

1. Read the following article and focus on the big ideas.
2. **RDW #2:** Briefly summarize “First Comes Marriage” and “The Problem With Arranged Marriage”. What is each author’s purpose for writing these articles? What evidence shows that? Include and highlight at least four complex sentences (hint: you have opposing points of view)

The Problem With Arranged Marriages

I was at a party the other night where I spotted a woman of European ancestry wearing a distinctly South Asian necklace. I complimented her on the jewelry, and this sparked a discussion about our respective experiences there. I mentioned that I had recently married and was looking forward to taking my husband to see Pakistan and India. Since we were on the topic of both marriage and South Asia, she asked me, "What do you think about arranged marriages?"

I can't say the question caught me off-guard. For as long as I've lived in Canada, my friends, co-workers and sometimes even strangers have felt compelled to ask me about this practice. I know most of my friends of South Asian heritage have also been asked this awkward question. It is understandable; we are all curious, and the concept of an arranged union between two virtual strangers really seems to fascinate people.

Being a certain color, you can end up as an ambassador for an entire subcontinent, but it wasn't until I started to answer this woman that I realized my own views have changed and that I am no longer nearly as neutral as I used to be.

Still very common

Arranged marriage has had roots in every corner of this planet but still holds on strongly in South Asia and even among the South Asian diaspora living in the West. Indeed, despite India's race towards modernity, this ancient custom of finding a spouse for your children is still very common.

In the past, whenever I was asked about this practice, I would tend to express slight reservations. But in the end, I usually tried to be diplomatic and suggest that if it works for the individuals and families involved, then it's fine. Who am I to judge? I know several couples, including members of my extended family, who had arranged marriages. But that evening, in the midst of our discussion — since marriage, weddings and love have been on my mind a lot lately — I said, "Actually, I think it's a really bad thing, and it's a tradition we need to separate ourselves from."

The woman was surprised by the answer, and I realize it will make people I know in the South Asian community very defensive. In fact, when I mentioned to a friend that I was going to write about why I reject the idea, she immediately pointed out "You have to understand that arranged marriage has changed now."

Indeed, she's right, I need to make a distinction, but that doesn't mean we still have to accept a tradition that is still not right for its times.

'Blind dates'

In the past, arranged marriages were primarily a business transaction between families trading their eligible children for financial security or future considerations for the respective families. That's still the case in some of these unions today.

Traditional arranged marriages usually require a dowry, a payment for marrying into the family, usually a payment that the bride's side would make to the groom's side.

Some South Asian families have been known to spend their life savings in order to get their daughters married off. There is no romance in these unions. There is no love. Financing a marriage this way left many families with huge debts. But having a daughter was a burden, too, and paying someone to marry her would be the only way of protecting her in the future.

Modern arranged marriages have progressed a bit, but only a bit. People like to describe them as "blind dates" where family members find "suitable" partners for their children. The couple can meet, even go on dates and really get to know each other. If they hit it off, then the families will move forward on a wedding.

I attended my cousin's marriage in Pakistan two years ago and it was only after I landed in Karachi and began pushing him for details — "How did you guys meet?" "How long have you been dating?" — did he reveal that it was an arranged partnership.

He and his-now-wife had only met a handful of times before they were to marry. In many ways, they were strangers, but I have to admit that once they did marry I could see them falling in love before my eyes.

'Wheatish complexion'

That's the tricky thing about arranged marriages; they can result in love and happiness, but that's just an added bonus and not necessarily the norm, or even a requirement. The primary reason for arranged marriage still remains that many families want to secure wealth, property and social status for their children.

It's an archaic and tribal way of thinking. In the poorest communities of South Asia I can understand why people cling to traditional practices no matter how damaging they may be.

But what I cannot understand is why middle-class and upper-class South Asians in their native land or abroad still want to do this.

If you've received a modern education, gone to school with members of the opposite sex, adopted a Westernized and progressive perspective on most aspects of life, then why should something as fundamental as marriage somehow revert back to some 14th-century ritual?

It has come to the point that, when families place advertisements to find suitors for their sons and daughters, they set out a list of criteria that would make you think they were picking out an appliance or a new car.

You will usually find an educational demand — must have at least a master's degree. A financial requirement — "six-figure salary preferred" — and, of course, the ever-insulting skin-tone requirement.

Most families want a girl with a "wheatish" complexion for their sons, which is a clumsy way of saying "dark-skinned girls need not apply."

And if you think this is just something you will only see in a newspaper in Lahore or Delhi, think again. These are the requirements for pre-arranged marriages among the South Asian community here in Canada. I understand it is a tradition and traditions are important. I can already hear some readers shouting, "It's not that big a deal."

But arranged marriages among the Westernized middle class of South Asia need to disappear. Family pride is one thing, but trading your children like objects is quite another.