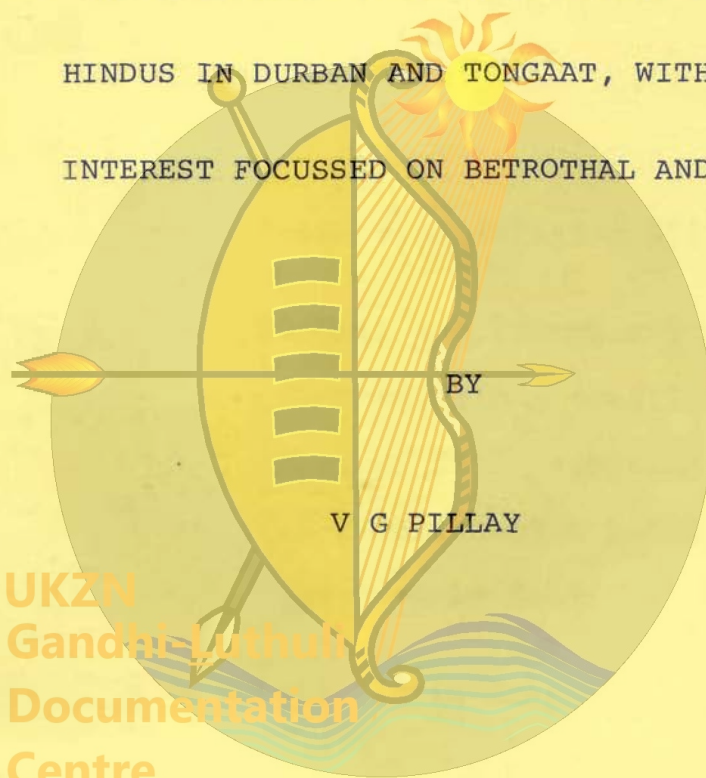


THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE HINDU RELIGIOUS
TRADITION AMONG A SELECTED GROUP OF TAMIL SPEAKING
HINDUS IN DURBAN AND TONGAAT, WITH PARTICULAR
INTEREST FOCUSSED ON BETROTHAL AND MARRIAGE



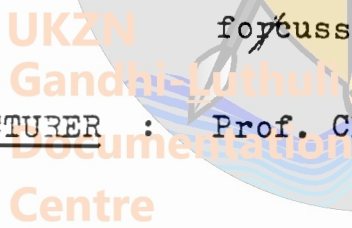
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NAME : V.G.Pillay

REG. NO. : 18125

SUBJECT : Science of Religion 111

TOPIC : Discuss the theory and practice of the Hindu Religious tradition among a selected group of Tamil speaking Hindus in Durban and Tongaat, with particular interest focussed on Betrothal and Marriage.



LECTURER : Prof. Chris Greyling

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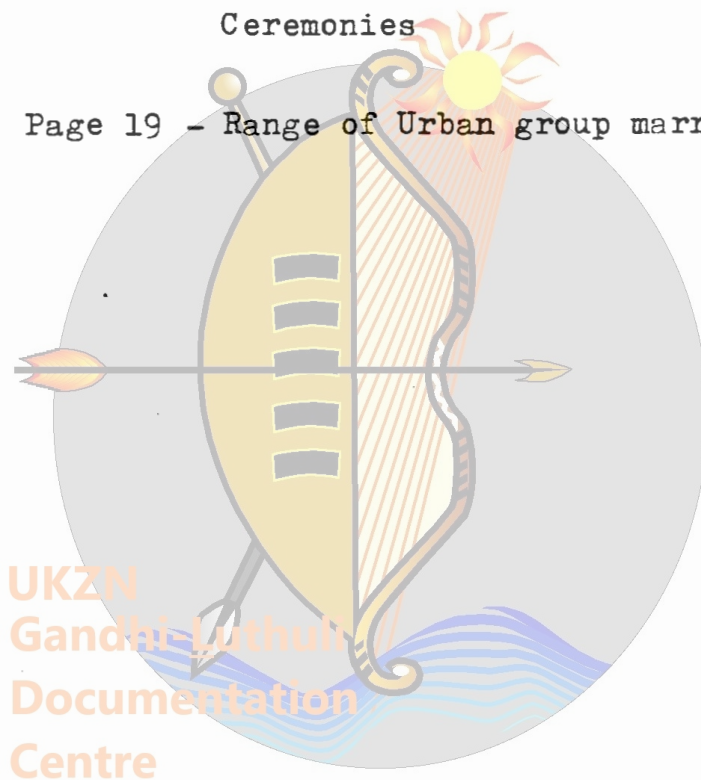
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A. SELECTION OF TOPIC

I am a Tamil speaking Hindu and I would like to find out more about my religion, in particular, the impact of Western Culture on the religion of the Indians in South Africa. I will focus my observations on a small number of families living in the city of Durban. It seems as though that the Hindu Religion is gradually losing its hold on the South African Hindus. 1

When the Government in 1960, 100 years after the first Indians arrived in South Africa as indentured labourers, changed its attitude from regarding the Indians as foreigners to accepting them as a permanent section of the South African population; the writer became convinced that, in order to effect this change of approach adequately among the general population, it was imperative for the Europeans and the non-europeans in South Africa to know more about Hindu Culture.

As we are progressing educationally, technically, and so forth, with time, I feel that we are losing our touch on the traditional values, norms and ethics that we once so strongly felt about, and we are letting other values, like Western and European Culture, influence and play a major part on the Religion we firmly believe in.

-
1. P.J.DE VOS.: Report on Indian juvenile delinquency in Durban,
p.18.

B. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The investigator wishes to assess any trends of deviation from the traditional Hindu way of life, with particular reference to the Religious aspects. The aim is to stimulate interest in further research among the Indians in South Africa, particularly by the South African Indians themselves.

C. THE LIMITATION OF THE PROJECT

It is impossible to take into consideration all the Indian groups, largely owing to the great diversity of the Indian population. It was therefore decided to select the largest Indian group in South Africa, viz. the Tamil speaking Indians for this research. 2

D. PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

1. One of the problems experienced was that some of the aspects regarding the Indian culture, was completely "foreign" to me, though I did receive some guidance to help me through.
2. The lack of sufficient published South African literature on Indians was an important handicap.
3. The fact that I cannot speak Tamil posed a serious problem where the mothers could speak only their vernacular. I was, in some way or the other, assisted by the husband, or the son or daughter of the family.

2. R.S.Nowbath : There are no Indians, p.43.

E. SOME SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS RELATING TO THE FAMILIES INVESTIGATED

The socio-economic factors of the families investigated, which will be discussed, comprise the social nature of the area of living; family income; educational aspects of the father and mother and home language.

1. Residential areas of the families investigated

TABLE 1

An analysis of the residential areas investigated

URBAN	5	62,5 %
RURAL TOWNS	3	37,5 %
COUNTRY	0	00,0 %
	Number	%
TOTAL	8	100

"Urban" refers to areas within the municipal boundaries of any South African city, in my case, DURBAN.

"Rural Towns", refers to the towns such as Verulam, Tongaat, Stanger.

I have chosen three families from Tongaat.

"Country" refers to farm areas.

2. Family Income - Number of people working in eight of the families investigated - 11

TABLE 11

	Number	%
R500 and more	4	36,4
R400 - R499	3	27,3
R250 - R399	2	18,2
R100 - R249	1	9,05
Less than R100	1	9,05
TOTAL	11	100

An analysis of table 11 shows the family income of the families investigated as follows.

1. The head of the family, in my case, eight of the fathers, do not consider money matters the concern of the females.
2. From the statistics shown, it can be deduced that many earn just enough to maintain themselves only, and not the whole family.
3. Six of the families act very strictly concerning the regulation of money.

3. Educational Standards of the Parents

In table 111, the educational standards of the parents are studied. However, some relatives were uncertain as to the school qualifications of their parents.

TABLE 111

	FATHER		MOTHER	
	No.	%	No.	%
No education	1	12,5	3	37,5
Std. 3 and less	3	37,5	3	37,5
Std. 6 and less	1	12,5	2	25,0
Std. 8 and 9	2	25,0	-	-
Matric	1	12,5	-	-
TOTAL	8	100	8	100

From the above table the following deductions can be made in respect of the fathers.

- i) 12,5 % have no education
- ii) 12,5 % have no school qualifications
- iii) 37,5 % passed std. 3 or a lower standard.
- iv) 12,5 % passed std. 6 or a lower standard.
- v) 25 % passes std. 8 and 9
- vi) 12,5 % passed matric.

No one went to Tertiary institutions. The one that completed matric did not continue to study as he obtained a practical pass.

In respect of the mothers, the following can be deduced.

- i) 37,5 % have no formal education.
- ii) 37,5 % reached std. 3
- iii) 25 % went as far as std. 6

No one even thought of entering secondary education. Six of them remained housewives, more content with raising children and looking after the family, than pursuing a career for themselves.

4. Language Factors

TABLE IV

	No.	%
TAMIL	7	24,1
ENGLISH	16	55,1
ENGLISH AND TAMIL	6	20,8
TOTAL	29	100

- i) The home language of 24,1 % of the families speak tamil.
- ii) The home language of 55,1 % of the families speak english at home.
- iii) In 20,8 % of the families, three of which have converted to Christianity, English and Tamil are both spoken at home.

F. SUMMARY OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE GROUPS RESEARCHED.

1. The highest proportion of the families are urban, 62,5 %.
37,5 % live in Tongaat.
2. The family income of the greatest proportion of families is relatively low.
3. Most of the mothers are housewives, and just two are working.
4. The school qualifications of the fathers are higher than the

qualifications of the mothers.

5. A relatively high proportion of the families, 55,1 %, have English as their home language.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES CONCERNING BETROTHAL AND MARRIAGE

In this chapter, consideration will be given to the Hindu Religious concepts and practices in respect of such aspects of family life as betrothal and marriage.

A. BETROTHAL

Marriage traditionally is planned by the parents. Members of the two sexes are kept apart from each other until the parents begin to seek approval and make arrangements for marriage.

Nowadays, although parents - arrange marriages persist, children have more say in the matter. Whereas, traditionally, betrothed couples were not permitted to see each other until the wedding day. Progressively more couples see one another during the period of engagement. Among Indians, non - parent planned marriages in modern society are subject to more frustrations on the part of the marriage partners than parent - planned ones. 1

In choosing marriage partners, parents consult the pachanga or almanac; the stars of birth should match. It is customary and according to the sacred scriptures, for the husband to be older than the wife, to be of higher status and on a higher intellectual level. 2

1. M. Cormack : The Hindu Woman, p. 103.

2. Ibid., p. 107

Cross - cousin marriages were traditionally encouraged while inter - caste marriages were taboo. However, prejudice in respect of inter - caste marriages is gradually being relaxed even through legislation. In India, for example, the Special Marriage Act of 1872. 1

Cross - cousin marriages are becoming less frequent; people feel that there is something shameful about the custom. Uncle - niece marriages, which used to be the custom, are regarded as even more shameful nowadays. 2 Girls were betrothed traditionally soon after puberty. Nowadays owing to educational opportunities, girls and boys are older when they are betrothed. Betrothal is seldom broken; in fact it is a business contract between the two families when a dowry is settled. 3

"Mutual Vows and gifts are exchanged between the future fathers in - law . The 'promise' is consecrated by a priest reciting appropriate mantras " 4

An engagement is celebrated separately by the two families. Worship also takes place separately. The actual engagement, as transacted between the two fathers, takes place at the girl's house. 5 The relatives of the prospective bridegroom send the bride - to - be a sari, a blouse, or dried fruits. 6

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1. P.D. Hey : The Rise of the Natal Indian Elite, p. 21
 2. A.D. Ross : The Hindu family in the urban setting, p. 13
 3. M. Cormack : Op. cit., p. 64.
 4. H. Kuper : Indian People in Natal, p. 163.
 5. lbid., p. 164
 6. M. Cormack : Op. cit., p. 108-109

The marriage is arranged on an auspicious day as indicated by the panchanga. Throughout the preparations for marriage, the God Vinayakar is worshipped. 1

B. MARRIAGE

Marriage is essentially a sacrament. It is a religious duty and not a mere contract. " It (marriage) is a ceremony whereby two souls are united spiritually, mentally and physically in the sacred bonds of matrimony " 2

Marriage is the most important religious ceremony and takes place at the house of the groom. The object of marriage is for the bride and groom to assist each other in spiritual evolution. 3 The main aim of marriage is dharma, followed by progeny and pleasure. The wife's special care is the worship of the deities. As she is now in the Grihastha stage, the duties of the wife are also focused on motherhood and the household. 4

To the woman her husband is a guru - deva, that is, teacher and God. It is expected that the wife should sacrifice herself for her family according to her prescribed role, just as it is the duty of the father according to his role. 5

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1. H.Kuper : Op. cit., p. 163
 2. R.P. Joshi : Salent features of the Hindu marriage ceremony with Shubhashish (blessing), p. 1.
 3. ibid., p. 3.
 4. H. Kuper : Op. cit., p. 80.
 5. M. Cormack : Op. cit., p. 178.

The actual marriage ceremony takes place under a canopy at the bridegroom's house, and traditionally continued for five days. The priest conducts all the ceremonies. The wedding ceremony is preceded by the anointing of the bride and the bridegroom an uneven number of times. The ceremony is known as nalungu and has the object of purifying the bride and groom ritually. 1



The main deity worshipped during the time of marriage is Vinayakar. An image of Vinayakar as well as other sacred objects, example, the sacred lamp, a grinding stone, a mortar and pestle, camphor, foodstuffs and pictures are placed under the canopy. 2 In the centre of the canopy is a pole called the bali, which in fact is the lingam or phallic symbol of Lord Siva. This pole is decorated and has brass utensils tied to it. 3

All the other deities traditionally worshipped are invoked, including Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. In addition the presence of ancestors is invoked to ensure that the formalities will be

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1. C.J.A. Greyling : 'n Studie van die Godsdiens en Godsdienstige gebruike van die Hindoes in die Transvaal, p. 10
 2. ibid., p. 106.
 3. M. Cormack : Op. eit., p. 136.

successful and that the married couple will be prosperous. The invoking of the deities is the first ceremony undertaken. 1

The puja or worship ceremonies are followed by the ceremonious welcoming of the bride's parents. The aim is to remove any bad influences and to enhance harmony. The welcome ceremony is followed by the Kanyadaan Panigrahan or the joining Hands ceremony, through which the giving away of the bride by her parents to the bridegroom is announced. The hand of the bride is placed in the hand of the bridegroom and the couple walk around the Sacred Fire thrice, whilst appropriate versus are recited.

The bride then takes the vow that according to the law of Dharma (righteousness or duty) she shall take charge of the bride - groom's home, be affectionate and co-operate and beget children. The bridegroom follows in taking an oath of loyalty, faithfulness and purity. 2

The tali 3 (a yellow cord and golden emblem) is the external sign of marriage and is hung around the bride's neck. Although the kumkum or red dot is often placed on the forehead of the bride, this is not a Tamil custom, but a Hindustani one. 4

The stone stepping ceremony takes place next in order to impress on the couple symbolically that they must remain firm as a rock in all the vicissitudes of life. 5

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1. R.P. Joshi : Op. cit., p. 1.
 2. Ibid., p. 2.
K.M. Kapadia : Marriage and Family in India, p. 167.
S. Radhakrishnan : Religion and Society, p. 162.
 3. C.J.A. Greyling : Op. cit., p. 107.
 4. H. Kuper : Op. cit., p. 166.
S.C. Dube : Indian Village, p. 120.
 5. R.P. Joshi : Op. cit., p. 2.

The bride places her right foot on a stone and a ring is placed on the second toe. Through this ceremony the Goddess of prosperity Sakshmi, is worshipped. Through offerings in the Sacred Fire, the couple dedicate themselves to perform their duties in respect of the grihastha asrama or householder state. Reciprocally they pray for mutual long life, health and wealth. The couple circumbulate the Sacred Fire and the pole an uneven number of times in a clockwise direction. 1

The offerings placed in the Sacred Fire consists of grain, ghee or clarified butter and honey. While the bride and groom make these offerings, the priest says the marriage prayers. Through this ritual the God of Fire, Agni, is propitiated. 2

The encircling of the Sacred Fire is followed by the taking of seven steps around the fire by the couple, symbolically to attain a good and constructive life consisting of :

1. food and nourishment
2. physical fitness
3. education, culture and wealth
4. general spiritual happiness in their home
5. procreation
6. health
7. friendship between themselves and other people.

-
1. R.P. Joshi : Op. cit., p. 2
 2. M. Cormack : Op. cit., p. 113 and 117.

Through the seven steps around the hearth and the bali, the two families are symbolically united and assisted toward the continuation of the family line. The garlands which the couple wear throughout the ceremony are exchanged; they are symbolical of the sun and other deities. 1

The marriage ceremony is terminated with the sprinkling of the yellow rice. This ritual ensures prosperity for the couple. 2

During the entire marriage ceremony the couple wear darbha grass (sacred grass) around the middle finger of one hand each. 3 and incense is burnt. 4

After the ceremony, rites are carried out to indicate fertility. Sanctified seeds are obtained from the bride and planted by the bridegroom. Their germinating refers to the potentiality in respect of procreation. 5

For at least three days the couple is expected to practise strict celibacy. The couple are usually not permitted to share the same bedroom until an auspicious time has been decided upon after consulting the priest. At an auspicious time the foetus laying ceremony of the garbhadhana samskara is performed. 6

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1. C.J.A. Greyling : Op. cit., p. 107.
H. Kuper : Op. cit., p. 165.
K.M. Kapadia : Op. cit., p. 160.
 2. B. Rambiritch : Some Traditional practices influencing the personality of the contemporary Hindu child in South Africa, p. 319.
 3. ibid., p. 121
 4. S.C. Dube : Op. cit., p. 121.
 5. C.J.A. Greyling : Op. cit., p. 121.
H. Kuper : Op. cit., p. 160.
 6. H. Kuper : Op. cit., p. 166.
K.M. Kapadia : Op. cit., p. 160

Nowadays there is a tendency to simplify the marriage ceremony.

As Hindu marriages are very costly if conducted along traditional lines, financial expenditure is minimized in modern times. L

In table V the performance of the traditional marriage ceremonies by the families investigated is shown.

TABLE V

	No.	%
All the main ceremonies	5	62 %
Some of the main ceremonies	2	25 %
One of the main ceremonies	1	13 %
TOTAL	8	100

From the above table, the following conclusions may be drawn.

1. All the main ceremonies (ie. the welcoming ceremony, anointing the bali, encircling the Holy Fire and invoking the deities, nalungu, offering mantras, tying darbha grass around the middle finger, sprinkling rice, tying the tali and the bride receiving the kamachee) valaku are performed by 62 % of the families.
2. Almost 25 % perform some of the ceremonies.
3. Only 13 %, that is, only one ceremony is performed by the families.

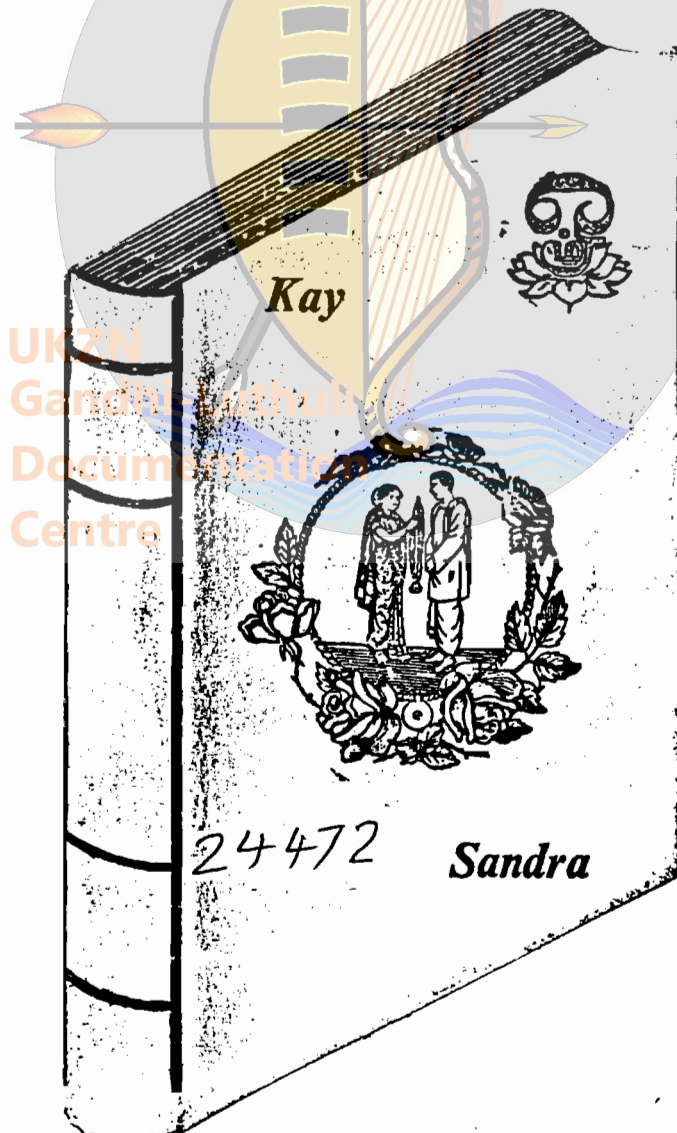
C. SUMMARY

1. Marriage is arranged traditionally by the parents. In modern times each partner enjoys greater influence in the choice of a spouse and the traditional cross - cousin marriages are gradually disappearing.

2. The purohita or priest plays an important role in the engagement ceremony, reciting mantras. Vinayakar, the God who removes obstacles, is worshipped during the engagement period.
3. Most of the families investigated, viz. 62,5 % undertake all the essential marriage ceremonies. 25 % of the people perform some of the rites and only 13 % undertake one ceremony only.

CHAPTER 111

THE TAMIL WEDDING CARD - ILLUSTRATION AND DESCRIPTION



The life of a householder if led in accordance with the code of ethic enables him to attain meritious heights in the mundane as well as in the existence beyond according to Thirukkural verse 50 written by Thiruvalluvar who lived about 2000 years ago in Tamil Nadu.

"He who on earth has lived in the conjugal state as he should live,
will be placed among the Gods who dwell in heaven."

(Translation by Rev. J.Lazarus and rev.
W.H. Drew)

This hypothesis according to the tradition of the Tamils is the guiding principle in the life of a married man. The formality which initiates a person into that state is the marriage ceremony which is conducted with meticulous care in a solemn atmosphere.

The wedding card which is a forerunner to the ceremony is the formal way of inviting relatives and friends. It should as a matter of convention embody (1) the name of the Tamil year (2) the name of the month (3) the phase of the moon - the bright half or the dark half (4) the asterism (5) the lunar day in the fortnight (6) the sector of the lunar path and (7) duration of the ceremony indicated by the time of the day, as most of these dates are used in the calculation of the auspicious time for the occasion. Other details such as the venue, names of the couple and the parents are also mentioned.

The decorative work in the card revealed such pictures as those of the guiding deities of the family concerned (Lord Murugar, Vinayakar, Krishna, Sri Vishnu, Luxmi), human beings playing musical instruments appropriate for the occasion, and ladies with trays displaying exclusively designed brass or silver ware containing sandalwood paste, kumkum (red powder) and rose water:

for sprinkling. The female figures are reminiscent of the important role the virtuous married woman played in the wedding ceremony in the distant past. Tholkappian, the ancient book extant, among other things reflects the mode of life about 5000 years, which includes the role ladies played in the marriage ceremony. Even today gracefully clad ladies are seen standing at the entrance to the hall with trays containing articles mentioned above in addition to betel leaves and areca nuts proving that the Tamils cling steadfast to the age old practice.

The invitation at the end makes a special request for the family as a whole to be present to witness the ceremony and to extend their good wishes to the couple. The blessing as a rule assumes two forms, the simultaneous blessing by all those present at the time when the sacred thali (wedding knot) is tied by showering a mixture of petals of some flowers and white rice coated with fresh tumeric, and the individual personal greeting which follows after the nuptial ceremony.

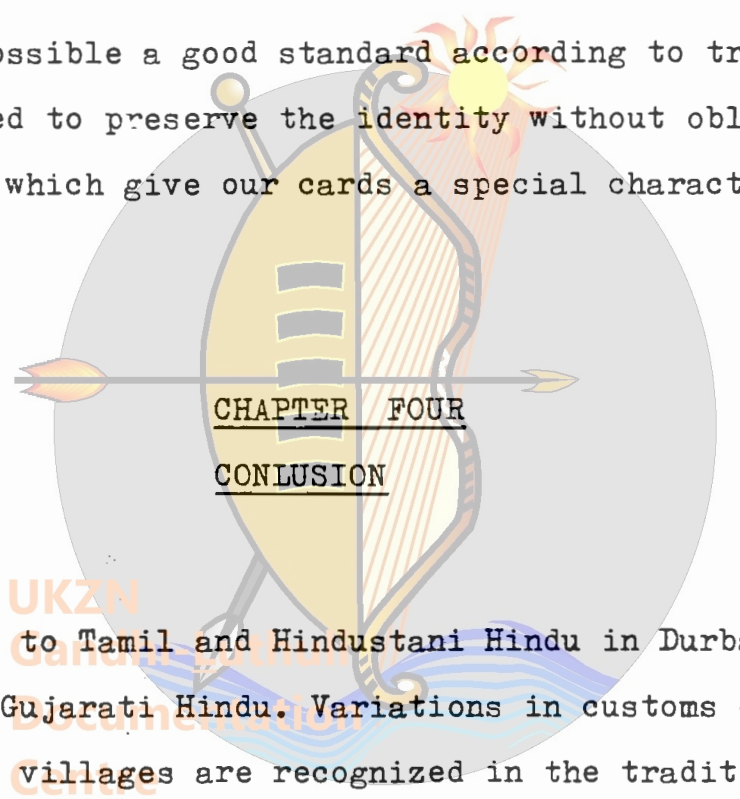
In the individual greeting it is customary to wish the couple thus : "May you both live happily. May you be endowed with the sixteen acquisitions for a perfect life." The former approach is a thing of the past as far as the Tamilians are concerned in South Africa although it still exists in Tamil Nadu.

The details reflected in the wedding card are gradually diminishing. The component parts that make up the auspicious time are invariably omitted with the result the ordinary man in the street will become ignorant.

The French abbreviation RSVP is now becoming very popular although correctly speaking, this procedure does not conform to

Tamil etiquette. The decorative work is also disappearing gradually. The colour of the paper used for the invitation is yellow as it is regarded as something conforming to moral and religious merit, the colour of the ink used in printing is never black but invariably green as green colour represents progress and youthfulness. Fresh tumeric paste was used to stain the corners of the invitation cards before delivering them. Few adhere to it now. The invitation cards that we now receive are of all colours, but I did notice that the envelopes are pasted at one corner

As far as possible a good standard according to tradition must be maintained to preserve the identity without obliterating the details which give our cards a special character and reputation.



CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

A. SUMMARY

In addition to Tamil and Hindustani Hindu in Durban there are Telugu and Gujarati Hindu. Variations in customs of different regions and villages are recognized in the traditional, sacred writings (the Grihya - Sutras) regulating married life and conduct. In Durban regional linguistic differences persist but village differences have fallen away. The customs of South Indians, that is, the Tamil and Telugu show greater similarity to each other than to those of people originally of North origin (that is, Hindustani and Gujarati).

Within the linguistic groupings there are certain differences associated with caste, even though present - day marriages in South Africa cannot be analysed in a rigid caste framework.

In the Tamil community, for example, the Pather retain a number of distinctive ceremonies, including what they describe as a 'double wedding'; and among the Hindustani and Brahmin and Kshatriya caste practice, albeit in abbreviated and symbolic form, the janoo.

But except for the Gujarati, caste customs are confused, and, especially among the Tamils, often ignored. Between conservative orthodox, modern orthodox and Reform Hindu there are recognized differences, but no group has yet achieved clear uniformity in marriages. Individuals who do not call themselves orthodox or reform but simply 'Hindu' may, and occasionally do, insist on 'modern' as opposed to 'old fashioned' weddings in which they themselves select which rituals should be performed and which omitted.

Hindu marriage in South Africa is one of several types of religious marriage and in itself does not legalize a union. Every Hindu marriage must be registered, and a civil marriage alone is sufficient for legal purpose. Only one marriage may be registered for each partner in South Africa, and polygamy (Permitted by Hindustani) is prohibited. The attitude towards Indian marriages has been part of the Political, rather than the social, or religious interaction of different ethnic groups in South Africa. In 1910 a legal judgement declared that no marriage could be regarded as legal if celebrated according to a religion practising polygamy.

Marriage of girls under sixteen years and boys under eighteen are still practised in India, but are legally prohibited in South Africa. 1

In South Africa, the most popular age of marriage is 16 - 20 years for the girls and for the boys between 19 - 27 years; in a sample of 86 religious marriages in a Hindu urban group the range was as follows :

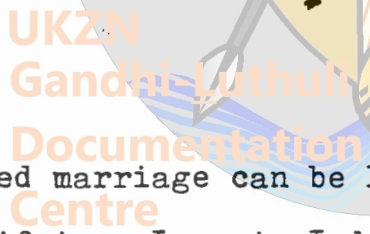
You research?

TABLE VI

AGE	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
GIRLS	2	2	2	16	24	20	4	12	4			
BOYS							4	12	8	20	4	4

AGE	26	27	28	29	30	31
GIRLS						
BOYS	4	8	4	4	0	4

In South Africa, a boy should marry a girl younger than himself, but only a few years. In Durban a man only marries a girl older than himself under most unusual circumstances and it is assumed that such a marriage is contracted for material benefits to the boy's group.



Any registered marriage can be legally dissolved under South African Law; in India Legislation permitting Hindu divorce was only passed in 1955. The divorce rate among South African Hindu is, however, very low, the majority considering the religious ritual binding on both parties until death.

There are a number of so called Hindu in Natal who have not been through any religious ritual, but it is anticipated that they will do so eventually.

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