and is now being practiced in some weddings in Fiji. This has also brought good business to the shops which sell such stuff.

18. If given opportunity, explain what are some of the things you would change in the way traditional Indo-Fijian weddings are conducted?

There is nothing that I would want to change but I would want to maintain and restore all the rituals and ceremonies so that we don't lose our identity.

19. What do you perceive on the future of Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremonies?

I think weddings will always be there but one thing or another would be added or removed in every wedding.

Interview Transcript

Participant Information

Name: Sukh Raji

Gender: Female

Age: 80

Place of residence: Labasa

Questions:

- 1. Do you think wedding is an important ceremony in the Hindu way of life in Fiji?**

Yes, it is important and it is a good thing.

- 2. How would you describe an Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremony in 5 words or less? Please elaborate on your answer?**

It is a loud and a happy occasion.

- 3. In your opinion do you think that the way the wedding ceremonies are carried out today is different to how it used to be carried out 15-20 years? If so do you think there have been massive changes or have there been only minor changes?**

There have been little, minor changes.

- 4. Which part of the wedding ceremony has undergone major changes?**

The types of marriages have changed. Wedding are conducted in different ways, some try to incorporate as much as possible the traditional aspect whereas others wish to have modern weddings.

- 5. Can you identify some of these changes?**

Before, in our times men and women did not see each other before the wedding day. Parents do not have much saying now.

- 6. In your opinion which of these changes are good and should have taken place which of these are bad, those that should not have taken place?**

It is good for the kids but I don't think it is good for the parents. However as long as the boy, girl and parents are happy the society accepts everything nowadays.

- 7. Can you suggest some ways in which these changes have positively/negatively affected the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) society?**

It depends on how the different people see changes. For some it maybe good and for others it may have negatively affected the society.

8. In your perspective are there more love marriages or arranged marriages?

Love marriages. Parents nowadays tell their children to look for their life partners themselves. Children want a person of their own choice when parents arrange marriages and they do not work out, children blame parents then arguments and drifts in family occur.

9. Is this similar to the ratio that one would have achieved 20 years ago?

No. It was all arranged marriages before very few love marriages. I arranged marriages for all my six children.

10. How would you relate the changes in traditional wedding ceremony to:

- a) **Migration of Indo-Fijians overseas**
- b) **Education**
- c) **Modernization**
- d) **Fashion**

A wedding happened in Labasa where the bride was from overseas but there was no change. It happened just as a normal wedding. However, some people do incorporate new ideas. For, example, a wedding I recently attended in Suva, they gave small gifts to all guests. Education has had a lot of affects. Educated children fail to understand the importance of all the rituals. The parents are not allowed to interfere. The children think that many customs are just a waste of time and money; however they say this because they do not know the importance of the rituals.

11. Do you think the specific gender roles within a family during weddings are important? Why?

Yes, it is. It makes the wedding more lively and exciting and the whole family is involved and is aware which roles to play.

12. Do you think that the gender roles have changed in weddings? If so, how?

I think women's roles have changed a lot. Women now control the weddings. Before, parents need not ask their daughters before giving consent for marriages. They arrange the wedding and the girl without asking any questions get married. This is no longer the case now. Before I the girls did not want to get married they did not have the audacity to refuse maybe due to the fear of their parents; especially their fathers. However, girls now refuse to marry when they don't want to.

13. How would you describe the economic status of weddings today compared to the past?

It is expensive now due to rising prices. Before everything such as bean, urdi, haldi, arhar, was planted at home and used in weddings from homes. It wasn't bought. Now everything is bought. Food before was served on leaves. Now

everyone prefers paper plates. No one wants to eat on leaves. People before would sit down on the ground to eat but now everyone want benches; fancy decorated seats.

14. What is your opinion on the Hindu weddings which has one of the couple who does not speak/understand Hindi?

The non Hindi speaking person should have someone with him throughout the wedding to explain everything. Many people I have seen have got married this way.

15. What is your perspective on the gift exchange in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

This is important. It has been there from the beginning. The bride's mother sends clothes for the groom's mother. Now the groom's brothers, sisters and father all get clothes. It has become more expensive.

16. What is your opinion on the monetary exchange between families from both sides in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

This has also been there from ages. Money matters less than the girl in this case. The girl's family cannot do much. They have to give. Money is given in almost of rituals and customs.

You have married seven girls so you are well versed with how a wedding takes place. In cities maybe only a member or two from a family will come only for one day in the wedding, what about in the villages?

Yes, village people mainly come to help. They come almost every day. This relieves the family from the tension of arranging men power to carry out task.

Before, there was dowry system but when our ancestors came to Fiji they did not practice it here maybe because they were poor. But people here do give wardrobes and beds when they marry their daughters. Do you think that's a form of dowry?

Yes, at some instances, the groom's family knows that all that you have stated will be given after the wedding so they come prepared with a carrier. The bride's family also gives sweets and money. Before cows were also given. Five cows were given in my wedding. We also gave all these in all our daughters' weddings except one daughter because her in-laws did not believe in all this. However, we never took anything from our daughter in law.

17. Do you think bollywood movies play a role in the transition of traditional Hindu weddings in Fiji? If so, how?

I don't watch a lot of movies so I don't really know but I have noticed that lok geets are getting eliminated and bollywood songs are now replacing them. I have also noticed the throwing of rice and flowers. Rice is something we eat and in our hindu religion we should not disrespect food by throwing it on the

ground. Flowers are offered to god in venerations. We should also respect that but some priests and family members want all this to be practiced. Films are destroying our culture.

18. If given opportunity, explain what are some of the things you would change in the way traditional Indo-Fijian weddings are conducted?

Well, many things have changed already. I would just want things to change at a slower pace so that there some traditional aspects are left for our future generations to enjoy and identify as their own.

19. What do you perceive on the future of Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremonies?

There will be more legal marriages (court marriage). Young people are already accepting all these live-in policies so if in future weddings take place, our culture will die out.

Interview Transcript

Participant Information

Name: Akaash Prasad

Gender: Male

Age: 21

Place of residence: Lautoka

Questions:

- 1. Do you think wedding is an important ceremony in the Hindu way of life in Fiji?**

Yes it is. It is a gathering for a family after many years at times. They get together and celebrate together.

- 2. How would you describe an Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremony in 5 words or less?**

It is a cocktail of ceremonies.

Please elaborate on your answer?

It has a lot of rituals in one particular ceremony on both the brides and the grooms.

- 3. In your opinion do you think that the way the wedding ceremonies are carried out today is different to how it used to be carried out 15-20 years? If so do you think there have been massive changes or have there been only minor changes?**

There are has been some changes.

- 4. Which part if the wedding ceremony has undergone major changes?**

It is not the wedding rituals that have changed; it is mostly what circumscribes that has changed drastically.

- 5. Can you identify some of these changes?**

Comparing to the past, a few years in Fiji and mostly in India there were no inter-caste marriages. People in the Hindu hierarchy were not allowed to inter marry. That has changed because many people in Fiji are no longer aware of their caste right now. Dowry system as well has been alleviated as well. Some people are shifting towards smaller and less expensive wedding but there are still some people who have big budget Hindu wedding. It is a good thing. The inter-caste system and the dowry system have been removed for the good of

people. On the other hand the competition which has built up in the marriages such as in villages, if one family does a big scale wedding the next family has to do something bigger than that.

6. In your opinion which of these changes are good and should have taken place which of these are bad, those that should not have taken place?

Both the changes mentioned are good for the society and should have taken place.

7. Can you suggest some ways in which these changes have positively/negatively affected the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) society?

Scientifically speaking marrying in the same caste, people were keeping all the bad genes in the society, now we see that there is a huge decline in all those genetic diseases that were in the past. There are only a few coming up. This could be attributed to this change in the inter-caste marriages. Absence of the dowry system saves a lot of money which could be used by the bride's family in other parts of the marriage.

8. In your perspective are there more love marriages or arranged marriages?

There are more love marriages. Parents are becoming more open with their children because times are changing and most people are changing with time. There are still some parents who are hesitant in accepting the changes in the society and still prefer arranged marriages.

9. Is this similar to the ratio that one would have achieved 20 years ago?

No. There were still love marriages in the past but what we are seeing now is that people are doing love marriages more openly. It also comes in the papers at times that this person has married someone and it's a love marriage.

10. How would you relate the changes in traditional wedding ceremony to:

a) Migration of Indo-Fijians overseas.

When people go oversea they learn new things. They go overseas and see how the actual residents living there do it. White marriages are mostly small and there are small number of people invited, they go to a park and put on the ring and everyone go back home. Migrants see that and try to bring it in their own culture as a means of changing things for their own betterment.

b) Education

People are getting educated and they are starting to see things that were not that important. From traditional perspective everything is important but as people are getting educated they start to see all those things which had been done before which are not actually that important and do not have any importance in the life of the person, they have been done because they happened sometimes before and people have carried that forward. They

now value money and try to save more. They have cut off what they think are unnecessary expenses.

c) Modernization

This is the same thing as education.

d) Fashion

Indian weddings have become more of a fashion parade. What we see is that the bride and even the grooms they choose to spend on their dresses more than anything else and that is actually not a good thing. That is something that has changed from the past to something that is happening now.

11. Do you think the specific gender roles within a family during weddings are important?

Yes

Why?

Weddings which happen now are totally controlled by females, as I have seen on many occasions. If I may relate to a real life incident there was this wedding of a girl whose father had passed away many years ago and her mother was working and she took the burden of doing everything in the wedding. It was done really well and there was nothing to complain about in the wedding. It was just as a male would have done it so as I see it that the gender roles are changing now and it doesn't have much effect on the way the weddings are done. Females can also coordinate it well. Male dominance is not always necessary.

12. Do you think that the gender roles have changed in weddings? If so, how?

Like before there was this concept of Sati. Do you think there is equality now or men are still dominating the society or do you feel that women are more in power?

There are some women who overpower their husbands but generally speaking we have a lot more to do in terms of this male dominated society. All the things that you mentioned for example the female had to burn herself with the husband and the dowry system has been totally alleviated in Fiji. Women are controlling their lives to much extent. We have come a long way from that time but there is still some work that should be done so that we can get equality in the society.

13. How would you describe the economic status of weddings today compared to the past?

People spend much more than what they used to in the past. This can however be attributed to the rising costs of things, materials and all that is required in the wedding. People also choose to show off to their families. 'I can do this, I can spend this much', hoping that they would compete with them and do something better.

14. What is your opinion on the Hindu weddings which has one of the couple who does not speak/understand Hindi?

Not only the non Hindi speaking people but the Hindi speaking people are lost in the Hindu weddings especially in regards to the Sanskrit mantras which are used. I am sure that just a handful of people understand what the priest is saying. However, for the people who are non Hindi speaking there should be something done before the wedding or even during the wedding the priest may translate as to what is happening in the ceremonies and all those rituals that are performed so that that person understands and indirectly Hindi speaking person also understands what is happening.

15. What is your perspective on the gift exchange in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

As I see it is just a cover up for the dowry system which had been going on for those many generations. However, there are some weddings in which there is a minimal exchange of gifts. There are a lot of weddings where two families exchange a lot of gifts and my perspective on this is that it is as I have mentioned about the fashion aspects of the wedding this is a bit of the competition between the two families as to who has the upper hand in this bond, the wedding. That is actually the role that this gift exchange plays in the wedding.

16. What is your opinion on the monetary exchange between families from both sides in the Hindu wedding ceremony? Such as the concept of giving money in the tilak.

I think this is a ritual gone long. In the past people gave some money as a token of love to the other family and if and the other family had to return a little more than that, just so that everything goes smoothly. But now as you have mentioned it becomes financial gain for one the families. People have started to abuse that ritual. However there are some families which give and take small amounts as token of love.

17. Do you think bollywood movies play a role in the transition of traditional hindu weddings in Fiji? If so, how?

Yes, definitely. Bollywood is entertainment industry and everything that they try to show us they put as much money into it as possible and some people do not understand this that they are doing it in order to gain more money when the movie actually comes out so that people get something good to look at. People here are trying to compete with those in bollywood and they are literally selling themselves off in trying to copy what happens in the movies by doing all those things. This has definitely had a huge impact on the weddings. People see what they do in the movies and they try to copy it here and in the process they end up spending a lot more money than necessary.

To add on to that, in India people are of different castes like Punjabis, bangoli's, gujratis and they have their own way of conducting marriages but we in Fiji are conducting marriages in a much generalized way.

Bollywood is showing us so many customs which we are trying to incorporate in our weddings. Will you be able to specify and ritual that is copied from the movies but did not exist in our Hindu wedding in Fiji?

Yes, I did notice, this dolly the vehicle in which the bride is transported to her husband's house, we did not actually see much of that in Fiji, and probably it was there when the laborers came. Slowly it disappeared. I noticed this happening in one of the weddings where the bride was carried out of the garage and from there she sat in the care and left for her husband's place. That is something I picked up is changing in Fiji. Another thing is that we did not have this throwing of flowers.

18. If given opportunity, explain what are some of the things you would change in the way traditional Indo-Fijian weddings are conducted?

As I have seen it there are many things that should be changed in the Hindu weddings. One of them is the vows. Not intending any offense to any of the authorities but the vows that are used in the weddings has been used from what was created in the past before time era. There is actually one on the vows that states that after the wedding if the husband has to sell the family cow to anyone else he has to seek permission from the wife. This was totally applicable in the past because every family had their cow for milk but now it is hard to see that a family has a cow in Fiji. As I see it this means that before making any financial decision that husband must seek for his wives permission.

Another thing is that the bride's father must wash the groom's feet. This I see as a sign of disrespect and I think it should be changed. This was a sign of the bride's family being inferior to the groom's family.

19. What do you perceive on the future of Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremonies?

I think the weddings will be compressed in much shorter time spans. People due to time and financial constraints will compress it into a day or two.

Interview Transcript

Participant Information

Name: Shristi Singh

Gender: Female

Age: 21

Place of residence: Suva

Questions:

1. Do you think wedding is an important ceremony in the Hindu way of life in Fiji?

Yes, I think it is very important because it defines the existence of Hindu culture in Fiji. Comparing and contrasting other aspects of the Hindu culture for example the birth of a child, our weddings and funerals are the only things left as the symbols of the Hindu culture in Fiji whereas the mundan and other things from the of birth of the child to the adulthood, all the sanskars have died.

2. How would you describe an Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremony in 5 words or less? Creative

Please elaborate on your answer? *Its creative in terms of how the mandap is set up, how the bride dresses, the jewelries and in terms of all the rituals that take place, sangeet, haldi.*

3. In your opinion do you think that the way the wedding ceremonies are carried out today is different to how it used to be carried out 15-20 years? If so do you think there have been massive changes or have there been only minor changes?

Yes, there have been changes. There have been major changes from what has happened a few decades ago and what is happening right now.

4. Which part if the wedding ceremony has undergone major changes?

I personally feel that the whole wedding has changed.

5. Can you identify some of these changes?

Looking at the weddings in Fiji, they have become more commercial from what a real traditional wedding is supposed to be in terms of the rituals. If you look at India, our mother land, it's a month long process and in Fiji is spans around just weeks. The rituals are short and simple; condensed.

- 6. In your opinion which of these changes are good and should have taken place which of these are bad, those that should not have taken place?**

The eradication of the dowry system is a good change and should have taken place whereas the changing of the rituals should not have taken place.

- 7. Can you suggest some ways in which these changes have positively/negatively affected the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) society?**

There have been some positive changes and some negative changes as well. Positive changes in the terms of the eradication of the dowry system as it is a relief to the parents because they know that they do not have to pay anything in return of their daughter getting married. The negative rituals in terms of the changing of the rituals because the bride and the groom do not really understand what they are doing and it becomes meaningless for them. Some of them do not even understand what the seven rounds mean. In my personal experience, my kaka got married and I asked him what he understood to which he replied that he didn't understand anything. All he could get was that after they exchanged the garlands they became husband and wife forever.

- 8. In your perspective are there more love marriages or arranged marriages?**

Looking at the Hindu society in Fiji today, I think there are more love marriages.

- 9. Is this similar to the ratio that one would have achieved 20 years ago?**

No, I think a few years back there were more arranged marriages.

- 10. How would you relate the changes in traditional wedding ceremony to:**

a) Migration of Indo-Fijians overseas. *The migration of our forefathers to us has been the main reason of the changes because when they came here they were all broken up, the cast system too and less priests came and as we all know that India is a very diverse place, a lot of culture combined, they fell in love with people of other culture and the marriage system combined.*

b) Education. *Education has caused a major fall of our society. Children now go to school and they do not learn the Sanskrit that they are supposed to learn. In India girls are not educated. They are kept home, educated at home and for girls their education is how to manage a house and for boys too it is all about how they keep their family happy. Getting educated means getting ambitious and we only see the economical part and not the religious part.*

c) Modernization. *Impact of technology in our lives, in terms of television and music has changed the way people think of traditional marriage. The folk songs was sung by old ladies but due to modernization there are now bollywood songs and children perform on it rather than the folk song that had to be there.*

d) Fashion. *It has negative effects on marriage. When women go to the weddings they are more interested on what the bride is wearing, how much it costs and whether it matches the current fashion trend. They do not see that she is getting married, it is a huge step in her life and that we should be blessing her. They want to see if it matches the groom's attire or not.*

Would you be able to reflect on the migration of Indo Fijians? *There are high numbers of migrants and when they come back to Fiji they are more financially secured, so do you think the way they conduct marriages is different to how common people do it?*

It is different because when people come back they want to have marriages according to what they like. Some want to finance their own because they want to have it in their own way. People get westernized. They want short simple wedding and save more.

11. Do you think the specific gender roles within a family during weddings are important? Why? *Yes, it is important. Looking at women, we are at a higher stake than men and if we forget or totally eradicate the roles of women, what are we going to do about our children. We as fua's (fathers sisters) and mouisi's (mothers sisters) are doing things for our nieces and nephews, but if we forget what we are supposed to do, our children's wedding will not be totally blessed. Since women are given the gift of giving birth they considered important in any religion throughout the world and they perform things better than men. Women are more organized.*

12. Do you think that the gender roles have changed in weddings? If so, how? *I think before the priests had more say. They would tell the ladies what has to be done. However the weddings that I have attended in Fiji it is not the priest who has more say it is the ladies who do things according to what they think is convenient and suitable.*

13. How would you describe the economic status of weddings today compared to the past? *I think it has become more commercial than a happy event. Example in 1940s weddings would have been conducted in a mandir giving it a spiritual air but now it is conducted in a hall. It is more of a competition between the families as to who has done more for the child, even between the bride and the groom people want to see who is better off. Even between siblings, they would want to have a bigger scale wedding compared to what the first married sibling had.*

14. What is your opinion on the Hindu weddings which has one of the couple who does not speak/understand Hindi? *If the bride or the groom doesn't understand the mantra it is a waste of time, energy and money. If you are getting married to someone it is the union of your heart and soul and if you don't understand what is going on that means you are not*

completely married from your side, from your heart. If, for example I were a non Hindu person getting married to a Hindu guy I love, I would have many questions in mind such a what am I supposed to do next, what am I doing etc. I will be really nervous. I think everything should be explained well so that they can adjust. It will avoid conflicts in future; they will think that my in laws are taking initiative in explaining things to me because they are whole heartedly accepting me.

15. What is your perspective on the gift exchange in the Hindu wedding ceremony? Like recalling, a father would give sofa sets, beds and wardrobes when he marries his daughter to someone.

From what you have just said, I think that gift exchange has covered the dowry system in Fiji. I think gifts should be in the form of shagun and not buying them dining sets ect because that is seen as a form of dowry. It does not have blessings. Going back, as you said you have attended your kakas wedding; did they also give him such things?

Yes they did. They gave him a dining set, mattresses and pillows. When we went to my kakas place I was shocked to see a truck coming with all these furniture and I asked my fua what all this was to which she replied that it is a gift they have given to my kaka and kaki as a blessing. I believe that's not a blessing. It causes speculation and negativity. My aaja had to explain that it was from their behalf and we did not ask for all that. But people would believe that.

16. What is your opinion on the monetary exchange between families from both sides in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

I think it is again a form of dowry. When I attended my kakas tilak and my fua started counting the amount of money that was in the thaali, she called out that it was this much. The ladies in my kakas family started gossiping about it, that they are such a rich family and that they should have given more. Instead of blessing the girl they started taunting that girl's family. I asked them if it is important to look at the money they give and they said yes, it shows their social status and their appreciation for the boy.

Yes, that is what is written on the wedding card that you are invited to bless the couple but according to you that doesn't happen?

Yes.

17. Do you think bollywood movies play a role in the transition of traditional hindu weddings in Fiji?If so, how?

Yes, from my experience of what happened yesterday, my non hindu friend and I were looking for a sari on the internet for her sister who is getting married. So when we clicked on the picture, the price occurred. One of them costs a \$145. When we went on the other website the same sari cost \$2000 because it was the same as what archana in pavitra rishta wore. I was shocked. The sari is sold in Fiji. They said it was the best deal because everyone wants to look like Archana, Katrina Kaif, Kareena Kapoor etc. All this affects the wedding terribly. It is supposed to be a simple traditional wedding but it becomes negatively affected.

Bollywood is polluting the wedding system. It does not matter if we have the money or not, it should be done at a big scale like in the bollywood movies.

18. If given opportunity, explain what are some of the things you would change in the way traditional Indo-Fijian weddings are conducted? *I would want to get married in a simple traditional way. Nothing high fashioned and trendy. Simple traditional Hindu wedding. Something affordable and beautiful. If you do not know your culture you cannot call yourself a Hindu.*

19. What do you perceive on the future of Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremonies?

I feel that if it is not conserved and things are not done in the right manner, it will fade away and there will be more paper marriages.

Interview Transcript

Participant Information

Name: Vidya Ram

Gender: Female

Age: 40

Place of residence: Suva

Questions:

- 1. Do you think wedding is an important ceremony in the Hindu way of life in Fiji?**

Yes, it is important in the Hindu way of life.

- 2. How would you describe an Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremony in 5 words or less? Please elaborate on your answer?**

It is expensive but beautiful occasion. There are a lot of expenses in a Hindu wedding. All this is done to make the wedding beautiful.

- 3. In your opinion do you think that the way the wedding ceremonies are carried out today is different to how it used to be carried out 15-20 years? If so do you think there have been massive changes or have there been only minor changes?**

Yes, it is different from what it used to be. I think there are minor changes.

- 4. Which part if the wedding ceremony has undergone major changes?**

The weddings customs and rituals are still the same. Other things like the way rituals are carried out have changed.

- 5. Can you identify some of these changes?**

The venues have changed. Brides now do not prefer to wear a lot of gold. They wear costume jewelries.

- 6. In your opinion which of these changes are good and should have taken place which of these are bad, those that should not have taken place?**

I think the changes which have taken place are good. As times change thoughts change too and this is reflected in the way the wedding ceremonies are carried out. For example people today are hiring temples and halls because they find it cheaper rather than building sheds which requires a lot of physical labor. The choice of women has also changed. Previously brides looked forward to wearing

a lot of gold in their wedding but today inspired by bollywood movies they prefer to wear costume jewelry.

7. Can you suggest some ways in which these changes have positively/negatively affected the Indo-Fijian (Hindu) society?

Well, I think these changes do not affect the rituals so it does not actually has any major impact, however it is notable today that the bollywood culture of dressing, especially for the bride is somewhat taking a wrong direction. In some wedding ceremonies it is seen that while the bride is happy wearing something similar to those work by the famous bollywood actresses, it does not look very decent.

8. In your perspective are there more love marriages or arranged marriages?

Definitely there are more love marriages today as people today have more freedom to socialize with each.

9. Is this similar to the ratio that one would have achieved 20 years ago?

No the ratio achieved 20 years ago would not even be half of what we would get today.

10. How would you relate the changes in traditional wedding ceremony to:

a) Migration of Indo-Fijians overseas

-Changes in the way the wedding is organized. More new ideas are brought in. Recently we had been to a wedding where the bride was from U.S.A. While the guests had dinner little gifts in form of socks, hand towels and body lotions were handed over. This was something new and the guests found it embarrassing to receive this as some felt degraded as they were in Fiji while others felt that the bride's family were showing off their family status.

b) Education

-Allows people to have more say in their life, especially for women they are given liberty to chose their life partners and even have a fair say in which the weddings are organized.

c) Modernization

-This has altered the ways in which rituals have been carried out. The kinds of clothes worn by guests, the music and the decorations keep changing with time to have the latest patterns.

d) Fashion

-People today love to walk with fashion, they do not mind spending money to get the most fashionable clothes and having the wedding ceremony organized in the most fashionable ways. It helps to see the changes in the trend of wedding ceremonies over a certain time frame.

11. Do you think the specific gender roles within a family during weddings are important? Why?

No I do not think it is very important today as families might not have a huge number of people to play specific roles and this can be fulfilled by anyone who is present. Also due to migration some families have most of their close members living in overseas and it might not be possible to have all of them present at the wedding therefore, it is a wise idea to allow those who are in Fiji to be given the opportunity. As long as the wedding ceremony does take place successfully.

12. Do you think that the gender roles have changed in weddings? If so, how?

Yes indeed gender roles have changed in the wedding ceremony. Roles played by men such as bringing the bride to the mandap is today done by the women and also some roles that had been played by men are today done by women. For example the Mama (mother's brother) plays a specific role in a ritual before the bride gets dressed in the wedding costume. Today if the mama is not present then this ritual is carried out by the Mami(mama's wife)

13. How would you describe the economic status of weddings today compared to the past?

Well it is very expensive compared to the past. One reason why its more expensive today is that previously a wedding was a family affair and all the members in the extended family had their share of responsibilities. A huge number of members meant that all tasks were carried out smoothly. Today as number in the family is getting smaller, the responsibility is placed on one small family, and therefore it becomes necessary for them to pay for most of the services to save time.

14. What is your opinion on the Hindu weddings which has one of the couple who does not speak/understand Hindi?

I believe translation is a good way to deal with such situation. If done by the pundit during the wedding it helps a lot because others guests who do not speak Hindi will be able to understand what the wedding ceremony is all about.

15. What is your perspective on the gift exchange in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

I think as far as the rituals are concerned, there is not any demand as to how much should be given but as people today see it as a question of their social status they tend to compete with each other. Sometimes certain elderly family members are made the head in the organization of wedding process as the parents may not be well aware of the custom. In this way those consulted to assist add more and more things to the list which eventually leads to a more expensive giving of gifts.

16. What is your opinion on the monetary exchange between families from both sides in the Hindu wedding ceremony?

Again this is not a part of a traditional Hindu wedding ceremony, people do give money as a form of gift but it only depends on how much one can afford. However it has been noticed that some families from the grooms side have unrealistic demands

such as buying of furniture etc... interestingly as the giving of furniture is no longer visible in some places, monetary gift is given to the groom to fulfill this. I believe this should stop as it becomes a burden on the poor families as the Indo-Fijian Hindu ceremony is already so expensive.

17. Do you think bollywood movies play a role in the transition of traditional Hindu weddings in Fiji? If so, how?

Yes definitely, today our youngsters are really inspired by bollywood movies and this has had a significant impact on our culture and therefore on the wedding process. In a way I can say that this has added to the wedding cost as well. Recently there was a wedding ceremony that I attended in Suva. As the bride came to the wedding mandap, we were informed by a few female relatives that the wedding costume was a designer piece which cost the family four thousand dollars because it was similar to that worn by a famous bollywood actress in a particular wedding scene. Even the wedding mandap was decorated with the same colors worn by the bride. The more changes we see in the movies the more changes we see in the wedding ceremonies as well. A sitting next to me was so fascinated by this told me that her daughter was getting married in the following month and she would certainly use the bollywood technique as well as it to her it looked modern and classy.

18. If given opportunity, explain what are some of the things you would change in the way traditional Indo-Fijian weddings are conducted?

I would stop the tradition of monetary exchange as I do not agree with it. The bride's family always gives much more than the grooms family.

19. What do you perceive on the future of Indo-Fijian (Hindu) wedding ceremonies?

With changing time, I believe a day will come when the ceremony will be a one day event and that too it will be done in a much simpler way. Young people today are more concerned on saving time and money and I am sure they will not bother to undergo most of the traditional acts in the wedding process.

THE END