

**A descriptive visual analysis of the survival of Tamil
arranged marriage rituals and the impact of commercialism**

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that A DESCRIPTIVE VISUAL ANALYSIS OF THE SURVIVAL OF TAMIL ARRANGED MARRIAGE RITUALS AND THE IMPACT OF COMMERCIALISM is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Date: February 2016

SUMMARY

Title: A descriptive visual analysis of the survival of Tamil arranged marriage rituals and the impact of commercialism

This research *A Descriptive Visual Analysis of the Survival of Tamil Arranged Marriage Rituals and the Impact of Commercialism* is a critical analysis of ritual performances as a key component of Tamil wedding ceremonies. These rituals are performed before, during, and after the wedding and are interrogated throughout in this dissertation. This research explored and attempted to identify the significance of ritual performances in Tamil people's marriages of southern India. Through the documentation and unpacking of traditional Hindu wedding celebrations, this study examined how these ancient rituals have been influenced by the modern world. It explored how cultural beliefs are negatively impacted through the commercialisation of wedding ceremonies and how they justify the maintenance of ritual practice. Symbolic activities and ritual performances are studied and discussed throughout this study by observing various Tamil wedding ceremonies and conclusions are drawn through conversations with couples and parents who have participated in such events. The dissertation further explores the ways in which these rituals are ultimately reflected and represented in artistic practice, inspired by the works of various artists who engage with their mediums in a ritualistic manner.

Keywords: Arranged marriage, Community, Hindu religion, Parental support, Performances, Tamil, Rituals, Wedding day.

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DEDICATION

This research document is dedicated to all my ancestors who formulated rituals with hidden scientific meanings and maintained them for the welfare of society.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

At this contemporary time across the globe traditional rituals are consistently in danger of being eroded, replaced or entirely wiped out as more and more cultures around the world begin to integrate, intertwine and sometimes clash with each other. Western culture in particular continues to carry the highest currency and permeate across the globe making an impact wherever it goes. However, the Tamil tradition of Tamil arranged marriages have in many ways been safeguarded and sheltered by the Tamil people of India to ensure its survival such that it continues to thrive and prevail in spite of the impact of globalisation.

Tamil is considered as one of the most ancient of surviving classical languages in the world. While the Tamil speaking community has a Diaspora spread far and wide through Sri Lanka, Malaysia, South-east Asia, South Africa and many regions in Africa, Europe, North America and Australasia, the core of this community lives in the South East Indian state called 'Tamil Nadu' meaning, the land of Tamils. About 80 million people around the world speak Tamil with about 70 million living in the Tamil Nadu state in India. Furthermore, about 88% of these people are Hindus. This study concentrates on wedding ritual performances in the arranged Hindu marriages in Tamil Nadu (Encyclopaedia.com 2007).

In the Hindu religion, marriage is "the building of a relationship between two families, where not only the couple, but all the relatives of the two families also contribute to form a good relationship" (Bhalla 2006: 97). Bhalla postulates that marriage is meant for the happiness and welfare of the couple, parents and the community at large (Bhalla 2006: 97). This is affirmed in the witnessing and conscious observation of these arranged marriages and observing the organisers and participants within the cultural exercise. The interest of this research lies in studying the ritual

performances associated with arranged marriages of the Indian Hindu Tamil community and the issues surrounding its sustainability.

In the Tamil Hindu culture, an arranged marriage plays an important role in the construction of what they believe represents a healthy society with the help of parental support. This is seconded by Schechner's (2009) theory of performance which proposes that traditional rituals and ceremonies such as cultural arranged marriages help societies to keep their cultural bond.

This study includes a practical component that involves the production of art works concerning the ritual practices of the Tamil Hindu arranged marriage celebration. The practical content involves media of painting, drawing, installations, video and graphics. The study examines how the tradition of the arranged marriage sustains itself through the performance of wedding rituals even when influenced by a continuously globalised world. The major marker of a typical traditional Tamil Hindu wedding is the organised arrangement of the couples match and meeting which is usually initiated by their parents.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Four eyes met. There were changes in two souls. And now I cannot remember whether he is a man and I a woman, or he a woman and I a man. All I know is, there were two: Love came, and there is one (Doan and Garrity2006:192).

Arranged marriages prevail among Hindus as the dominant form of marital union and such wedding ceremonies are usually accompanied by popular rituals, which could be viewed as the standard format for members of the Tamil community.¹ The Tamil community is one of the oldest communities

¹ A community who speaks the Dravidian language Tamil primarily found mainly in Tamil Nadu, Southern India.

in India. They perform various rituals during lifestyle celebrations which are still based on Vedic guidelines. The Vedic guidelines, particularly those based on the mythology of Ramayana,² promote monogamy as against the previously prevailing practice of polygamy. Married life is viewed as highly important for the 'bonding of souls' across genders and thus fulfilling an important role in the building and preserving of society.

The representation of the 'cosmic' aspects of Hindu deities presented artists with visual challenges. An analogy of this is the image of *Ardhanarishvara* for instance which is the depiction of a perfect marriage through a half female and half male body— albeit a celestial one – with husband and wife, *Shiva* and *Parvati*, harmoniously united (Seid 2004: 48-49). The first visual depictions of *Ardhanarishvara* were initially produced during the Chola (3rd century BCE to 12th century CE) and the Vijayanagara³ (13th century CE to 16th century CE) period. An analogy of this visual depiction is seen in Shelna's Glass painting aptly titled *Ardhanareesvara* (Seid 2004: 48-49) (Figure 1.1).

²A Hindu mythological book written by Vaalmeeiki, containing life philosophy.

³ The Vijayanagara Empire (also called the Karnata Empire and the Kingdom of Bisnagar by the Portuguese) was an empire based in South India, in the Deccan Plateau region. It was established in 1336 by Harihara and his brother Bukka Raya I of the Sangama Dynasty.



Figure 1.1 Shelna, *Ardhanareesvara*, glass painting Bangalore, 2014

The South Indian Tamil community's organised marriages are based on the principles adopted from this period. Shelna's painting symbolises that 'feminine' and 'masculine' do not mean 'male' and 'female'. The 'feminine' and 'masculine' are certain qualities. It is traditionally believed that only when these qualities balance with the self that a human being lives a life of fulfilment.

A Tamil marriage symbolises not only the coming together of two individuals, but also the bonding of two families, understanding, commitment, mutual love, oneness and spiritual growth. Each and every ritual and custom associated with marriage portrays the essence of a 'solemn' wedding. The rituals are essential sources for life within these

marriages (Saritha 1994:140). There are several ritual performances that are mandatory during the different stages of a Tamil marriage, starting before the wedding day through to after the wedding. Of great importance is the actuality that the ceremonies themselves have fallen victim to commercial capitalist interests through a number of activities, which are further unpacked in this study.

1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This study analyses various ritual performances associated with these marriages with particular attention being paid to the overall aesthetic presentation. The traditional Tamil Hindu marriages were meant to be sacred affairs and were very unique, with a variety of sanctifying performances which included solemn acts. The second objective is to showcase and highlight the visual impression of these colourful occasions saturated with social and ritual performances. Another important aspect is to highlight the role of rituals within Tamil arranged marriages. Most contemporary marriages that occur out of love between a couple independent of the influence of the family and community are mostly conducted within the means of the couple. In such marriages there is usually little or no ritual compared to that witnessed in some traditional Tamil arranged marriages. Ultimately, this study questions the very prominent and somehow negative impact of commercialisation now infused within these cultural beliefs. It asks whether the adherence to the prescribed original cultural standards of Tamil marriage rituals justifies the maintenance of this practice in its contemporary and heavily commercialised state. The Tamil Hindu wedding is a vast affair, with a number of activities which not only have a cultural significance, but have become very expensive financially in these contemporary times. This questioning of the prescribed original cultural beliefs is meant to call for critical reviewing of some of the cultural values towards protecting them from unreasonable baggage brought about by this contemporary world.

Usually before the wedding day, people from the families of the bride and groom commence with the preparations for the various wedding ceremonies and these are considered a significant turning point in the couple's life. This is the reason why marriage is given supreme importance and a number of rituals are conducted before, during and after the wedding day.

Browne (1980: 19) states that "phenomenological rituals are defined as culturally transmitted symbolic codes which are stylised, regularly repeated, dramatically structured, authoritatively designed and intrinsically valued". This supports the notion that rituals are passed through generations and they are the thread that holds the community together. They are intrinsic and among the Tamil, they define the process of a marriage. They are greatly valued and follow a defined pattern.

Ingraham (2008: 1) argues that "culture instils meaning in our lives from the very first moment we enter the social world." The behaviour of individuals and how they relate "is a product of the dominant culture and its social order". Ingraham (2008:1) also makes the point that "it is this behaviour that to us becomes so natural and may be taken for granted that cultural construction appears to occur so naturally". One can readily agree with Ingraham's premise and view the rituals that couples perform during Tamil weddings as being embedded in the Tamil culture. This has become a part of their life which they perform without any qualms.

Anderson (2000: 52) states that "when weddings are viewed in purely economic terms, a pervasive, indeed prevailing factor is the artistic dimension of the event". The arts play a crucial role within the wedding celebration. Predictably, merchants capitalise on the same sentiments; for instance, one wedding magazine advertisement proclaims that, "a plain gold band says we're married and a diamond says forever" (Celeste 2014).

The Tamil people of South India have their own marriage rituals which look very vibrant and somehow sophisticated, yet all the customs are practiced with religious observance. Superstition also plays an important part in Tamil weddings and this is largely because marriage has a link to fertility, conception and childbirth hence blessings have to be sought through certain rituals and objects.

Turner (1967:19) defined ritual as a “prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical being and powers”. He adopted the procession view on rituals from Van Gennep (1960) and stated that all rituals involve symbolic manipulation and reference to religion. Within Hindu arranged marriage rituals are a rite of passage in which all who are involved have to conform. Rites of passage are a category of rituals that mark the passage of an individual through the life cycle, from one stage to another (Turner 1982: 109). Furthermore, Hindu marriage rituals involve various performances especially before, during and after the wedding day and these symbolic activities are analysed and discussed throughout this dissertation. Since an arranged marriage is heartily welcomed by the parents and relatives in the Tamil community, this research also briefly looks at how parental support is important at the time of preparation and arrangements which includes ritual performances, dress and ornaments.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Marriages are performed with much symbolic significance within Tamil culture. This study takes ‘ritual performances’ as its foundation to analyse the ways in which marriages are performed in Tamil culture. In this study the researcher analyses and argues for the “significance of rituals for societal welfare” (Durkheim 1995: 150) and the “misunderstanding of misfortunes” (Turner 1967:9) which come from the anxieties of their performances during the pre-wedding ceremony, the wedding day

ceremony and the post wedding ceremony. The leading contemporary Tamil writer Jeyakanthan's (2012) revolutionary books influenced the researcher to consider the couples' emotional feelings. Seline (2005) says that Jeyakanthan's stories promote the notion that wedded life will be bliss only if there is mutual love and understanding and if a deliberate attempt is made to not dominate by means of or indulge in emotional aggression.

Ritual is one of the key concepts in the sociology of religion (Durkheim 1995). According to the Oxford Dictionary (2015) ritual is defined as a "religious solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed". Durkheim (1995) suggests that the relationship between ritual behaviour and devotion to social order put collective worship of the sacred at the heart of the theory of social unity. A "Ritual is central for the understanding not only of religion but of society" (Durkheim 1995: 150). A ritual involves many symbolic movements throughout the performance. Rituals generate group emotions that are linked to symbols, forming the basis for beliefs, thinking, morality and culture (Summers-Effler 2006: 135).

From another perspective Turner (1967: 9) mentions that ritual action seeks to improve spiritual feelings that are the basis for humans' misfortune or fear. According to Turner spiritual performances happen because people have fear in their life. To support Turner's view Radcliffe (cited in Lessa and Vogt 1979: 36-38) mentions that ritual is an expression of common interest symbolically representing community and that anxiety may be felt if the ritual is not performed. From these arguments it can be inferred that nervousness or fear may necessitate the rituals of a Tamil marriage. In the Tamil marriage, plenty of ritual performances take place, but most of them are performed particularly to please the deity and avert anxiety. In the Tamil community people believe that if one does not perform marriage rituals, misfortune may occur and this may lead to unhappiness between the couple, individual health problems and infertility.

Firstly, this study takes a look at the backdrop of the Tamil wedding and how social structures are formed through rituals within marriage ceremony. Secondly, this research applies Stryker's (1968) symbolic interaction theory to analyse the ritual meaning throughout the wedding performances. Stryker's views of human social behaviour is organised by symbolic designations of all aspects of the environment. Based on Stryker's statement both physical and social activities have been discussed and analysed. Bell's (1997) view of ritual theory which elaborates that ritual is seen as a way to create a collective set of beliefs and ideals is also analysed. In an ever changing society ritual is a bridge between tradition and constant social change (Bell 1992). In the Tamil marriage ritual culture interacts with various symbols and performances in all the three stages of wedding which are pre-wedding, wedding and post-wedding. These symbols revolve around ideas of human interaction, beliefs and communication. These symbolic acts are facilitated by words, gestures, and other signs that have acquired conventionalised meanings.

1.4 ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

Artists S.H Raza, Andy Goldsworthy and Beatriz Milharzes have had a significant impact on the artistic practice and the research discussed in this study. Indian artist S. H. Raza's geometrical style have been applied in the researcher's simplified drawings. Raza's strong ties to nature, specifically the forests of Madhya Pradesh, are at the root of his paintings, and manifest themselves predominantly through his use of colour. In the 1980s Raza distilled his landscapes into geometric blocks of colour, with each part distinctly associated to the natural world (<http://eapgroup.com/index.php/s-h-raza-thirst-for-an-indian-elixir/>).

American land artist Andy Goldsworthy follows the tradition of the great American earth-movers such as Robert Smithson who created *Spiral Jetty* (1970) and Richard Long, who imported this tradition to Britain. Goldsworthy himself wanted to move away from two-dimensional representation of landscape in a frame, and to give you the thing itself

(Adams 2007). His land art installations have had an influence on my ritual art making processes. Goldsworthy works with nature as a whole, emphasising the originality of ritual performances.

Brazilian artist Beatriz Milhazes rich and complex work draws together motifs which have their roots in her everyday environment, and includes references to natural forms, folk art, carnival, and Brazilian baroque decoration. She transforms these influences into abstract patterns and ornamental shapes, which shift between the recognisable and the unfamiliar. Her artworks directed me towards the analysis of the ritual artefact of shapes and colours and apply them now in my own work. The work of these artists, embedded in different forms of ritual, present alternative propositions for the representation of organised ritual as discussed through this study of Tamil Hindu weddings.

1.5 STUDIO PRACTICE AND VISUAL METAPHORS

In this study, I applied my personal experiences during my marriage and the experiences during my relatives' marriages in order to observe and analyse the consequences of ritual performances and their significances. My studio practice visualises the Tamil wedding ritual practices/performances. This study artefacts portrays pre-wedding rituals such as astrology (match making), the engagement day (*Nicchayadhartham*) and other rituals' social tensions as described by Turner (1969:9), and these are expressed through art.

Wedding day pleasures and anxieties pass through certain rituals like *Kanyadaan* (parents giving their daughter to husband's family) and *Thali* or *Mangalyam* – literally 'tying the knot' (a thread applied with turmeric paste and tied around the bride's neck with three knots) are captured in the form of graphics, photography and paintings. These ritual performances are loaded with emotional feelings and interaction for social benefit as described by Durkheim (1995).

The term 'tying the knot' originated in South India where the practice of 'tying three knots of a thread around the neck of the bride by the bridegroom' symbolises the climactic act and positive conclusion of a marriage. This terminology is also universally applied during wedding ceremonies to indicate a conclusion of a marriage. Similarly, Christian marriage practice – Christianity being the largest faith in the world with more than 30% (Pew Research Center 2012) of the world's population – symbolises marriage with the exchange of wedding rings (Noreen 2012) between the bride and the groom.

Post-wedding ritual performances like *Grahapravesa* (*entry of the new bride in her husband's home*) and the first night ceremony (first sexual intercourse) rituals are evidenced through the researcher's installations and paintings. The married couple's relationship brings a change of life within their family circumstances and this amendment unites both families' relationships. From this idea, painted art works are analysed in relation to Bell's (1992) ritual theory, in which the author argues that "an ever changing society ritual is a bridge between tradition and constant social change in human society".

In this discussion I compare and contrast my own work with the intentions and technical strategies of these ceremonies. Visual art works are in a semi-abstract and symbolic form which emphasise and communicate Stryker's (1968) symbolic interaction and interaction with ritual theory. My studio practice makes use of a variety of domestic Indian traditional materials that are used by Tamil people when they conduct ritual performances. These include rice, turmeric powder, coconut, saris, fruits, leaves, bricks, clothes, and other domestic artefacts.

CHAPTER 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the rituals of Tamil marriages are unpacked and analysed. The ritual performance acts done by the bride, the groom and their families will be analysed in relation to ritual theory and culture. Theories of conformity in cooperative behaviour which seek to explain the participation in these arranged marriages are discussed. Ideas of commercialisation theory are referenced while unpacking the heavy commercialisation of these arranged marriages within this community and its effect on the sustainability of this cultural phenomenon.

The chapter concludes with an explanation of the methodology and how the information which informed this study was collected using a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach involves the use of a variety of materials, case studies, personal experience, interviews, observation, and visual texts that describe experience and meaning in the lives of individuals (Donna 2009:1). Also espoused by Donna (2009) qualitative methods such as observation and interviews with relatives and my mother, were used in this study to achieve its objective.

2.1 PROCEDURES FOR A LIFETIME OF PEACE AND HAPPINESS: RITUAL AND PERFORMANCE.

Rituals and ceremonies form a part of the institutional arrangements which can be understood only in terms of the ideas, beliefs, attitudes and values, i.e. the ideological frameworks, which render them meaningful. The movements, gestures, instruments, times, places and words that constitute these rituals are expressions (Signs and symbols) of other aspects of society (Berardo and Vera 1981).

Rituals of various kinds are a feature of all human societies, past and present. They include not only the various worship rites and sacraments of organised religions and cults, but also rites of passage, atonement and purification rites, oaths of allegiance, dedication ceremonies, coronations and presidential inaugurations, marriages and funerals.

Ritual performances indicate the influences of history, culture and sometimes religious beliefs over a society or community.

Ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degrees by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition) (Tambiah 1979: 119).

Based on Tambiah's (1979:119) definition, rituals are "culturally constructed" tools of communication and they are transmitted and sustained through being performed in a structured format whenever there is a need. The need itself is determined by cultural beliefs and norms. Thus these rituals become signposts for every human/community achievement or episode. The closer to the original or traditional prescribed way of conducting these rituals the happier are the followers. This need for originality has resulted in social stereotypes which sometimes lead to the abuse of authority with perpetuation of dogmatic practices at the expense of those who cannot afford some of the unnecessary aspects.

In this study a ritual is referred to not simply as a religious exercise to please the divinity but also as a mechanism for social survival of the married couple, their families as well as the society at large. Kevin (2014) supports this when he says that ritual is debatably a universal characteristic of human social survival: just as one cannot imagine a

society without language, one would be equally hard-pressed to imagine a society without rituals.

A ritual in itself is performed as a physical or expressive experience intended to convince/prove to both the celebrant/believer as well as observers of such a ritual performance that a milestone is being crossed (Schechner2009). Thus, a ritual becomes the tangible aspect and a signifier of the milestone being crossed and being endorsed. Schechner (1993: xviii) refers to this physicality/tangibility as “make-believe”, because everyone who has witnessed the ritual performance will know for sure that it happened. This is evident in the Tamil arranged marriage process; for example in any marriage including my marriage ceremony the couple and relatives do not believe the marriage is happening and do not get excited about the union until all the rituals associated with it are performed to their satisfaction. When the rituals have happened it is usually acknowledged by applause or ululation as a sign of belief and relief. In my own personal experience of my marriage, my parents and relatives felt that without the performance of the rituals the marriage would not be completed. They performed all the traditional activities including prayers, and lighting with the guidance of a Brahmin who is the priest in the Tamil community.

The ritual involves various actions and symbols which according to the participants and society help them understand and respond to nonverbal cues associated with the ritual event. For instance, a Tamil pre-wedding ritual which involves erecting a pole with mango leaves in front of the houses of both the bride and bridegroom is understood by all who see it as an announcement and invitation of relatives and the public to the wedding. This cultural performance is a “social drama” and is understood (Turner 1974: 23-35) in a Tamil culture to be a symbolic advertisement of the marriage ritual. Geertz (1973:5) argues that culture should not be experimented with scientifically but rather it should be interpreted in search of meaning. He further elaborates that external symbols express

the culture that a society embraces. Geertz's symbolic theory relates to Tamil Hindu priest Brahmins who perform external symbolic activities during the marriage ritual ceremonies. Turner's (1974: 23-35) definition of a ritual includes the manipulation of symbols, and the reference to a belief in supernatural beings or powers. According to Turner, a ritual is endorsed as an essential element of religious belief. The exegetical meaning is obtained by "questioning indigenous informants about observed ritual behaviour" (Turner 1967: 50). An inquiry on ritual performances may provide a reasonable answer to the welfare of society and it may clear superstitious belief.

Durkheim states that "individual minds can meet and commune only if they come outside of themselves" (1995: 232) and further postulates that embracing the use of symbols without social approval would only maintain an unstable existence. In agreement with Durkheim concerning the Tamil arranged marriage one might argue that the significance of symbols in the Tamil marriage can be subscribed to the fact that people from both families of the bride and bridegroom come together in order to perform the rituals to understand the proper meaning of these symbols and perform them. It is understood that if the two families do not agree to do rituals, it aggravates severe anxiety within the community. In this respect the urgency to perform the rituals is also an expression of the anxiety associated with the union (Lessa and Vogt 1979: 36) and highlights that rituals in themselves can also create anxiety (Bell 1997: 28). In other words the rituals are believed to relieve stress within all involved and once they are performed people feel comfortable even though they were responsible for the anxiety in the first place.

Different arguments espouse that the kind of meaning produced by ritual activities depend on the outsider's or participant's positioning in relation to the performance of the rituals. Bell notes in her essay that "outsiders ... will see ritual ...aesthetically or analyse scientifically" (Bell 1992: 28).

Geertz (1973:5), on the other hand, asserts that culture should not be experimented with scientifically but rather should be interpreted in search of meanings. This engenders the importance of highlighting the significance of the activities in Tamil arranged marriage rituals and to explore the reasons behind the rituals.

2.1.1 Tamil Marriage Rituals

Schechner (2009) who was instrumental in developing the discipline of performance studies during the 1960s and 1970s made the claim that performance is a general animal phenomenon and that self-awareness and cultural transmission are necessary for performance. He also added that it is difficult to define performance because it is flexible with permeable boundaries – ritual performance is a flexible activity that is performed by a performer in the presence of a spectator. For Schechner, performance includes far more than just theatre, but contains an entire spectrum ranging from everyday life to rituals and art.

Marriage in itself constitutes one of everyday life's activities and by common assumption around the world its meaning is about relationships where people interact as a unit. As the wedding marks the individual's transition from singlehood to the marital state, "It simultaneously creates a legal unit" (Henslin 1980: 158). According to the Vedas,⁴ marriage is a union between two bodies, two minds, two hearts and two souls that lovingly resolve to live together like Shiva⁵ and Parvati⁶ (Bhella 2006: 97). It is the coming together of these two lives that brings about ritual performances. One can then say that until certain rituals are performed, then the marriage may not be viewed as complete. This is evident in the

⁴'Veda' literally translates to 'knowledge'. It has four volumes: Rigveda, Yazurveda, Sama-veda and Atharvanaveda. These four Veda are considered the book of knowledge in Hindu religion (Iyengar 2012)

⁵ Shiva is the God of Hindus in the Saiva group.

⁶Parvati is a Goddess of Hindus and wife of God Siva.

vows which in many cultures are viewed as the cornerstone of the wedding. In the Tamil arranged marriage however, the wedding vows are not sufficient as the required ritual performance activity. In the Tamil Hindu culture, the wedding day rituals for arranged marriages includes activities such as a discussion with an astrologer regarding the couple's future, wearing of jewels, wedding day attires and other traditional performances and social drama.

A Tamil Hindu wedding includes many traditional rituals that differ from other communities. However, basic details such as the time of the year when the wedding is organised remain the same. In the past, marriages were held for as long as a week in the couple's own village and house, but today marriages are held for two to three days and all the near and distant relatives and friends are expected to come together to witness the rituals. The Tamil community believe that marriage rituals are holistic in nature. Marriages perhaps involve more elaborate rituals than those of any other life event in Tamil Hindu culture. For example, a Tamil wedding cannot be held in the months of Aadi or Aashad (July 15th to August 15th), as they are considered inauspicious (Rajendran2015) this is because if a newly wedded couple begin their marriage consummation in sexual intercourse in the month of July 15th to August 15th, there is a chance of conceiving and delivering a baby in summer which is not good for the child in view of the weather in that geographical area. The new born baby and mother may suffer a lot from the heat and temperature in summer (Naveen 2015) as Asian summers are gruelling and dangerous for the susceptibly weak. Tuesdays and Saturdays are also regarded as bad days since Brahmin priests' believe that those days will lead to an unhappy life. There is no authentic scriptural basis to such a belief but many such beliefs have spread and developed to become a part of people's strong beliefs over time.

The Tamil culture has often been described as a primitive society due to their rituals and traditional spiritual values which are in contrast to contemporary civilisation. Turner (1997: 3) asserts that contemporary civilisation drives these traditional societies to lose the meaning of their lives, “their social organisation disintegrates”. Turner postulates that the contemporary social organization does not cooperate because of benefiting economically from the bride and bridegroom. According to Turner’s (1997: 3) view Tamil contemporary society has become one of the cultures which is gradually eroding its traditional rituals alongside its spiritual and traditional values due to the adoption of contemporary trends. However, this study asserts that in the midst of all the globalisation and affectation of western cultures that the Tamil custom of arranged marriages has been sustained and is being passed from one generation to another through the loyalty to these traditional arranged marriage rituals by the individuals within this cultural society. There are several consistent significant rituals that happen right from pre-wedding, wedding right through to post wedding.

2.1.1.1 Pre-Wedding Rituals and their Significance

Ritual symbolic activities can have a strong emotional impact on people. Indian art is replete with depictions of religious beliefs which symbolize the Hindu philosophy through various artistic poses in temples. In South India holy signs and symbols are evident in TamilNadu⁷ historic temples like Brahadeeswara temple,⁸ Sri Ranganatha Swamy temple⁹ and other notable shrines. The Tamil community rituals are influenced by these

⁷TamilNadu is situated in southern part of India. It has a very strong cultural background.

⁸The Brihadeshwarar temple was built to grace the throne of the Cholaempire by the Tamil emperor Arulmozhivarman, popularly called Raja RajaChola. It is situated in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu. (The Chola Dynasty 300 B.C.E to 1250 C.E.

⁹ The Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple or ThiruvarangamTamilHindu temple dedicated to Ranganatha, a reclining form of Hindu deity, Vishnu located in Srirangam, Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu, India. Constructed in the Dravidian style of architecture..

temples and historical Vedic¹⁰ writings. In earlier times Tamil marriages were held in temples, and as a result the Hindu temple architecture and landscaping were designed to accommodate people for social gatherings. In addition, they were designed with a marriage hall for a divine wedding *Kalyan Mandap* (Figure 2.1), a water pond for bathing, a kitchen (*Madappalli*), and a dining area. This temple (Figure 2.1) is an historical and well known temple in Tamil Nadu. Naturally temples would be surrounded by trees as people would rest and mingle after a wedding ceremony.

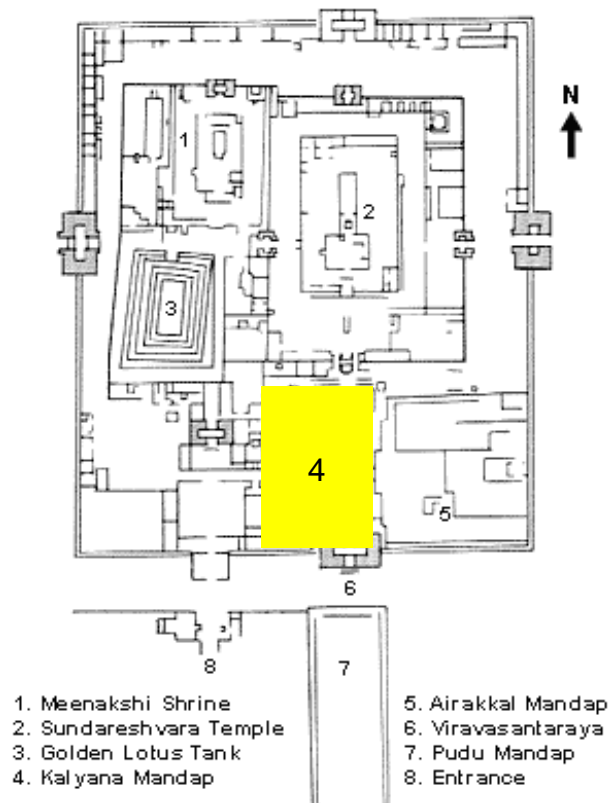


Figure 2.1: Meenakshi Temple, Madurai, Divine wedding place–Kalyanamandap, Blue print

Historical paintings in Indian art confirm the importance of rituals during the Tamil marriage celebration, as seen in Figure 2.2. In this painting, the Indian deity *Rama* is depicted with green skin with *Sita* and they sit facing

¹⁰ Composed in Vedic Sanskrit, the text constitutes the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature and the oldest scriptures of Hinduism.

each other with their hands in the respectful prayer position as in the marriage ritual position as seen on the far right of this image. On their left and right side there are several devotees and followers fattered around in prayer position. It is an exemplary painting that presents an impression of the traditional marriage situation. This historical painting depicts the religious beliefs of the community that the deity *Rama* is placed in the centre of the marriage ceremony with courtiers and sages which encourage the people to have many participants and witnesses with relatives and well-wishers in the marriage ceremony.



Figure 2.2: Unknown artist, *Tamil Rama's coronation*, 1833-39

Traditional weddings throughout Southeast Asia are considered as an important alignment between two families and not just between two individuals. Elders do most of the talking at these marriage procedures, while the young couple usually sit silently, ornately dressed to match a local ideal of beauty and formality (Aragon, 2007). A few days before the

wedding day, friends and relatives from both sides engage in the preparations of the marriage ceremony. Searle and Stevenson (1992: 01) in their document of the marriage liturgy state:

[T]here are two basic movements which have been interpreted variously through the ages, but they are intertwined. Human resolve, on the one hand, expresses the commitment of a man and the woman to carry each other before God. Divine blessing, on the other hand, embodies the fact that the couple seek God's presence and strength. One could almost say that the interplay and centrality of these features will determine the clarity, even the success, of any given marriage rite.

The above statement supports the idea that in religion, rituals are performed before and after marriage in order to obtain divine blessings. The first marriage ritual that the Tamil perform is the *Nicchiyadhartham* (engagement). During this engagement ritual the bride's parent's offer a prayer to Lord *Ganesha*, who is believed to expel all obstacles. A *puja* (prayer) is conducted in the presence of a priest. Every Hindu Tamil community start all their celebrations with a prayer in front of an image of Lord *Ganesha* who is also popularly depicted in Indian art (Figure 2.3). This deity is depicted in a surrealistic form with an elephant head and human body. The Lord *Ganesha* is believed to be the god of beginnings and is honoured at the start of every ritual and ceremony. Jain connections with the trading community support the idea that Jainism took up the worship of Lord *Ganesha* as a result of commercial connections (Thapan, 1997: 151, 158, 162, 164, 253).



Figure 2.3: Unknown artist, *Ganesha*.Basohli miniature, circa 1730

Gluckman (1963) views ritual as an expression of underlying social tensions (this is an idea taken up by Turner), and that it functions as an institutional pressure valve, relieving those tensions through cyclical performances. The ritual rites ultimately function to reinforce social order, in so far as they allow those tensions to be expressed without leading to actual rebellion. This is similar to how a carnival may be seen. Gluckman views social tension during the pre-wedding *Ganesha* worship as taking place because of social pressure to avoid unnecessary argument from the social community. This also suggests that people become psychologically addicted to these kinds of ritual.

During the pre-wedding rituals several significant objects and colours are exchanged as a ritual custom between the families, particularly to the bride and bridegroom. In this ceremony the groom's family presents a new decorative silk sari to the bride. Her forehead is adorned with a red paste made from *chandan* (sandal powder) and *kumkum* (Vermillion) (Figure 2.4). In the Tamil culture this red paste is referred to as *Pottu*. In North India it is referred to as *Tilak*.¹¹The bride's sari *Pallu* (border) may be filled with fruits, beetle nuts, turmeric, kumkum and coconut.

¹¹ *Tilak* is a mark worn on the forehead and other parts of the body. *Tilak* may be worn on a daily basis or for special religious occasions only, depending on different customs.



Figure 2.4: Pavithra, *Pre-wedding – Bride and Beauty*, photography

Making a red dot on the bride's forehead is essential in Tamil customs because they believe that the point between the eyebrows is a sanctum or a temple of the human body. Pre-wedding rituals include a married elder woman applying a red mark exactly between the eyebrows.¹² A forehead without a *Thilak* is a woman without a husband. Sarita (1994: 183) proffers that the space between the two eyes is called the third eye. Sometimes people use yellow turmeric powder with red coloured powder to apply on the forehead (Sarita 1994: 186). Turmeric is favoured as it is believed to keep evil spirits and negative feelings away. These plants and ingredients are an extension of good wishes. The scarlet colour of the *Thilak* cools the forehead, protects the wearer and prevents energy loss (Vivekananda and Krishnakumar 2008:19). The beautiful red dot on a bride's face expands the value of her appearance and at the same time it

¹² In Yoga practice bringing the concentration between the eyes is the main aim of meditation. The place is called *Ajna chakra* in Yoga sutra. The entire body emanates energy in the form of electromagnetic waves – the forehead and the spot between the eyebrows especially so. That is why worry generates heat and causes a headache.

helps to massage their third eye, which the Tamil believe is located in the chamber of the bride's body located at that point.

Another pre-wedding ritual is the *Panda kallmuhurtham*¹³. Its customary purpose is to invoke the blessings of the family deity to ensure that the wedding preparations proceed smoothly. Generally, a short ritual is performed on the eve of the wedding, where both the families of the bride and the groom offer prayers to the Lord. This is done to ensure that the wedding preparations proceed smoothly. The family of the bride and the groom pray to the deity who is symbolically represented by a bamboo pole. This bamboo pole known as *bans* is recognised as the symbol for fertility (Sarita 1994: 202). For instance, in China a bamboo pole is a symbol of virtue. It reflects people's souls and emotions (<http://everythingbamboo.website/bamboo-in-china/>). A bamboo pole often signifies the value of culture. The usage of a bamboo pole in Tamil communities is common and may be because of its availability in all villages and it is very convenient to use to construct a shelter for a marriage ceremony. During the *Panda kallmuhurtham* ritual bamboo is placed in front of the house and provides a small shelter to indicate that the house has a prospective marriage participant.

French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss regarded all social and cultural organisations as symbolic systems of communication shaped by the inherent structure of the human brain. He viewed myth and ritual as complementary symbol systems, one verbal, one non-verbal (Bell 1992). Thus, Lévi-Strauss's ideology can be used to interpret a bamboo pole as a symbol for the system of communication about the particular family within the marriage ritual. It is an old system that conveys their happiness within their community. In current times people use a printed invitation and loud speakers to convey this message, but the problem is that most people in

¹³*Panda Kaal Muhurtham* is a ritual held on the day before wedding. Both families pray to ensure the blessing of family god. A bamboo pole symbolically represents the god.

the community especially elders feel uncomfortable if bamboo is not present as an element within the wedding procedures, this is in the belief that a misfortune will befall the couple if the bamboo tree is not used for the *Panda Kaal Muhurtham* ritual.

In the Tamil community every family has their own family deity similar to a family doctor; the act of worship of the family gods and goddesses is known as *kuldevta / deviKul* translates as 'family' and *devta* means 'deity' (Kannan 2015). Through these rituals God is remembered and belief concentration is strengthened. The *kuldevta* is allocated a little corner in one of the family rooms away from public scrutiny (Sarita 1994: 223). It is believed that the family god or goddess will protect them from misfortune. Some families slaughter a lamb or chicken to offer as a sacrifice to this god. The symbolism behind this ritual called the *Pooja*¹⁴ is for self-affirmation of divine connection.

Another pre-wedding ritual is called the *Paalikali Thelippu / Karappu* which is performed by the bride's family. This ritual involves decorating seven clay pots with sandalwood paste and *kumkum* powder, which are then filled with curd and nine types of grains. Thereafter, the pots are watered by five or seven married women from both bride and bridegroom sides who are later presented with gifts. On the next day, they are thrown in a pond in the hope that if any fish eats the grains that would have sprouted this will bring blessings to the couple. Seven grains including green gram, black gram, mustard and paddy seeds are sprinkled on a set of five earthen vessels with a little bit of milk and water by *Sumangali* women before the function. A *Sumangali* is a Sanskrit word meaning *a married woman whose husband is still alive*. There is a belief in this community that such a woman has the right to perform auspicious ritual activities. It is also believed that the married life will prosper just like the sprouts that come from the seeds. This arrangement is immersed in water after the

¹⁴A Sanskrit word for the traditional ritual performance by priest.

function. The sprouted seeds are compared to the bride and bridegroom and bring positive thoughts that are highly valuable in human life. A study published in the April 2012 issue of the "International Journal of Food Sciences and Nutrition" found that sprouted seed (due to containing sulforaphane) reduce insulin resistance and may assist with blood-sugar control in people with type 2 diabetes (Joslin 2016). In this view the Tamil community symbolically uses these sprouted seeds to propel both the bride and bridegroom into a long life of marriage.

The *Sumangali Poojai* is a pre-wedding ritual that is carried out in celebration and honour of ancestors. The *Sumangali Prarthana* is a ritual that is conducted to seek the blessings of women of the family who have departed or passed away. It is purely a ritual that is witnessed and carried out by females within the family. In most families this function is performed during important events like a marriage ceremony while in some families it is performed every year. A pattern will be designed using rice powder to decorate the ceremonial place at the bride and bridegroom's place. The design is drawn on the ground in a traditional patterned method (Figure 2.5).



Figure 2.5: Unknown photographer, *Sumangali ritual*, 2014 (courtesy Thapas)

It is believed that performing this *Pooja* will satisfy the unfulfilled yearnings of all the girls and women who have passed away at a young age and that they would in turn bless the family. It is common practice to conduct the *Sumangali Prarthana* before the marriage if the daughter is getting married and after the new daughter-in-law comes home if a son is getting married. This function is not performed on Tuesdays or Saturdays (Thapas 2014) because it is believed that those days are not lucky days. Usually, seven women and two young girls (preferably below the age of 10) are invited to participate in the function to feast and receive *Thamboolam* which is a gift (Ammupatti 2007). There is no objection for near relatives of the hostess to participate. This ritual symbolises that the family members respect the deceased elders.

The use of *Thulsi* (basil leaves) in the Tamil marriage and other ritual activities is very important. *Thulsi* is a sacred and medicinal plant which cures many diseases including indigestion, stress, controls temperature, prevents colds and prevents bacterial growth (Deshpande 2005: 203). During the marriage ceremony the bride and bridegroom are offered *Thulsi* immersed in water to drink. The idea of drinking *Thulsi* water is to prevent sickness so that both the bride and bridegroom will not suffer from any sickness during the period of the ceremony. The idea of a ritual performance does not only support religious acts but is for the welfare of the individuals and society at large (Durkheim 1995: 150) and according to Durkheim ritual actions are designed for social benefits.

Before the wedding day the bride will be decorated elaborately with *Maruthani* (Henna). This has a great significance broadly in Eastern wedding traditions. The colour of henna specifically has symbolic significance because red is the colour of power and fertility (ExoticIndia.com 2015). Many brides believe that the deeper the colour of the henna, the more passionate the marriage. The custom of applying elaborate henna patterns to the hands and feet of the bride is a symbol of

satisfaction and happiness in marriage among the Hindus. The motifs used relate to nature such as leaves, flowers, petals, birds and show women's symbolic link to organic characteristics of nature which is associated with concepts of birth, nourishment, growth and regeneration.

2.1.1.2 Wedding day Rituals and their Significance

The marriage ceremony may commence on the evening of the arrival of the bridegroom. The hour for the ceremony has to be carefully fixed by the Hindu priest so as to be at the most favourable time and may fall during the day or night. Before fixing the date the astrologer will be consulted. The wedding party assembles at the accommodation nearby the place where the grain is sprouting. Bathing is a blessing and is called *Mangalasnana* (Sharma 2002: 47). The *Mangalasnana* is an intriguing ritual performed early in the morning particularly before sunrise; both the bride and bridegroom must take a bath. In older times, before the marriage ceremony, the bride took a bath in the Holy River¹⁵ (this is a particularly Indian tradition) because there was no marriage hall. Marriages were held inside temples which were usually surrounded by a river, thus marriage is considered to be very auspicious. The significance of this early morning bath is that it refreshes the couple's bodies and activates them for the wedding ceremony. According to Thatayone refreshing the body is a preliminary stage for refreshing the soul. During a ritual called *KaasiYatra*¹⁶ the bridegroom enacts a performance of leaving for *Kashi*, this is a pilgrimage centre to devote himself to God and a life of prayer. He carries a walking stick and other meagre essentials with him to imply that he is not interested in becoming a householder. The bride's father interferes and requests him to accept his daughter as his life partner and to fulfil his responsibilities as a householder. The bridegroom relents and is then taken to the marriage venue.

¹⁵ River namely Ganga, Yamuna, Kaveri is considered a holy or sacred river to perform the rituals by the bank of the river.

¹⁶ *Kaasi* is the name of the holy place and *Yatra* means travel in India.

The researcher witnessed this performance ritual in some Tamil marriages he attended in Puducherry, South India the impression thought was that these actions happen only for formality sake. Rook (1985: 253), however, views ritual behaviour as a “dramatically scripted performance” acted out with formality, seriousness and inner intensity. The author goes on to say that ritualistic experience relies on “artefacts, scripts, performance roles and an audience”.

The main ritual on the wedding day entails the *Thali* ritual which is the tying of the string. The Brahmin (priest) performs an important and respected role during a Hindu marriage ceremony. Both bride and bridegroom are told to sit in front of a fire-place called *Homa*.¹⁷ The Brahmin takes traditional yellow turmeric which is tied with a thread to the audience who gather to bless the couple and to wish the couple good will.



Figure 2.6: Siva,R.Sacred, yellow rice ritual performance, Photograph, 2012

¹⁷*Homa* (also known as homam or havan) is a Sanskrit word which refers to any ritual in which offerings are made into a consecrated fire. *Homa* is an important religious practice in Hinduism and forms part of most *Sanskara* ceremonies.

For this ceremony well-wishers and relatives take sacred yellow rice and flowers to bless the couple. The colour yellow is considered an auspicious colour and yellow turmeric powder helps as an antibiotic within Tamil community in their daily life. After the wedding, married women apply turmeric powder on their faces to make their skin soft.

Flowers, a variety of fruits, and leaves, seeds and other natural grains are used during the knotting up ceremony as seen in Figure 2.7. Couples pray and vow that they will never leave each other.



Figure 2.7: Imax photography, *Tamil wedding day ritual*, photography, 2010

Agni (Fire) is considered the tongue of the Supreme Lord *Narayana*,¹⁸ hence all the sacrifices are ultimately a sacrifice to the Supreme Lord *Narayana* (<https://mantrik.net/2013/06/09/197/>). Fire also is believed to be a symbol that is considered to be an agent of purity and acts as a symbol of morality and truth. The Vedic disciplines of Hinduism believe that fire is a central element in the ceremony, with *Agni*, playing the role of mediator between the worshipper and the other gods. *Agni*, the mightiest power in

¹⁸Hindu God - avatar of Lord Rama.

the cosmos, the sacred purifier, and the all-round benefactor is deemed as a witness to the sacred marriage, hence, the term '*Agni Saakshi*' or Witness by Fire'. The couple can only be accepted as truly married if they finish one of the rituals of *saptapadi* (seven steps) around a fire (Bharati 2005:185). The design and construction style of the fire place is artistically decorated.

The *mangalanaan* or *Thali* (sacred yellow thread) is tied to the bride's neck and forms the main ritual for the whole wedding ceremony. The *Thali* is made out of thread that is painted with sacred turmeric powder. It is the symbol for the recognition of the marriage by the society. Three knots are made in the sacred thread. The first knot by the bridegroom, and the second and third knot by his sister who proclaims that the bridegroom's family will provide full support to the bride. These three knots symbolically represents the marriage of the mind, spirit and body. Other interpretations might interrelate that the three knots symbolise Brahma, Vishnu and Rudhra.¹⁹ During this sacred thread ritual traditional music namely *Nadaswaram* and *Thavil* is played until the knot is tied to the bride's neck. In contemporary times, parents might organise western music or a cinematic music troop to entertain well-wishers. While the knots are tied the *Nadaswaram* (Figure 2.8) is played loudly and fast so as to muffle any inauspicious sounds so that the couple are not distracted in this critical moment (rahul-vidya.weebly.com/mangalya-dharanam.html). This is called *Getti Melam*. At the same time the *Mangal Sutra* a turmeric thread is also put around the brides' neck (rahul-vidya.weebly.com/mangalya-dharanam.html).

¹⁹Name of Hindu God Shiva.



Figure 2.8: Mahesh Kumar, *Naadhaswaram and Thavil music performance*, Photography, 2015

The groom will put a ring on the bride's toes to confirm that they are together (Figure 2.9). However, these symbolic ritual performances act as language-like codes and are not to be interpreted independently of cultural systems (Bell 1992: 66).



Figure 2.9: Kapil Ganesh, *Wedding day South Indian Marriage Rituals*, Photography, 2011

2.1.1.3 Post-Wedding Rituals and their Significance

Immediately after the main ceremony the parents of the bridegroom take the couple to their house. The ritual called *Grihapravesha* is then performed, marking the entry of the new bride into her husband's home where she is welcomed with the *aarti* ritual²⁰ after which the bride enters the house by tipping over a jar filled with rice. The parents prepare a plate with a solution of lime and turmeric powder and wave it in a circle in front of and around the couple and then throw it away to ward off evil spirits. Beliefs are strongly entwined with many rituals. Glover (2011) suggests that beliefs have to be considered holistically, and that they do not exist in isolation in the mind of the believer (www.gutenberg.us/articles/belief_system). According to Glover (2011), the *aarti* ritual is measured spiritually and cannot be judged on its own. Circling the *aarti* around the couples may not work scientifically but because the ritual is performed it may give satisfaction, which will produce positive psychological feelings for all the members of the family.

There is also the *Santhi Muhoortham* ritual arrangement which to calm the passions of the couple on their first night together. The consummation of the marriage is fixed for an auspicious time to accord a happy, ever-lasting married life that is full of understanding and care. Two souls unite in a sacred act of fulfilment, to bring forth progeny as nature's best creation. The parents decorate the room with lots of flowers and during ancient times, a fire sacrifice and mantra ritual was performed to enable the couple to pray to God in true devotion so that they would be blessed with a healthy child. For Hindus who are endowed with intellect and understanding, the sexual union is not considered for enjoyment only, but it is believed that the husband uses the divine creativity and vital energy for the formation of a human body and when the marriage is consummated it means all the rituals have therefore been fulfilled.

²⁰*Aarti* is a Sanskrit word and is a form of symbolic ritual which is believed to kill the Evil spirit with light from the camphor.

2.2 CONFORMING TO THE STATUS QUO

The traditional Tamil arranged marriage is very unique and the survival of this culture in the face of western globalisation brings to the fore the question of how the cultural phenomena still persists. The preservation of this culture that is propelled by religious beliefs and social order of the community highlights the cooperative behaviour of the Tamil community. Cooperative behaviour can be regarded as how people behave when they are together as a group for the benefit of all those within the group. It can also be viewed as how people act during special or specific events that increase the success of the members of the person's social group.

Cooperative behaviour of this kind is usually enforced by superstitious beliefs which are also culturally constructed. The idea of cooperation is complex and participants may provide both direct and indirect contributions. The extent of cooperation may not be readily identified as cooperative behavioural activity as it may be viewed as an interaction between two individuals for the mutual benefit of both, but it may also form part of a broader scale of communal goals that bring people together (Clutton-Brock 2002:69-72). Thus it is important to look into the social behaviour that is a major factor that contributes to the social drama and performance of all participants within the Tamil arranged marriage. How this social orientation is passed on and gains influence over the members of this social community is a factor in the perseverance of the social phenomena. According to Durkheim (1995: 150) a ritual is for social and personal benefit. These rituals support certain basic functions such as the provision of prescribed solutions to basic human psychological and social problems as well as expressing the central values of society.

The question to ask is whether these rituals are being performed to really help the performers or are simply performed due to fear of being labelled as non-conformist to valued cultural beliefs. For example, a majority within

the Tamil community believe that a couple has to seek an astrologer's readings to have an idea about their compatibility. Although this is meant to be an undertaking by the couple at their own discretion, this too is culturally enforced and if the couple does not go through this exercise it is believed they will encounter misfortune. As a result parents from both sides are always anxious to know the astrological readings results as this exercise is believed to "alleviate the spirit that causes misfortune" for the married couple (Turner 1967: 9). The pressure from these cultural expectations comes in different ways resulting in couples conforming and going through each and every prescribed ritual. Most Tamil families believe that some misfortune may occur if the customs or rituals are not properly followed although there is no recorded evidence to prove the authenticity of these beliefs or anxieties.

Cooperation of people in the social context may take on broader meanings as the idea of unification in ritual may be both direct and indirect through participation and/or observation. The levels and forms of participation in the rituals may be viewed as a form of social interaction by the people of that community. This is beneficial to all involved while keeping the community and its culture in unity (Clutton-Brock 2002:69-72).

The community is a makeup of family units in whatever form, be it nuclear or extended. The ties of individuals between their families and the community by extension show that there is cooperation within the family. In this way all people cooperating together for these rituals see their actions as a contribution to their own progress and preservation as a member of that family. What this means is that they see the progress of the family as their own personal progress (Clutton-Brock: 2009: 69-72).

How this cooperation is achieved within the family may be different. For instance the person involved may cooperate for survival and sustenance in thinking that if he/she complies with the laid down order of things then

when it is that persons time to benefit from the cooperation of the community he/she will receive the required support. Also there could be issues of inheritance where the person or people involved will cooperate in the hope that factors of lineage loyalty and order will benefit them within the community when their older generation move on. This refers to issues of power, property, respect, titles among other factors within that community (Balshine-Earn, Neat, Reid and Taborsky 1998:432-438). Therefore, where cooperative behaviour exists in the family and community all participants benefit in various ways as a result of their cooperation and conformity (Ross-Gillespie *et al.* 2009:1-8). The value placed on the community and its culture wins out over the persons own personal opinions over the matter as in the case of the culture of extensive rituals within the Tamil arranged marriage procedure.

Consistent behavioural patterns of a group may be passed on from one generation to another in other ways than just through family orientation and passing of behaviour patterns is one of the qualities found in community groups (Boyd and Richerson 1982: 326). In this way people may move away from a location but not imbibe the culture of where their new habitat is and also not let go of their own imbibed culture from their own community. This possibility supports the sustenance of the Tamil arranged marriage culture as it does the migration of ideas that come with technology and globalisation where western ideas are carried by migrants and tourists and through the media. People generally are social creatures and tend to cooperate on a wide range of things, this is in the view that people are not only interested in themselves but with their social existence (Boyd and Richerson 1982:326). People keep company and develop relationships and communities, hence the popular saying "no man is an island"; this need for social relevance contributes to the inclination to conform to cooperative behaviour.

How the ideas of cooperative behaviour are passed to others in the Tamil community is not just by family orientation, but also by cultural orientation where people take on the behaviour of others by copying what they do. There is the pressure to conform to the traditions of that society (Boyd and Richerson 1982:327). These are the factors that impact cooperative behaviour amongst a community, the need for social interaction generates the power that affect the strength of these traditions in the Tamil arranged marriage rituals. So to determine how people of a community choose to live and follow traditions, it is the people that have been in that community longest that are observed for understanding the behaviour of everyone in that particular situation. This is because it is these older ones in the tradition that influence others to take on the already imbibed behavioural qualities.

The need to conform on the basis of strong influence is important; this is because the people in the community have been oriented to believe or order their interests in such a way as to benefit their social standing within the community. An example of this is the common ritual which is performed by older female members in the family *Sumangal*²¹ called *arathi* in the Tamil arranged marriage. This ritual is performed in front of the couple to be wed. In this ritual camphor fire on betel leaves which float on turmeric powder mixed with water in a bronze vessel is meant to drive away the evil spirits and give fertility and health to the couple. Every couple in this type of marriage always wants this ritual to be performed to prevent the misfortunes associated with non-conformity to this ritual. Thus, an orientation regarding the importance of the older ones in the community and their effect on a marriage is already an idealised construct that influences the participants in the marriage ritual.

Not conforming to the laid down social order also has its own punishment and checks. This is evident in the reaction of the family and community to

²¹Married woman who lives with her husband.

defaulters. The reactions in themselves create a form of community satisfaction that unifies the cooperating participants thereby generating a form of civil order and social code within that community (Boyd and Richerson 1982:328). Defaulters face situations of exclusion, lack of support and in other cases shunning from both family and the community, and these are the forms of power that are exhibited when nonconformity occurs. One can see this when traditional marriages are carried out with fanfare and a carnival atmosphere compared with the lack of attendance and support both in cash and kind for those who venture outside the laid down traditions for marriage in the community. It is this kind of cooperative behaviour that forms the mechanisms whereby the community keeps its social structures in place.

2.3 COMMERCIAL INFLUENCE IN WEDDING PERFORMANCES

The fixed rituals of the Tamil arranged marriage ceremony have been impacted by capitalistic trends and are engendered by the ever increasing global society. The process of the traditional Tamil wedding has been overtaken by commercialisation. The typical elaborate rituals in traditional pre-industrial societies that practice arranged marriages also establish large kinship groups which function as major economic and political units. Having witnessed arranged marriages among friends, relatives and acquaintances in the field work of this study it was observed that in arranged marriages, the parents always want to keep their wealth within the family hence establishing a strong sense of kinship. To maintain close relationships between the relatives, parents arrange marriages between relatives such as cousins. If a family sometimes wishes to look for an alliance outside their relatives, they look for a family with the same social and economic status. The economic aspects of these Tamil marriages therefore have roots within the family system which feeds the culture.

2.3.1 The Base of Economic Survival

In the surrounding villages and districts in Tamil Nadu (South India) in this contemporary time arranged marriages are always characterised by parents choosing a set of in-laws. The attention is not so much on the feelings of the prospective marital partners as on the kin network that is established or that has to be maintained by the impending marriage as it is for the economic security and well-being of the family at large. Alliances are searched for by the closest relatives to the family (*Thai mama*), mother's brothers or (*Chithapa*) father's brothers. The selected bride or bridegroom horoscope is given to a traditional astrologer (matchmaker) to study the matching stars of the bride or bridegroom (Shravan 2014).

Here the stream of commercial transactions begins with negotiations between the parents in connection with dowry and properties. Due to technological developments there are many matrimonial websites mushrooming on the internet with details of brides or bridegrooms. This kind of technology is used only by the middle, upper middle and high class society. Parents of the lower classes use the traditional way of selecting the bride or bridegroom.

The import of the dowry custom in these marriage deliberations cannot be underestimated. India has the highest number of dowry related deaths in the world with the reality that a woman is killed for dowry related reasons every hour. Crime statistics for India in 2011 (National Crime Records Bureau 2011) reported that a bride was burned every 90 minutes. The police recorded 1,130 cases of bride burning during the first seven months in 2013 in Tamil Nadu. A major underlying factor causing the violence against women in these societies is the perception that married women are the property of their husband. Dece's (2007) research in Tamil Nadu says that the decline of a system of close kin marriage and rise of a commercialised dowry system of marriage is possibly one fatal cause for

these statistics. The brides' parents are prepared to give money or even gold to the bridegroom.

In the commercial banter of the marriage drama the bride's father requests the bridegroom to marry his daughter in a polite manner. Butler (1990: xxix) argues that notions of 'women' and 'female' are greatly unstable and that they are what she calls 'relational terms'. The concept of 'bride' or 'female' within Tamil society is greatly unstable because of misunderstood ritual actions performed by the elders and in particular the parents. The import and information attached to the marriage rituals are no longer passed on properly. The bride and bridegroom do not know why rituals are performed during the marriage; they were not taught and their significance in the belief or social system not explained. Presently parents engage in performing rituals simply because they are following their ancestors' performances and pressure from relatives. The concept of the bride is constructed through social and cultural interaction (Butler 1990: 135-141). Butler argues that feminine identity is socially constructed and gender is not expressed but done (Butler 1990: 140). Based on Butler's statement it is clear that the brides are constructed by the society not by the individual.

2.3.2 Commercial Attitudes towards Marriage Proceedings

By definition commercialisation is a process by which a new product or service is introduced into the general market (Investopedia 2015). In this study the Tamil marriage ritual process may be viewed as a product within society which is a factor in the sustenance of the family and by extension the culture of that community. Commercialisation can be

'broken into phases, from the initial introduction of the product through its mass production and adoption. It takes into account the production, distribution, marketing, sales and customer support required to achieve commercial success. As a strategy, commercialization requires that a business develop a marketing

plan, determine how the product will be supplied to the market and anticipate barriers to success (Sensele 2015).

All these attributes and characteristics of commercialisation are synonymous with the contemporary situation of the Tamil arranged marriage custom. The whole concept of the marriage process is saturated with the need to find economic gain. This is apparent in all areas and at all levels of the marriage process and is exemplified in how parents consistently save money for their daughters' marriages so that they can live a healthy happy life.

The real fun and enjoyment of a wedding celebration has faded and given way to artificial gloss and glitter (iloveindia.com 1999). Roy (2013) sees this commercialised attitude to the arranged Tamil marriage as detrimental such that there are warnings and worries that if such commercialisation continues all our aesthetic values will degenerate to create a hollow India. Marriage procedures are approached with an aim to ensure that connection to society is upheld and the commercial intensity that revolves around it represents the success of the event. Society as such creates the standards for the families to follow concerning the marriage events. Since the society stands to gain economically from the commercial activities of the marriage ceremony, there is less likelihood that the associated commercial activities will diminish. It has grown to become a factor in the economic survival of society in general along with survival of the particular families involved in the marriage.

Very much like commerce itself, the marriage process opens up with a variety of requests, rituals, bartering and buying. This starts from the matching of partners all the way through betrothal to the main event of the marriage and is just like the components and the many ideas that a company might have for launching a product which in this case is a requiem for social survival and acceptance. Organising and successfully

carrying out an acceptable Tamil marriage ceremony involves a number of logistics which in one way or another fulfil the societal expectations.



Figure 2.10: Balu.K. Sarihoarding, Advert, Pothis, 2014

This directly refers to all the happenings that surround the arranged Tamil marriage. A large amount of social and financial support is required to conduct successful celebrations involving marriage invitations, photography, video recording, attractive music, dresses (see Figure 2.10), stage and venue decoration (Figure 2.11), expensive gold ornaments, a variety of foods, colourful pre-wedding street procession, post-wedding travel etc. At the end of marriage ceremony parents who spent a lot of money are under pressure to settle their debts with their loan brokers.

South Indians view marriage as an essential institution and the defining marker (regardless of career or profession) of a woman's social status.²² Marriage is seen as a relationship between families that takes into account individual preferences but eventually the duty to family usually overshadows individual desires.

²² For more information on South Asians and arranged marriage see Deve and also Abraham



Figure 2.11: Maharani. Commercialisation, Garland decoration at Marriage hall, date unknown, photography

Due to the weather conditions of Southern India, traditional dress has been adapted accordingly resulting in a white cotton *Dhoti*²³ for the bridegroom and a cotton *Sari*²⁴ for the bride. Their attire helps them to sit comfortably for a long time inside the marriage hall. For my wedding I decided to spend money on non-traditional dress (western suit and coat). When I married in 2003 my marriage attire cost 15,000 rupees (approximately Botswana Pula 2500 / South Africa Rand 3000 at the time). I could not wear the suit again after the ceremony as the cloth did not suit South Indian weather conditions.

²³A traditional dress for Tamil community man. Usually white. It is a rectangular piece of unstitched cloth, around 4.5 metres (15 ft) long, wrapped around the waist and the legs and knotted at the waist, resembling a long skirt.

²⁴A sari (saree) is a South Asian female garment that consists of a drape varying from 4.57m to 8.23 m(5 to 9yards) in length and 60cm to 1.20m (2 to 4feet)in breadth that is typically wrapped around the waist, with one end draped over the shoulder.



Figure 2.12: Agneva Commercialisation, Chennai Silks, Advertisement

Some families are prepared to spend more than 200,000 rupees (approximately Botswana Pula 20,000/ South Africa Rand 25,000 in 2015) on dresses alone (Figure 2.12). The textile shops attract people through their sophisticated language in expensive advertisements (Figure 2.12). The dresses are designed and stitched with pearls, reflective glass, and lots of glittering ornaments to look more attractive. I observed that some couples find these heavily decorated clothes extremely uncomfortable to wear because of the contemporary synthetic material and they struggled with the idea that they might be influenced by adverts or popular images in cinema and television

The wedding sector of India has always been a fruitful business (Raghuvanshi 2011). According to a leading management consulting organisation, there are about 10 million weddings in India per year and a total of 14, 7230billion U.S Dollars is spent on them. Of this the jewellery market accounts for about 4, 4169billion U.S Dollars. Apparel is about 1, 4723billion U.S Dollars, whereas furniture durables and household items

are roughly around 4, 4169 billion U.S. Dollars. Other expenditure such as food and drink, wedding arrangements etc. amount to 5, 8892 billion U.S. Dollars (Diwan 2009).

During the marriage, decorating the venue and stage (Figure 2.13) presents another profitable area for money making. Attractive stage decorations, colourful flower arrangements with various patterns which are attractive to the viewers is the standard. Like the rituals in every wedding, Jasmine flowers are very important element in South Indian weddings even today where the contemporary culture/style has invaded weddings with new customs. Today's weddings also incorporate flowers like Orchids and Marigolds and you will still get the fragrance of Jasmine when you enter a South Indian wedding today..

Historically the woman's family pays for the necessities of the event. Tamil families share expenses among the respective families, but the bride's expenses are always more than the bridegroom's. Ingraham (1999) mentions that changes in the economy have forced couples to start sharing the costs of weddings. She claims that social awareness has made a great impact on such gatherings. When I analysed the expenses for the ceremonies I researched this varied from couple to couple according to the bride or bridegrooms' status, qualification and the type of job someone is engaged in.



Figure 2.13: Kapil Ganesh, *South Indian wedding decoration*. Photography, 2011

If the bridegroom has a bride with higher status he must plan to offer a luxurious car, a plot or house and several grams of high quality gold jewellery. Spending money for this kind of luxurious arrangement is not a ritual. Wedding jewellery reflects the culture by its design and is also reflection of the bride's status and prestige. Gold jewellery is normally passed down from grandmother to daughter to granddaughter and is a family tradition followed in Tamil culture. Jewels made out of yellow gold are attached to family values and sentiments in Tamil families (Figure 2.14). Each and every ornament used by the bride is somehow linked to the human anatomy and functions. Kumar (2002) states that the people of India have expended limitless energy, and creativity in the invention of ornaments that celebrate the human body (https://in.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/trainers_forum//conversations/.../39681). As such, there are several ornaments associated with the wedding day celebration rituals.



Figure 2.14: Mahadevan, G. K, *Traditional Tamil wedding jewellery*. Photography, 2015

Jewellery patterns during the olden days were inspired by nature including flora, fauna, birds and animals. Recurring motifs included mango, lotus, swans, peacocks, birds etc. South Indian jewellery is famous for temple based designs. A woman in South India is considered an embodiment of Goddess *Lakshmi* and is expected to adorn herself alluringly. She adorns herself with bracelets, necklaces, armbands, anklets and delicate hair ornaments. There are more than forty-eight kinds of essential jewels, based on jewellery and fashion ornaments used during the Vedic era, each signifying a bodily mechanism.

China and India are the largest markets for gold jewellery in the world. Approximately 3,000 tons of gold is produced in the world per year, of which approximately 750-800 tons are imported by India every year (Anbumani and Sundar 2014). People buy gold as an investment related to weddings. Tamil Nadu people buy gold every day to save for marriage (Anbumani and Sundar 2014). Presenting gold jewellery is a deeply embedded part of marriage rituals in Indian society. There are several designs available for brides and bridegrooms. I noticed during my field visit in 2012 in Tamil Nadu that in some instances even though the relatives do not have proper shelter to stay, they buy gold jewellery to present to their relatives during the Tamil marriage. They believe that they will receive back more than what they have given out when they finally have a wedding at their own homes. Family minded people become business minded within the family situation when they have a celebration in the contemporary world plagued by economic crisis.

Jewellery and style enhances the bride's femininity and beauty. Fashionable and traditional jewellery enrich the beauty of a bride and gives an elegant and dazzling look during the wedding ceremonies. Anderson (2000: 52) states that when weddings are viewed in purely economic terms, a pervasive, indeed prevailing, factor is the artistic dimension of the event. The arts play a crucial role in a wedding. Predictably, merchants capitalise on the same sentiments. One wedding magazine advertisement claimed: "A plain gold band says we're married, a diamond says forever" (Rajendran 2015). There was a time when marriage used to be purely about the happiness created between two families but because of new expenses, marriage has become a burden to some parents.

Meinzen (1980) mentions that in both a symbolic and very real sense dowry is the means by which the marriage arrangements are finalised. The gifts presented by the bride's family to the bridegroom's family are

accorded with spiritual merit, social significance and economic compulsion. According to Meinzen (1980) giving jewels as gifts or any property is really just a present to the parents' own child's welfare and is, of course, a necessity in the present economic conditions. The problem begins when the bridegroom's expectations from the brides' family is for presents of higher value than what is normally associated with his status. Such a scenario verges on marriage becoming a money making business.

The commercial attitude towards the marriage ceremony has built commercial empires that weigh in and weave around the marriage activities. These services, vendors and traders are all core players in the shaping of the orientation towards traditions that are fuelled by commercial attitudes in the Tamil community. They predominantly strategise and collaborate with one another to remain of importance and influence in the marriage process. They drive innovations and strategies by creating larger and larger portfolios to influence the society.

2.3.3 Contemporary Trends in Tamil Marriage Activities

There have been several new transformations of rituals which have had a big impact on Tamil marriage performances. Chennai ²⁵ is an ideal example of a metropolitan city that easily blends visible signs of its culture with symbols of prevailing trends. In older times, Tamil marriages were held in temples where they did not have to spend money on the venue. During the marriage the temple would be decorated with a lot of flowers. In Tamil Nadu the temple structure itself was constructed for social gatherings. In the present society very few people choose temples to conduct their marriages as they would rather go to an official wedding building to perform traditional rituals. Temples are now seen to have limited facilities with limited space, lack of water for visitors etc. People also want to show their socioeconomic status by conducting weddings in

²⁵The capital of Tamil Nadu, South India.

luxurious hotels and wedding halls which then feed commercial businesses. Hancock (1999) and Singer (1959) explain that the emphasis is on understanding the interplay of traditional practices within the realms of contemporary inclinations within the urban society.

Modernisation was once understood as being in opposition to tradition and as constituting a break from tradition (Antonio and Kellner 1994; Appadurai 1996). This breaking down of tradition is creating problems in people's lives. Over time human society created valuable life procedures in order to live pleasurably, through traditional rites and rituals such as marriage ceremonies. The effect of contemporary trends is exemplified in the artistic works of the late 18th century. During the contemporary culture ritual performances and materials have changed from natural to artificial and undermine the previous respected traditions.

In the course of this research information about Tamil marriages was also garnered through interviews with relation to both nuclear and extended families. I also attended marriage events involving my family and engaged in lengthy discussions with my mother. In these conversations she related her marriage and how it is so different from what now ensues with the high commercial influence. I was informed that my parents' wedding was held in a *mandap* (a temporary platform set up for weddings) with a lot of relatives and that the venue was decorated with banana, mango and bamboo leaves. They did not spend money on luxurious things to attract others (Figure 2.15). My mother alluded that it was a very simple gathering, but they followed all the traditional ritual performances. The contemporary life style has pushed people to spend more money in order to maintain a certain kind of status in their society.



Figure 2.15: Bell studios. – *Simplicity in my parents' wedding*, photography, 1963

Visual media is unavoidably associated with contemporary Tamil marriage ceremonies. Modern technology has influenced the change in cultural value. Cultural stereotypes present great resistance to change in their own redefinition. Culture often appears fixed to the observer at any one point in time because cultural mutations occur incrementally (Petraakis and Kostis2013). In marriage, communication was the main aspect that facilitated a solemn ceremony. However, contemporary lifestyles have brought change in communication systems. Computer art and media influence marriage organisation starting from invitation card printing, video and photography, adverts, audio etc. All these extras do not come cheap. If there is no professional photographer a wedding day is not complete. As can be seen in Figure 2.16 a photographic spot has to be prepared which has to be decorated with flowers, drapery, red carpet and many other glamorous artefacts.



Figure 2.16: Prasad R. *Wedding day in my relative's marriage, photography, 2012*

Every traditional Tamil family wants to make their marriage a pleasurable event. It is something that is inherent in the nature of family members in general. However, when family members have the intention to celebrate their marriage, it is also an event that is important in sustaining their economic conditions and position. From the beginning of the pre-wedding period to post-wedding there are a number of visual media markers. Modern wedding planners are engaged to facilitate the wedding process and these services do not come for free if it is not being done by a close relative. The process and its expenses is now split between the bride and the bridegrooms family to make sure that everything is catered for. The wedding planner for my brother-in-law's wedding suggested the following budget/expenses break down: 5% for social media advertisements; 15% for decorations; 5% for music recording; 40% for reception; 15% for wedding attire and jewellery; 10% for photography; 4% for stationery and

6% for miscellaneous.). The sanctity of marriage has been undermined relentlessly over the past few decades because of commercialisation and expectations related to dowries in marriage. Previously, wedding information used to be printed on thin yellow colour paper which is easy to fold. Nowadays, wedding cards are gauges to show the parents status. Some families spend up to \$100 for 1 wedding card. The contemporary trend in weddings is that it should be highly personalised in some way, such as an outdoor wedding at a beach or a riverside or in the hills etc. The colours mostly used by wedding decorators are brown tones with light pink or light blue (Shaadiinvite.com 2012). Monochromatic is very popular in recent years (Shaadiinvite.com 2012). Varieties of flowers in different colours are used. There are many companies available to organise weddings nowadays. Thus wedding sanctity is slowly disappearing and is being replaced by kitsch. In conclusion, the Tamil solemnity associated with weddings and marriage rituals is slowly eroding due to contemporary trends. It is important that the Tamil community must relook at their tradition and cultural strength so that people may have a love bond instead of a money bond.

2.4 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

During the course of this study I became a non-participant observer in many wedding rituals and took the position of an outsider in order to maintain objectiveness. During this time I observed each and every action using still and video cameras as well as taking notes. I reflected on my experience during my own wedding in order to recreate the emotional feelings I felt at the time. I became a full participant observer during my relatives' wedding rituals. Thus observation played a major role in informing this study's visual metaphors. In everyday life, people use various ways of arriving at truth or meaning, and the most important of these is by direct experience involving the use of the basic senses. Hence, a non-participant observer is an "observer who has no involvement with the people or activities studied". On the other hand, "participant

observation is a method of collecting data in which the researcher, to some degree, takes on the role of a member of the group being observed and participates in the functioning of that group” (<http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/466/996>).

In this study as a researcher I applied both these levels of participation, starting from being a full participant during my wedding and becoming a non-participant observer in various weddings and subsequently participating in my relatives’ wedding negotiations and planning. Participation with observation is useful for gaining an understanding of physical, social, cultural, and economic contexts (Selltiz 1965:208).

Through this method I have collected a vast amount of information about the relationships between couples and parents. The main difficulty in my observation was to get more information while working in different continents. As a participant in my brother-in-law Mr. Navaneedha Krishnan’s marriage proposal, we travelled to India in June 2012. After a long search to find a suitable life partner, we found a girl with the support of traditional astrologer. It is imperative to mention that my wife and I came back to Botswana because of employment reasons. In the meantime, there were several pre-wedding rituals which were being performed by family members and relatives after we left. Although my wife and I missed very important activities, we went back to India to participate in his wedding day rituals held on 10th December, 2012 (Refer to invitations in Appendix A). During this time, I documented all the ritual performances and information and this experience influenced my practical work immensely. During the process of this research I have spent more than two years recording and interviewing elders and couples in search for the real meaning of these rituals. Thus, three methods, namely, observation, in-depth interviews and focus groups interviews were used either simultaneously or alternatively.

I also visited several Hindu temples and as a participant observer I learnt several ritual activities which helped me to understand the meaning of some aspects of this phenomenon. I observed that rural marriage rituals are stronger with various dynamics than those found in urban areas. This is because the families in the urban areas usually outsource some of the activities to the service providers who see the Tamil wedding as a commercial heaven. On the other hand rural wedding ritual performances are carried out by close family and friends from the décor to the catering on the wedding day. During this study, I discovered that planning rural weddings sometimes results into family tensions. This tension usually emanates from disagreement within close family members and distant relatives with regards to the distribution of tasks especially where money is involved. These feelings of anxiety and the significance of ritual activities have been documented in this research study. I gained ideas to create artworks through my video and photographic collections.

All the different artistic marriage invitations and some of the traditional coloured cloths used to create my installations are from the wedding rituals I attended or are exact replicas of those used at these weddings. I collected information about these marriage ritual activities on naturally occurring behaviors in Tamil communities' and in their usual contexts. Personal histories, perspectives of the bride and bridegroom and parents experiences have been collected and executed in my installations using traditional as well as contemporary materials. It is very interesting to bring the visual narratives to the foreground through the collected information because Tamil ritual performances are colorful and aesthetically elaborate.

The beauty of rituals in the Tamil culture informed the technical rendition of my artworks. The symbolic performances of Brahmins Hindu priests), decorative designs of brides and the grooms and ritual activities in marriage celebrations have been captured and compared and contrasted with artists such as Goldsworthy, Milharesand Raza. Symbolic

movements have been achieved through symbols like shapes and colour. I created artifacts through analyzing the various rituals and differentiated and comparing them with Tamil cultural ritual performances. Turner's symbolic theory and Durkheim's (1995: 232) social ritual theory have been applied in the creation of my artworks. For my own artistic practice I have drawn on the traditional Tamil wedding rituals and subverted them through the use of digital media, referencing the commercialisation of rituals in the case of contemporary wedding rituals. My work has been influenced by various artists whose work will be discussed in Chapter 3. Symbolically, however, even in Western society, vestiges of rituals connected with ancient customs still remain, such as asking for the prospective bride's hand and giving away the bride (<http://cw.routledge.com/ref/religionandsociety/rites/marriage>).

CHAPTER 3: ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

In the course of this research I investigated contemporary artists who make use variety of organic and inorganic materials in the process of communicating various cultural beliefs and rites. These artists' works are of interest to me concerning my own art production and some relate to Tamil marriage ritual performances in one way or another. I have focussed on their styles, techniques, materials and method of conceptualisation. Many artists have tried to capture the rituals and beliefs of different cultures through variety of media and have played a key role in the shaping of my research project. The works in this project are more than the reflections of socio-cultural performances – embody active participation in socio-cultural structures. They also represent artists' views which embrace evolving forms of nature and ritual artifacts. I have been influenced by artists who have made artworks based on the customs and rituals of different cultures such as Andy Goldsworthy, Beatriz Milhazes and S. H. Raza.

3.1 ANDY GOLDSWORTHY'S RITUAL ENVIRONMENT

Goldsworthy is a well-known environmental subject-based sculptor. His land art installations foreground my ritual art making process. He works with nature as a whole emphasising the originality of ritual performances using leaves, wood, rocks, sand, ice, sticks, quills, thorns and other available natural materials in order to create specific artworks. After he completes his intervention with nature, he photographs his artwork, which serves as a documentation of the process, and then allows the natural materials to decay or be washed away by water and wind. As a result weather plays an important role in his artworks. He depicts autumn by using golden colour, spring is represented by green and summer is represented by a brownish colour. Goldsworthy says that "the energy and

space around a material are as important as the energy and space within” (Morning Earth 1956).

During the marriage ceremony flowers and fruits are used for the ritual performances. Leaves are sacred in Tamil culture. For example, Banana leaves are symbolic of love and medical benefits. As Goldsworthy asserts the energy of banana tree leaves signify the worth of family life. The Tamil word for ‘banana’ is ‘*Vaazhai*’ meaning ‘life’. Being interested in his installation making process, I have discovered many ways of rendering my own art installations, computer graphics and paintings. My computer graphic works reflects the Tamil cultural rituals’ use of flat bright colours. I use my graphic media to manipulate and play around with the flowers, decorations and other ceremonial activities. In my installations I have used organic and inorganic objects which grow, stay and decay just like Goldsworthy’s style. Process and decay are also implicit components of my work.

The transience within my work reflects what I find in nature. As with all my work, whether it is a leaf on a rock or ice, I try to get beneath the surface appearance. For instance, by working the surface of a stone I attempt to understand the internal energy of the stone. Goldsworthy’s *Autumn Cherry Leaves*(Figure 3.1) and *Red Cherry Leaf Patch*(Figure 3.2) works show the vital role weather plays in his artworks. He manages to collect a variety of leaves and colours and arranges them in different shapes to denote the decaying of newness and freshness in an expressive manner. The colour variation of these works reminds me of Indian ritual garlands. My artworks try to show how flowers and leaves make up beautiful garlands which are used for a range of Tamil marriage ritual activities.



Figure 3.1: Andy Goldsworthy *Autumn Cherry Leaves*, 1984



Figure 3.2: Andy Goldsworthy *Red Cherry Leaf Patch*, Cumbria, 1984

The tree in Goldsworthy's artwork entitled *Incredible Serpentine Tree Roots* in Figure 3.3 creates a sense of rhythm using sand to show how to extend and expose the roots of the two trees which show their interconnectedness (Morning Earth 2008), and is similar to the *Thali* ritual (tying the knot). I was influenced by this idea to create an installation to show the interrelationships between couples (Figure 4.11 and 4.16).

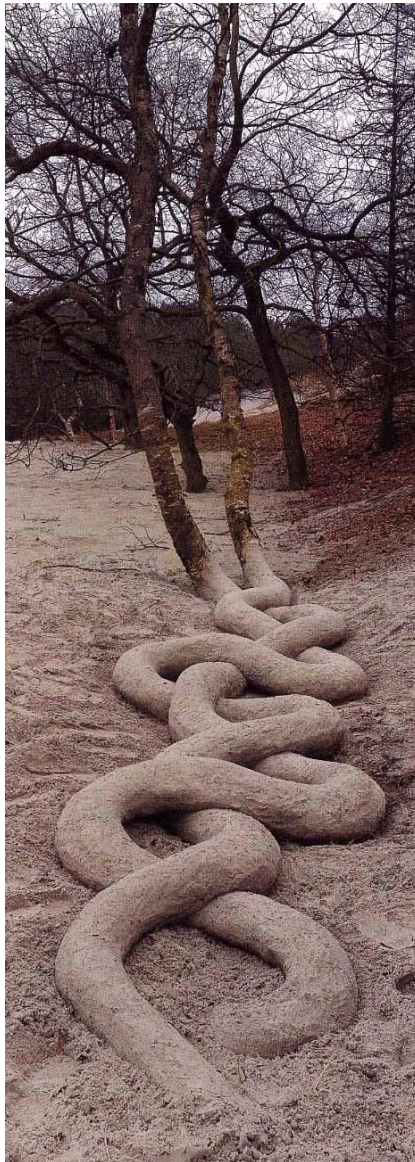


Figure 3.3: Andy Goldsworthy, *Incredible Serpentine Tree Roots*, date unknown

Goldsworthy understands nature by directly participating in it as intimately as possible (Morning Earth 2008). Goldsworthy explaining how he creates his artwork as follows:

I enjoy the freedom of just using my hands and "found" tools--a sharp stone, the quill of a feather, thorns. I take the opportunities each day offers: if it is snowing, I work with snow, at leaf-fall it will be with leaves; a blown-over tree becomes a source of twigs and branches. I stop at a place or pick up a material because I feel that there is something to be discovered. Here is where I can learn (Morning Earth 2008)

Artist and decorator Akshay decorates outdoor wedding settings (Figure 3.4). Previously most Tamil wedding ceremonies were held in concrete buildings however nowadays a variety of contemporary venues such as hotels, public halls including those outdoors are used by the current society weddings. I drew inspiration from Goldsworthy's and Akshay's use of environmental found objects for my installations which incorporate traditional material like wood and other objects associated with Indian traditional temples in outdoor settings. Every art work should be viewed philosophically as they also convey an intrinsic meaning.



Figure 3.4: Akshay. *Out Door wedding theme, Photography, 2012*

One of Goldsworthy's artworks entitled *Rowan Leaves and Hole* (1956) (Figure 3.5) reminds me of the sacred firing (*Agni*) place at the wedding day rituals. The contrasting yellow colour and the black hole influenced me to create my own "*AgniSacred Fire*" installation (Figure 4.13) and "*Gaze of Agni*" graphical work (Figure 4.14). The pattern and free movement of ritual feeling can be expressed through computer media. The "*Gaze of Agni*" artwork seeks to portray the ritualistic sanctity of this ritual and it makes use of fusion and merging of warm colours to resemble the heat of the moment which usually fills the room when this ritual is performed.



Figure 3.5: Andy Goldsworthy, *Rowan Leaves and Hole*, Installation, 1956

Although I often use computer media, I give importance to the original effects to show the richness of rituals. Goldsworthy proclaims that "when I touch a rock, I am touching and working the space around it. It is not

independent of its surroundings, and the way it sits tells how it came to be there” (Morning Earth 2008).

He demonstrates the richness of feelings in natural spirituality in his artworks. Through my series of graphics and mixed media works, I try to showcase the interconnectedness of natural elements with Tamil marriage rituals and everyday life. The leaves in these works are linked to offerings and they are related to Shilling’s leaves which reflect different seasons through different colours. The lines are symbols of the vibration of the different ritual situations, giving direction towards the point of adoration.

3.2 BEATRIZ MILHAZES’S TRANSFORMATION

Brazilian artist Beatriz Milhazes’ rich and complex work draws together motifs which have their roots in her everyday Brazilian cultural environment, and includes references to natural forms, folk art, carnival, and Brazilian baroque decorations. She transforms these influences into abstract patterns and ornamental shapes, which shift between the recognisable and the unfamiliar (Milhazes 2008). Her art works directed me to analyse the ritual artefact of shapes and colours.

Milhazes’s geometrical forms and structured approach to different surfaces demonstrates the freedom of motifs. She mentioned once in an interview that the “freedom of forms and imagery is taken from different worlds” (Milhazes: 2008). The careful balance of harmony in her work combined with her colour palette is evidence of her being a contemporary artist. One of her works is displayed as the background of an opera dance. The art is not simply a backdrop, but it develops the environment with all the elements surrounding it as shown in Figures 3.6, 3.7, 3.8 and 3.9. The images show the struggle on the surface and create some sort of conflict that will never really end up anywhere which means there is always continuity in her works. It epitomises how parents make an artistic setup to decorate the stage in a wedding hall especially where photographs will

be taken during Tamil wedding ceremony. Milhazes's background setup (Figure 3.6) can be artistic influence for any wedding set up.



Figure 3.6: Beatriz Milhazes, *set design for Marcia Milhazes's contemporary dance company, 2008*

My installations and geometrical patterned designs were influenced by Milhazes's vibrant colours such as golden orange and explosive energy, which symbolises the rhythm of holy wedding day rituals especially *homa* (ritual fire) place. My artwork the "Gaze of Agni"(Figure 4.13)is also deeply influenced by Milhazes's, particularly her design quality, colour and technique which could be related to the ritual performances during Tamil wedding ceremonies.



Figure 3.7: Beatriz Milhazes, *O beijo*, Acrylic on canvas 2001

The sensitivity and lucidity of her designs are not just patterns but are artistic. I make my work in the form of various geometrical shapes, which plays a very important role in wedding processions and commercialised rituals as in Figure 3.7.



Figure 3.8: Beatriz Milhazes, *Pierrot e Colombina*, Acrylic on canvas 2009/2010

Instead of painting directly onto the canvas, Milhazes develops a technique where she uses acrylics to paint shapes onto plastic and then transfers them onto canvas. Technically this idea of transforming the sketches from surface to surface relates to my use of several layers in my computer graphic and painting works. “Her works ultimately resemble computer generated work but if you move closer you find superimposed layers of colours on canvas” (Paul 2013).

Her ceremonial form of art is full of “happiness, curly locks and patterns and wants the viewer to make discoveries” (Paul 2013). Her murals and works in glass decorate the venue in abstract design form. Her influence is evidenced in my graphical art that seeks to show the pleasurable moments of the Tamil marriage performances. Lines and shapes tied together convey ritual richness.



Figure 3.9: Beatriz Milhazes, *Mural on glass*, Courtesy: Stephen Friedman Gallery

Decorative flowers and simplistic patterns are relevant to my research. These resemble the decoration used in marriage venues with plenty of colourful fresh flowers. One might say that Milhazes's compositional colour thoughts and movements of patterns are celebrating a peaceful environment, which the marriage venue requires. Her abstract compositions are typically layered with imagery, particularly floral designs and ornate circular medallions (Milhazes 2008). Milhazes draws upon local visual traditions as diverse as Baroque colonial art, with the filigree halos of its saints; folk styles of decorative painting on furniture and architecture; and the mass-produced textiles, wallpapers, and ceramic tiles of her everyday surroundings. In addition, her brilliant colour schemes as seen in Figure 3.10 recall the costumes and parade floats of Carnival, especially as celebrated in *Rio de Janeiro*, her hometown and the cultural capital of Brazil.

Her piece *The Beach* (Figure 3.10) deeply influenced the compositional quality I attempted in my graphical work, *Ritual Moment* (Figure 4.7). Working with contemporary technology on traditional subject matter presented some interesting challenges. I always have a feeling that happiness in marriage is a spiritual pleasure. Many marriage ritual performances rites involve geometrical shapes²⁶ which play a vital role.

²⁶ Geometrical shapes such as square, rectangle or square (yantra), zigzag (kolam), red dot, circle etc. play an important role during the marriage ceremony and are organized by the priest (Brahmin).



Figure 3.10: Beatriz Milhazes, *The Beach*, Acrylic, metallic paint, metal leaf on canvas, 1997

3.3 SYED HAIDER RAZA'S SHAPES AND FORMS

The Indian artist Syed Haider Raza's symbolic geometric form has also influenced my artworks. He moved from plastic art to art that uses spiritual geometric shapes. His unique energy vibrating with colour in his early landscapes is now more subtle but equally, if not more, dynamic. Raza's works express deep insight and thoughts on Indian spirituality as represented in his work *Antar Pradesh* (Figure 3.11).



Figure 3.11: Syed Haider Raza, S.H, *Antar Pradesh*, oil on canvas, undated

Circles, triangles and other geometric shapes symbolise spirituality (Raza 2014). For example, a triangle represents the *Trimurthy* which is the holy trinity of Shiva, Brahma and Vishnu. A circle represents universal energy. I compared and contrasted those elements to Tamil ritual performances and expressed them using painting materials and computer graphical software. My experimentation in this study presents my personal experience and involvement with these ritual performances, which are

expressed through shape, colour, line, forms, perspective, design and light.

The compositional elements and the vibrancy of colours used to represent the elements are central to Raza's works. Another important aspect seen in his later works is the incorporation of religious symbol and folkloric imagery such as the Bindu²⁷ and Yoni²⁸ (Raza 2014). These mystical elements display his ties with India, as well as adding a purity of form.



Figure 3.12: Raza. S.H, *Bindu-Shiyam*, oil on canvas, 2013

²⁷ *Bindu* is a Sanskrit word that denotes the male organ.

²⁸ *Yoni* is a Sanskrit word that denotes the female organ.

Raza's symbolic significance of female organ and male organ ideas and his composition influenced me to use them in my graphical ideas and art works. In his Bindu-Shiyam painting the black circle represents a female organ and colourful vibrant lines around the black circle represent the male organ in this canvas (Figure 3.12). It is quite interesting to understand that male and female should be together in order to maintain the social order. Raza's work reminds me of Bellah's (2003) essay "The Ritual Roots Are for Society and Culture" and that a ritual is central for understanding not only for religion, but also understanding a society (Durkheim 1995: 150).



Figure 3.13: Raza. S.H., *untitled*, oil on canvas, Photography 2014

These artists were chosen first for their unique ways of using unconventional materials such as natural found objects in an unconventional way such as the installation works, and secondly for Milhazes and Raza's abstract manner which makes use of geometric shapes and flat colours when rendering the meaning of the subject matter inspired my computer graphic artworks. All these artists have in some way or another been the main influence in the artistic development of my solo exhibition which forms part of this research as presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: STUDIO PRACTICE AND VISUAL METAPHORS

In this chapter I elaborate on my studio practice which stems from the research of Tamil wedding rituals. I try to emphasise the Tamil marriage ritual performances and their significance. I visualise ceremonial ritual activities in various forms of art which include drawing, painting, computer graphics and installations. I have grouped my studio practice into pre-wedding, wedding day and post-wedding day ritual performances based on the information gathered before and during the course of this research.

4.1 PRE-WEDDING DAY PREPARATION AND RITUALS

I am always fascinated by observing decoration wherever I go as these remind me of Tamil wedding decorations. During this research I have decorated many shrines for ritual activities both in Botswana where I currently live and work and in India where I originate from. I was influenced by the work of Andy Goldsworthy in which I used natural material to decorate the venue (Figure 4.1) and emphasise the importance of the relation between human existence and the environment.



Figure 4.1: Bala. K, *Decorative Installation in Temple*, Photography: Gaborone, 2014

My artworks *Brides pretty move* in Figure 4.2 and *Pre-wedding ritual sensation*, Figure 4.3 are based on Tamil ritual metaphors. These works make use of vibrant colours to express the pleasure associated with emotional feelings of satisfaction felt by everyone involved after a ritual has been performed.



Figure 4.2: Bala K, *Bride's pretty move*, Computer Graphics, A1, 2014



Figure 4.3: Bala K, *Pre-wedding Ritual Sensation*, Computer Graphics, A1, 2014

The art work of Beatriz Milhazes combines multiple shapes and forms. She defines her approach to art as “geometric abstraction” (Milhazes2008). *Obeijo* in Figure 3.7 radiates a life energy and pleasure force typical of Raza’s work. Both Milhazes and Raza make use of circles and squares in their art works and with their ideas and influence I used the movements with blurry effect such as in *Pre-wedding Ritual sensation* in Figure 4.3. The blurred line incorporates the happiness during wedding day celebration, which suggests lively movement. The colours and wavy lines represent the action, which is performed by the Brahman. The rectangle shaped configuration or puzzle boxes, which indicates sanctity in my work *Bride’s Pretty Move* Figure 4.2, are also found in Indian style art especially in the work of Raza’s *Bindhu Shiyam* painting in Figure 3.12. During my personal visit to various pre-wedding day events, I noticed that an agreement is made between the two families, which constitute the central theme of the ritual and how it will be carried out. The conversation and negotiation between the two families plays an important role on the wedding day. The geometric shapes and colours are interpretations of the connections and relationships between both families.

From the documented video clips I observed that the colour yellow is dominant throughout the ritual performances. Hindu God and Goddess idols were covered with yellow turmeric powder and during the wedding day a thread was covered with yellow powder and all female well-wishers’ faces were beautifully decorated with traditional turmeric powder. Yellow is the symbol of euphoria and happiness. This idea and colourful event has been re-interpreted in my art work through lines and shapes as in *Pre-wedding Ritual sensation* (Figure 4.3). The expression of happiness and emotions of brides and bridegrooms have been captured in this art work through the use of blurring lines and merging of colours which create soft edges associated with swift moments of both joy and anxiety. The anxiety is caused by the anticipated wedding day rituals which mark the

completion of the main wedding activities. On the other hand wedding day rituals are an expression of blissful emotions and anxiety as they “underlie social gatherings and stress” (Gluckman 1963).

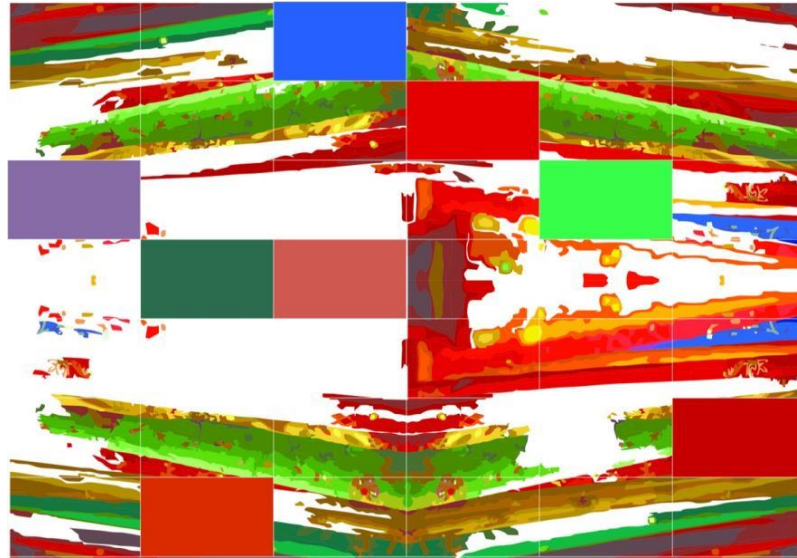


Figure 4.4: Bala, K, *Bridegroom in pre-wedding*, Computer Graphics, A1, 2014

These pleasant and unpleasant emotions have been visualised through puzzled colours in Figure 4.4. The contrast of colours and rectangular shapes symbolise the bride and bridegroom’s relatives gathered around the ceremony. The line in the middle brings both parties together to where the rituals usually happen. Marriage is a social drama which represents and confirms the basic values (Turner 1974:23-35) of the Tamil community. The anxiety increases during the wedding event. Although marriage involves so much pressure, rituals are never stopped and they are performed throughout various occasions of the Tamil people.

Bridegrooms wear white or light coloured shirts during their deliberations. Trays full of popular gifts and lots of colourful flowers and fruits are the major characteristic of these events. This arrangement is visualised through a semi-abstract computer method in *Bridegroom in pre-wedding* (Figure 4.4), and in *Wedding day Ritual* (Figure 4.6) which portrays the presentation of wedding gifts as part of the ritual performance. Computer

graphical media has been applied in creating these artworks as a symbol embracing a commonly used contemporary medium. Modern sociologists believe that technological innovation is the single most important source of social change (Sheldon 1999). I used a computer as contemporary media method to promote the Tamil culture and to show the loveliness of rituals. I am comfortable using this contemporary to create ritual actions by means of graphical effects.

4.2 WEDDING DAY AND POST-WEDDING DAY RITUALS

The last two stages of the Tamil marriage custom, the wedding and post-wedding are intertwined. This is because in Tamil Hindu marriage the most memorable scene is the main wedding ritual which is the thread knotting ceremony, usually held in the early morning of the wedding day. Once this ritual is performed the couple is considered married. Everything that happens thereafter is considered post-wedding by the couple and the rest of the day is occupied with post-wedding rituals and celebrations.

The traditional light which shines during the performance of the knotting ceremony signifies the supreme power light. The elders perform this ritual by placing a burning light in front of the couple as shown in Figure 4.5. This light is symbolic of the supreme presence to bless the couple as they become one in a matrimonial union. With this inspiration of luminosity in ritual, my artworks integrate light and shade in many ways to show the different aspects of rituals in Tamil culture. I often use photographs which I captured during such ceremonies to create compositional design.



Figure 4.5: Siva. R, *Traditional light in front of couples*, Photography, 2012

Wedding day Ritual in Figure 4.6 showcases the myriad activities which take place on the wedding day. A traditional band may accompany the families and the bridegroom is greeted at the door of the bride's house with a flower garland and sandal wood paste. The central ritual which formally seals the marriage in all communities is the tying of the *Thali* (tying the knot). This message is depicted in my *Wedding day Ritual* work in Figure 4.6 with a smudged yellow colour showing the *Thali* immersed in traditional turmeric water. The graphic design itself demonstrates that this ritual is an auspicious activity.

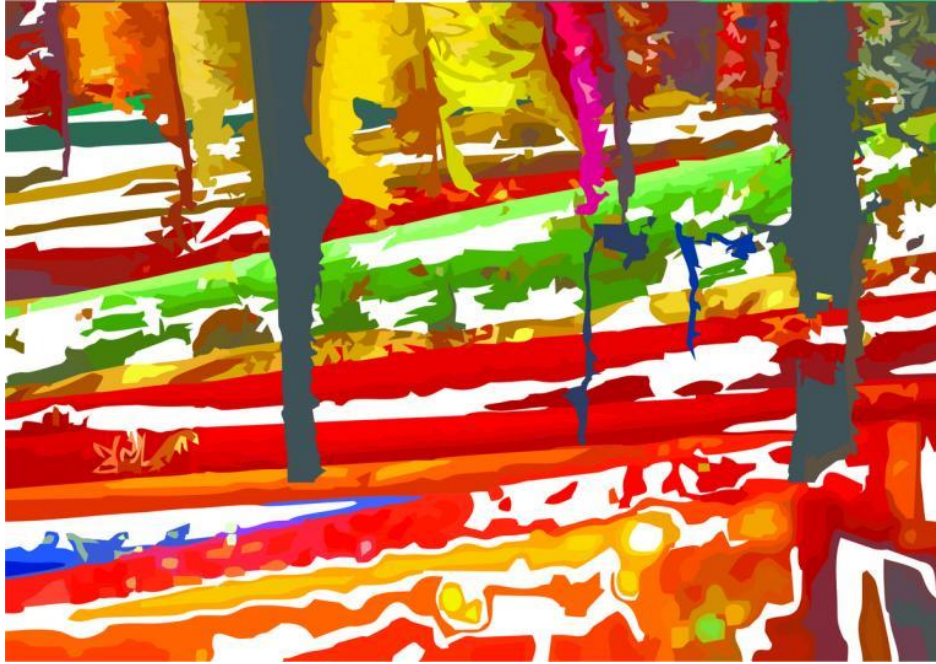


Figure 4.6: Bala K, *Wedding day Ritual*, Computer Graphics, A1, 2014

In the evening of the wedding day, the bride and the bridegroom move to the bridegroom's home. The couples are encouraged to have sexual intercourse. The potential emotion and feelings are visualised in *Ritual moment* in Figure 4.7. These emotions are presented by forms which suggest some shapes of female organs and movement such as the mixing of liquids. Turner's (1967:9) and Gluckman's (1963) theories claim that rites are performed for spirit divination. Turner asserts that spirit prediction and pleasing of deity are the main reasons for ritual performances. His argument is debatable when analysing and interpreting the Tamil post-wedding ritual performances which are dominated by intimate moments and indulging in conjugal rites. The ritual performance in post-wedding particularly sexual intercourse is not performed to please the deity but the couple is expected to engage in this sexual act not only for enjoyment but to produce offspring. When I got married in 2003 I was invited by my wife's parents to celebrate our first night with my wife at their home. I considered this gesture as an honour and a sign of acceptance by my wife's family.

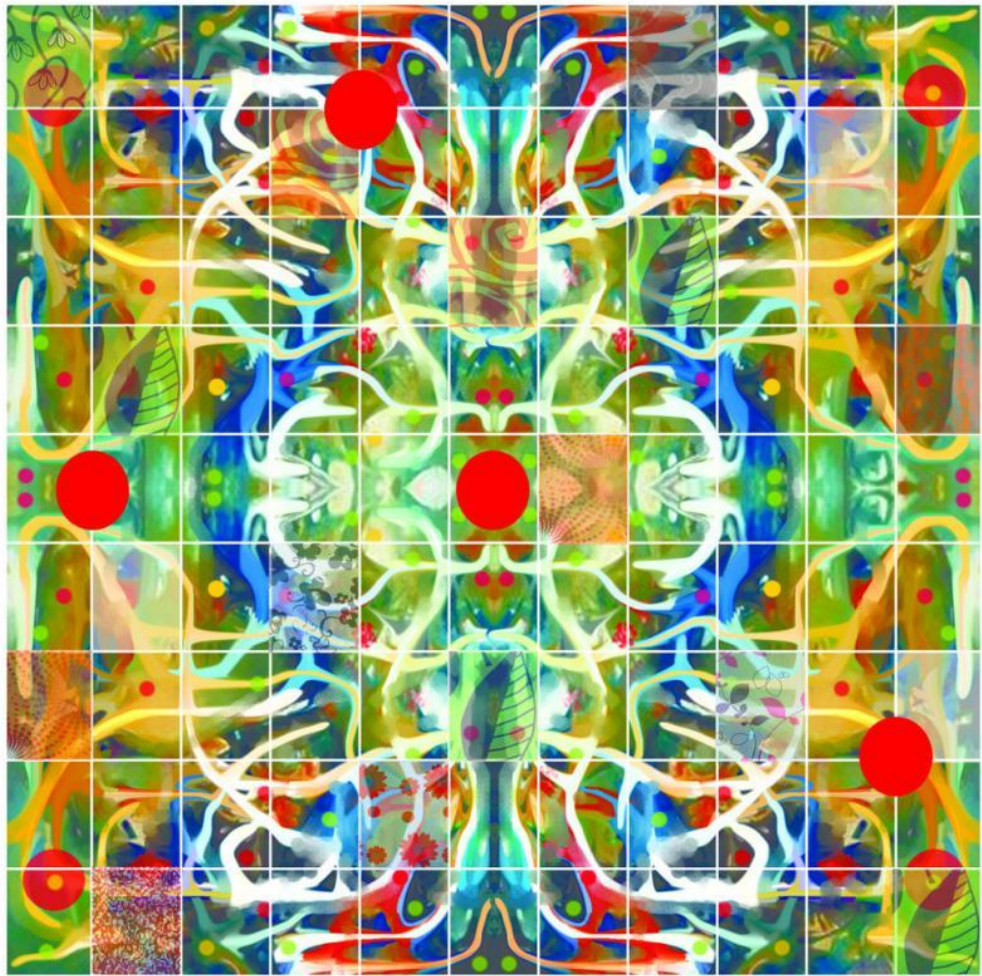


Figure 4.7: Bala, K., *Ritual moment*. Graphic Art, A1, 2014

Flowers and fruit were used to decorate the room we slept in which was infused with perfumed incense. From my personal experience and observation I created this ritual arrangement using computer graphics in the work entitled *Wedding Night Ritual* (Figure 4.8). The splashed lines depict the feelings of the couple. The forms of banana fruits and flowers are visibly suggestive. There is milk in the pot. This art work conveys the intimate mood of the couple. Actually the idea for decorating the room with different coloured flowers particularly jasmine, provides a wonderful smell to create the sexual mood and romantic situation for the couple in their first night in this room. This is done to entice the couple into indulging in sexual intercourse without any disturbance, and with the hope that the new wife will conceive their first child. The Tamil ancestors

prescribed this arrangement for the post-wedding day with the creation of offspring in mind. These emotional and romantic scenes have been depicted in Figure 4.8.

The commercial impact is also created in the form of superimposed graphical art entitled *Artist on her feet* (Figure 4.9). In this computer graphic image expensive jewellery and costumes are superimposed on the bride's and the groom's picture. This art work indirectly interprets the commercial influence on the Tamil wedding activities. This influence is presented by computer generated designs in contrast to the traditional decorations which are characterised by natural objects as this one incorporates a touch of precision in the execution of patterns in clothing and jewellery.



Figure 4.8: Bala, K., *Wedding Night ritual*, Computer Graphics, 2014



Figure 4.9: Bala, K., *Artist on her feet*, Computer Graphics, 2014

Installation is the type of art where an artist can combine a variety of media, materials and techniques on a larger scale. These ritual scenes have been presented in installations such as in Figure 4.10 *Tamil wedding 3 stages* and Figure 4.11 *Wedding Sanctity*. Marriage is a journey which is presented in a number of stages in Tamil culture. This journey has to be experienced in its entirety going through all the prescribed rituals.



Figure 4.10: Bala. K, *Tamil wedding 3 stages*, 30ft, Installation, Gaborone, 2015

In my installation work I present this journey by making use of prominent or commonly used objects associated with each and every stage marrying couples have to go through in order to complete the entire cycle until the fairy-tale belief of happy ever after is accomplished. This idea of using real material I have adapted from Andy Goldsworthy's work the *Tree God under Banyan tree*. The installations entitled *Tamil wedding 3 stages* in

Figure 4.10, 4.11 4.12, 4.13 try to present the Tamil marriage life philosophically and in its entirety, starting from announcement by inviting family and friend, through the wedding and finally the couple living together and producing children.



Figure 4.11: Bala, K., *Wedding Sanctity*, Installation, 12ft, Gaborone, 2015



Figure 4.12: Bala, K., *Kula Devta*. Installation, Gaborone, 2015



Figure 4.13: Bala, K., *Sacred fire*, Installation, 2015

The *Tamil wedding 3 stages* work in Figure 4.10 presents a totem pole placed on a number of invitation cards in the foreground of this installation which indicates the union emanating from the two families. The sari in the middle ground presents the wedding day and all the rituals associated with the wedding, whilst the tree and the setting in the background is a symbol of growth and family expansion. Figures 4.11, 4.12 and 4.13 are narratives of other wedding rituals.



Figure 4.14: Bala, K., *Gaze of Agni*, 2014 Graphics, A1 size



Figure 4.15: Bala, K., *Bride with Garland*, Painting, 2013

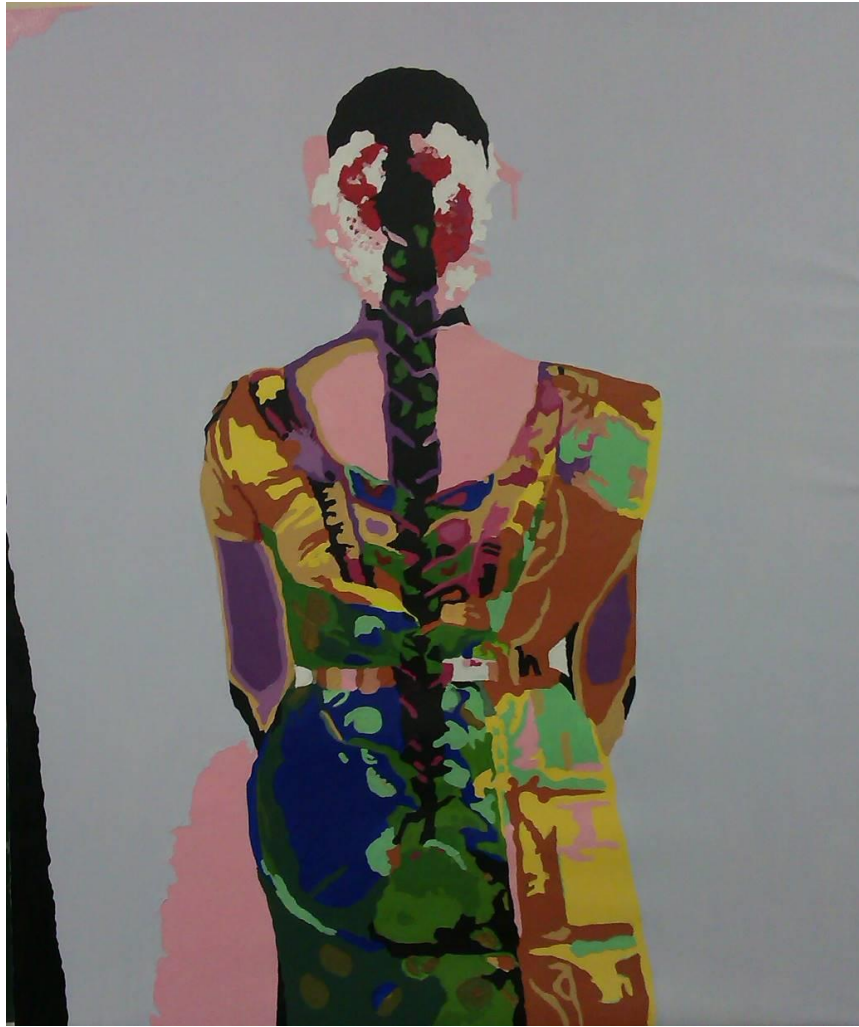


Figure 4.16: Bala, K., *Spiral Bond*, Acrylic on canvas, 2013

Finally, my work can be described as ritualistic in design, playing with spiritual feelings embedded within Tamil marriage ceremonies. Tamil customs are designed for happiness and to construct a holy situation. To create sacred feelings and ritualistic design, in my art work I technically use decorative lines and colour contrast. My work is highly aware of the influence of Western culture and the continued commercialisation of these rituals and ceremonies and asks what kind of social implications such intertwining produces. My work wants to stand as artefacts of what these ritual performances truly mean today and reveal or question the meaning that might have come to be hidden or diluted due to capitalist thinking.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This study attempted to find the significance of rituals within Tamil marriage customs and to explore whether or not there are logical reasons behind their maintenance from various points of view. In addition the study sought to investigate the negative impact contemporary trends or commercialisation of this custom has had in the sustainability of this marriage custom in its original practice. Furthermore, the role parents play in perpetuation of this traditional custom was also analysed and interpreted.

Subsequently, the body of artworks which forms part of this research has been developed from the information collected by the researcher through various qualitative methods including observations at these events and interviews with knowledgeable people about this custom. These artworks portray the reality of these events by making use of the real material used when these rituals are performed.

Marriage means unity on the physical, mental, and spiritual planes. If you attract others by spiritual magnetism then you will meet your soul companion. An ideal human marriage is the communion of two souls. But the soul finds the highest communion in God. Unless human love is spiritualized, it will be a canker in your soul. Unless you are spiritually-minded and your mate is the same, you can never be completely happy (ParamahansaYoganandha / Spiritual marriage 2014).

Ritualistic obligation and obsession, commercialisation and parental influence have led the Tamil people to maintain these traditional marriage rituals in line with cultural conformity.

5.1 RITUALISTIC OBLIGATION AND OBSESSION

People act according to the beliefs which they have learnt through both enculturation and acculturation and adopt them as their standard of living. These beliefs include rituals, attitudes, values, ideologies, and role models or cultural authority, amongst others. Enculturation in this sense refers to the transmission of cultural values within the same culture from generation to generation, whilst acculturation takes place when two different cultures coming together and absorb some of each other's values and practices. A ritual is a sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects performed in a designated place and according to a set sequence (Merriam 2011) which takes place according to the tradition and culture of that society. In the case of this study parents play a major role in the maintenance and transmission of dogmatic Tamil marriage rituals. Thus the Tamil people perform rituals in fear of misfortune and sometimes because they want to be associated with a certain class or status within the community. Tamil people believe that the performance of rituals is ordained and consists of hidden meanings which do not have to be questioned, but have to be carried out for the welfare of the people and society at large.

Many couples including my relatives whom I interviewed said that they do not know why these strict rituals are performed, but they perform them simply because they were told to do so by their parents. Some couples confessed that they had questioned the significance of these rituals but were told not to ask and this could be because the elders and parents themselves do not know as they were also told not to ask. According to responses from interviews I conducted during this research, marriage rituals are constructed by the Brahmin (priest) based on Vedic ritual guidelines which even today are not publicly disseminated. Most weddings are pre-planned and the priest ensures that rituals are followed from ancient Vedic scriptures. The wedding ritual patterns suggest that

the performance comprises cultural texts that reflect the larger system of social expression and structure.

Through my observations and interviews conducted during this study it was confirmed that many families perform these rituals as a formality and in order to be accepted by the society as the supporters of what is the standard practice. People become obsessed about doing these rituals in accordance with the prescribed standards which are sometimes difficult to abide by, but they feel obliged to do it in fear of the unknown. Thus it seems that people simply follow without knowing the true meaning and the real value of the rituals except for what they have been told and observed through cultural transmission. Whilst these beliefs and rites do not disturb the social order they nevertheless require to be revisited for healthy implementation among the people. This revision has to take into consideration the family members' socioeconomic conditions and status.

5.2 COMMERCIALISATION AND PARENTAL INFLUENCE

Commercialisation is a term associated with this contemporary world and "is a process where markets are established" for a specific type of goods and/or services resulting in an increase in competitive pressures on both the suppliers and the consumers. In this case the commercialisation of the Tamil marriage activities involves competition first among the families who are about to unite and in relation to the communities they associate themselves with. Secondly, service providers sometimes entice their customers by adding unnecessary things to their products compelling the consumer to pay more for items that are not important. These unnecessary items include such things as very expensive attire, jewellery, decorations of the venue, advertisements, catering and gifts to mention just a few. This competition manifests itself in a number of ways affecting the manner in which both suppliers and consumers do things. Thus families, by wanting to belong to a certain class, end up following what is

believed to be accepted and the standard which is a form of cultural conformity or cooperation.

It has been my aim to make people understand the significance of ritual activities in every event they perform. My artworks are presented within the context of the theorists I have used and they explore the ritual performances in Tamil weddings by showcasing simplicity. I attempted to create awareness and happiness through my various visual art experiments, qualities which should surround wedding ceremonies. It was also my aim to eliminate the boundaries between the bride's and bridegroom's parties and priests through the interpretation of the 'acknowledgment' made to me by the couples I interviewed. Of course, a wedding ritual performance itself is colorful, artistic and a beautiful presentation of culture, but people must understand the negative impact on some of the members within the society due to disparities in socio-political and economic status.

In this contemporary world where people are more materialistic, Tamil rites and rituals have been affected. The traditional cultural beliefs which respected the wellbeing of the people by embracing natural and easily available products are slowly but surely dying. Only a few people, especially in rural areas still cling to these esteemed cultural beliefs and ritual performances which still respect the wellbeing of the society. This has been demonstrated in my art installation through the use of contrasting colours, shapes, decorations and other art elements which embrace natural products. Similarly, this research does not advocate for a single answer but proposes going back to the drawing board and to examine our way of life to avoid gradual erosion of culture and how this may influence perceptions of the young generation negatively.

Finally, this study is not suggesting that all aspects of the contemporary Tamil wedding rituals are unnecessary, but it calls for retaining the positive

aspects which support human stability and dignity. Submitting to better solutions does not mean that traditional valuable rituals should be done away with, but the study advocates for a balance between the past and present ways of life. Thus acceptance of variations in the set systems could be done through gradual change of elements such as attitudes, values, and ideologies amongst other things. This means influencing the non-material aspects such as adherence to simple traditional rituals in the case of this study. It is hoped that if these traditional rituals are kept as simple as was in the past the material aspects brought about by contemporary changes can be dealt with without people feeling that culture is not respected.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: TAMIL MARRIAGE INVITATIONS

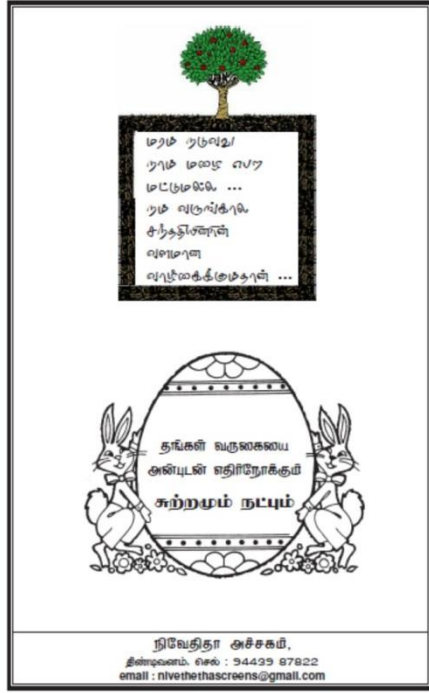
Research Participation and observation

Fancy Invitation



Tamil culture Marriage Invitations collected during research 2012

Traditional Invitation



Brother in-law marriage invitation, participated on 10/12/2012

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Botswana Hindu Society, Botswana

RESEARCH TOPIC:

**A DESCRIPTIVE VISUAL ANALYSIS OF THE SURVIVAL OF TAMIL
ARRANGED MARRIAGE RITUALS AND THE IMPACT OF
COMMERCIALISM**

BALASUBRAMANIAN KANNI 47172371

Research in Visual art

Dear sir/ Madam

This request and exercise is to conduct informal interviews with individuals in Tamil Marriage ceremonies and ritual based festivals about the process of planning and participating in *Hindu ceremonies*. The focus of these observations and interviews will be on the choices made with regards to the ceremony and participation in the Tamil culture.

All individuals that share personal experiences will stay identified in the appearance of research information though consent is requested to use the stories of their personal experience for academic research.

The names and data collected detail will be used only for academic purposes only.

The materials and things which are relevant to culture will be used for art installation purposes only. and I promise that this plan will not be used for business purposes.

Thank you

BalasubramanianKanni

18. 06.2013