

## Arranged Marriages

An arranged marriage also known as endogamy is the tradition in some cultures that parents select whom their child will marry. Arranged Marriages are popular in many countries in Asia and Africa such as Japan, China, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. Thousands of years ago, love marriages (marriages based on love) were common in East Indian culture. This type of marriage was called swamber and it became a problem because many people chose a partner for their appearance and/or wealth. Marriages started to fail and social leaders became concerned with swamber. Arranged marriages were introduced and they became very popular.<sup>1</sup> Anthropology is probably the most important discipline when researching arranged marriages. Reason being is because anthropology is the study of the culture and customs of human beings, and arranged marriages occur because of the beliefs and customs of some cultures. Different cultures believe in different types of marriage and it is important to study a culture in order to find out why they believe in certain customs. This research report focuses on how arranged marriages take place, why they occur, and the benefits and drawbacks of the process.

There are many different ways in which an arranged marriage can take place. The most extreme form is called a forced marriage where the bride and groom have no choice but to marry each other. These marriages take place in

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<sup>1</sup> [www.indobride.com/cultural/arranged\\_marriages.htm](http://www.indobride.com/cultural/arranged_marriages.htm)

the traditional Chinese practice and some upper Caste Hindu families. The less extreme form is where the future bride and groom have a say in the decision of their marriage. If one of them decides they do not want to go through with the arranged marriage, the marriage will not take place. In the Islamic religion, forced marriages are forbidden. Marriages must only take place with the consent of both partners, and they have a right to disagree with their parent's choice.<sup>2</sup> Every culture has a different tradition as to at what age the marriage is arranged, who arranges it, and who has to agree with it for the marriage to take place.

Sometimes there is a person who is hired and therefore responsible for finding a match for a male or female of marriageable age. This person researches the family of the person they chose for their client to marry. They look for insanity, felon and undesirable behavior. These days it has been a family friend or distant relative that approaches a family for a match. This person ensures that both families are of the same social, economic and religious status. They also make sure the families speak the same language, have the same religion, beliefs and values.<sup>3</sup>

After the client's family accepts the family in question, both families meet to discuss the marriage. They talk about their beliefs, values, issues that are important to them and expectation of each other. It is also during this time that a possible dowry is discussed. As arranged marriages have become more influenced by Western culture, sometimes couples can get engaged for six months before deciding to commit, or they may have a meal alone together.

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<sup>2</sup> Ganeri, 24

<sup>3</sup> [www.geocities.com/Wellesley/3321/win4a.htm](http://www.geocities.com/Wellesley/3321/win4a.htm)

Then both the bride and groom decide if they want to marry each other, if the answer is yes on both sides wedding plans begin.<sup>4</sup>

Depending on the culture of the two families involved in the marriage, sometimes a dowry is expected. A dowry can be money, property, jewelry, cattle of anything worth money that is given to the brides or grooms family. In India and China where daughters are seen as a burden, a large dowry would be offered to attract possible grooms. In Muslim families, the Grooms family has to give a dowry to the bride to make sure she is financially independent.<sup>5</sup>

Many people living in North America who are ignorant concerning arranged marriages have false conclusions on the subject. Every arranged marriage is different; for some people it is arranged when they are 3 for others it can be 23 and some people have a choice in whom they marry while others do not. The ultimate question is why would people allow their parents to decide whom they get to marry?

In Asia where most arranged marriages take place, children have more respect for their parents. A group's marriage practices match its values and in India, arranged marriages reflect the Indian value of children accepting parental authority. To young Indians, choosing a partner is too important an issue for the to be responsible for alone. They see adults as being wise so they trust them to find a good mate for themselves<sup>6</sup>. This is an observation an anthropologist would make since the customs of the culture are reflected by their values.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.geocities.com/Wellesley/3321/win4a.htm](http://www.geocities.com/Wellesley/3321/win4a.htm)

<sup>5</sup> [www.encyclopedia.msn.com/encyclopedia\\_761574825\\_1\\_4/marriage.html](http://www.encyclopedia.msn.com/encyclopedia_761574825_1_4/marriage.html)

<sup>6</sup> Geldart. 100

Many Indians believe that love is a peaceful emotion based on long-term commitment and devotion to family. They believe that love can be created between two people under the right conditions. Also because the arranged marriage tends to be a union of two families of strong moral and cultural values, it provides checks and balances against areas that may ruin it, such as infidelity.<sup>7</sup>

Chandra Ganju is from Kashmir and has a successful 23 year arranged marriage with a man also from Kashmir. She is a writer as well as a lawyer and she informs people about arranged marriages:

Arranged marriage does not mean to be tied to somebody without your consent. It involves a lot more than getting two people to spend rest of their lives together because their parents think it is good for them that way. Arranged marriage prevents us from having intimate physical relationships with ten people before we find the right partner, that too if we are lucky. Marriages are not contracts you make today and break tomorrow. It is a union of two souls, two individuals, two families, and two cultures. This cannot be done just by meeting some body at a club or at a beach and by dating for days together.

Marriage is based on lot of factors. Economic, educational, social, cultural, and most of all romantic compatibility is very important too. In arranged marriages loving and caring parents or family friends or relatives help in looking for compatible match, keeping in view all the requisite factors.

After matching compatibility of education, family, profession, the boy and the girl meet each other to look for their mutual liking and understanding. If they like each other then they agree to take final vows. They don't have to worry about family background or economical background. Parents and family friends have already taken care of it. Then two sets of families also meet and get to know each other's life style. So after all this work out, possibility of any unknown factor creating marital discord is minimal.

(<http://www.sawf.org/newedit/edit08112003/reflections.asp>)

There are many advantages and disadvantages to arranged marriages. The advantages are you do not have to be solely responsible for the big decision, you do not waste time dating people, you know that you will not be alone

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<sup>7</sup> [www.sergekreutz.com/arranged\\_marriages.htm](http://www.sergekreutz.com/arranged_marriages.htm)

because your parents will find someone for you. To not marry is to disgrace your family in cultures that practice arranged marriages. Also you trust that your parents will arrange a marriage for you with someone that is a good person, one that you will have a good life with.<sup>8</sup> The disadvantages are that you might be forced to marry someone that you do not want to marry or you may already be in love with someone that your parents do not approve of. Also once you get married, you may realize the person you married is horrible and treats you really badly. Then you would be reluctant to divorce them because you might bring shame upon your family or might lose custody of possible children.<sup>9</sup>

A big advantage to arranged marriages is that countries that use arranged marriages have a lower divorce rate than the countries that do not. India's divorce rate is 8% compared to that of United States which is 55%. This means that arranged marriages in India, last longer than free-choice marriages in USA. These statistics do not necessarily mean that arranged marriages are more successful than free-choice marriages, they just mean that marriages in India last longer. Since the values and beliefs of Indians are different than those of Americans, these statistics may be misleading. Indians do not believe in divorce as much as Americans do. It is not so great that India has a low divorce rate because there is evidence of many marriages there that are not successful. The success of marriage is measured in quality, not quantity. In India, it is a disgrace to your family if you get divorced. If you are a woman, you will be a burden on someone, which is why most unhappily married people stay together. Some

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<sup>8</sup> Ardavan, 46

<sup>9</sup> [www.students.Faulkner.edu/depts/sbs/readings/an1301/japan.htm](http://www.students.Faulkner.edu/depts/sbs/readings/an1301/japan.htm)

religions also do not allow for divorce, which is another reason why unhappy couples stay together.<sup>10</sup> Therefore it does not matter if India has a low divorce rate if the marriages are not all happy. In North America, marriages that last three years could have been successful for two years, but since the marriage was no longer successful the couple divorced. Maybe the couple should have tried harder to deal with their problems and stay together, but in North America divorce is more accepted than in India so people do not mind doing it as much.

Today, some young Indians in Canada are adopting the Canadian culture, and defying their parents so they do not have to have an arranged marriage. Most young Indians living in Canada are in touch with their culture, respectful to their parents and they will let them arrange a less extreme form of arranged marriage. This less extreme form allows the male and female to get to know each other a little better before the ceremony, and allows the male and female to have a say in whom they marry.<sup>11</sup> Arranged marriages are getting more popular in some places through online matchmaking, and less popular in other places as they start dating like in North America.<sup>12</sup> Anthropologists will continue to study the culture and customs of people who practice arranged marriage to see how this institution changes in the next couple of decades.

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<sup>10</sup> [www.tamil.net/list/2001-03/msg00019.html](http://www.tamil.net/list/2001-03/msg00019.html)

<sup>11</sup> Penney, 43

<sup>12</sup> [www.geocities.com/Wellesley/3321/win4a.htm](http://www.geocities.com/Wellesley/3321/win4a.htm)

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