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The Institution of Marriage: A Case Study on Social Pressures Surrounding Marriage in Muslim Indian Communities in Johannesburg

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Abstract:
There is an undoubted societal focus on marriage in many, if not all, communities. This is manifested in social media, television, almost every movie, novels, children's storybooks, conversations and the internet in forms of online articles and blogs, which emphasize a pressure on women to get married or have a companion. This paper discusses the institution of marriage and the societal pressures surrounding matrimony amongst members of the Muslim Indian community in Johannesburg. In this paper, I illustrate that marriage is a necessary condition, especially for a Muslim Indian woman's constructive and participatory role/identity in society. The significance of marriage can be seen to be embedded within Islamic practices. However, this dogmatic view of marriage does not explain the pressures placed on individuals to get married. Islam advocates for fate and trust in God, therefore it can be argued these pressures are socially constructed as opposed to religiously inflicted. This article uses feminist methodological tools and theories in an attempt to debunk the role of patriarchy in modern society. The paper is set as a case study that conducted semi-structured interviews. It concludes that unmarried women feel 'judged' and 'scrutinized' because of their marital status.

Keywords: Marriage, Islam, Indian, Women, Societal Pressures, Johannesburg

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Introduction

In 2012, an article was published in the campus newspaper of the University of the Witwatersrand, titled '*Becoming an honest woman*' by Sakeena Suliman (2012:7). The article discussed the pressures Muslim Indian women face with regards to matrimony in a light, humorous yet thought-provoking manner. In the article, Suliman (2012:7) discussed why she dreaded attending weddings and said that in her early 20's she was asked by guests 'When are you getting married?' In her late 20s the question was replaced with 'Don't worry you're next my darling' and in her early 30's the questions and comments were replaced with a look. Most poignantly, she discussed the fact that she was constantly referred to as a 'girl', and said that 'no matter how old you are, if you [are] unmarried and Indian, you [are] a girl … you are only regarded as a woman once you [are] married' (Suliman 2012:7). She adds:

> [Y]ou will only be a somebody until a man says you are. You must not become too independent because apparently, men want you to depend on them. You are only worthy of respect until a man chooses you. We're still being told that we can't stand on our own. Marriage should be … about companionship. Not a race for acceptance.

These words resonated with me and the article was an inspiration to write a paper on the pressures and constant focus on matrimony. I am a twenty-six-year-old single Muslim Indian woman. Ever since I matriculated the first piece of advice an uncle gave was: 'You better find someone in the first year [of university], or else you [will] get left on the shelf'. Many years later I am seen as 'at the back of the shelf, collecting dust, if not almost off the shelf'. Similar interactions with other family members and within social networks (such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) and in my various experiences I have noticed that almost always there is an association between femininity[1] and marriage.

[1] Femininity is a societal construct which refers to 'the quality of being feminine; womanliness' (Simpson & Weiner 1989). To be a feminine woman can be defined as 'having qualities traditionally ascribed to women, as sensitive or gentleness; pertaining to a woman or girl' (Simpson & Weiner 1989).

Generally, in many patriarchal[2] and hetero-normative groups in South Africa and globally, the idea of two people coming together either in the union of marriage or in a courtship manner is extremely pervasive. This is represented in popular culture, reflecting a normative understanding of how men and women should live their lives and consequently, how they should not. From this, it can be deduced that marriage is an important concept and the pressures to get married or have a partner is felt by all, especially women. Using this as a starting point I wanted to deconstruct this connection and learn how different people understand it.

My research questions looked at the societal pressures which regulate the social practice of marriage in Muslim Indian communities in Johannesburg. It asked whether there is a pressure on both men and women to get married and how individuals experience this pressure. Lastly, it looked at whose perspective is a marriage a necessary condition for a Muslim Indian individual's constructive and participatory identity in society.

It was challenging to find scholars who speak directly to the topic of exploring the societal pressures to get married in Muslim Indian communities in Johannesburg. There is however, substantial literature on marriage and marital politics globally, particularly in Muslim communities. A great deal of this literature pays attention to gender politics and the practice of marriage. This literature is valuable when thinking about marital politics, culture, religion as well as the aspect of pressure and how this pressure is perceived and plays out.

Popular culture artifacts, such as internet articles and novels[3] were used as an archive for the research as it framed the approach. These additional

[2] For the purpose of this study, a patriarchal society refers to a society where men have the main authority over their families. Patriarchy refers to the privilege of men and the subordination of women. Waltby as cited in Shilling (1991:30) discusses patriarchy as 'cultural rules provide women and men with gendered norms concerning ranges of acceptable behaviour, participation and aspirations'.

[3] Popular culture artefacts include: *Courting Samira* by Amal Awad, *I want to get married* by Ghada Abdel Aal, *It Isn't Easy For A Single Muslim Girl* (a live segment played on Huffington Post Live. The segment created a dialogue between five Muslim women who spoke about their experiences of being single at the age of 30 and the pressures to find a spouse. See also

sources contextualised the research, which was based on primarily interviews and scholarly literature. I use arguments and sources from individuals who experience this pressure. Because there are public concerns and international debate around marriage in Muslim communities, this double approach was strength in both topic and research.

Methodology

The methodology lay within the fields of feminist theory and discourse analysis. The paper began with the objective of locating it within feminist knowledge production. The notion of feminist knowledge production influences not only the approaches to collecting and bringing the material together, but also to the lens through which one analyses that material (Mukaddam 2015:17). Feminist methodology was developed 'in an attempt to challenge and provide an alternative method to mainstream research' (Ducet as cited in Birch 2012:11). Birch (2012:11) further elaborates that feminist methodologies were developed by women of colour in an attempt to move away from views dominated by white, Western men who claimed to be universal.

Thus, feminist methodologies and knowledge production aim to disrupt dominant, hetero-normative and patriarchal discourses (Mukaddam 2015:17). Jane Flax argues that 'insofar as women have been part of all societies; our thinking cannot be free from cultural-bound modes of self-understanding' (Flax 1987:626). Patriarchy has shaped society in such a way that ''man' is viewed as the norm and 'woman' is viewed as the deviant' (Mukaddam 2015:17). Consequently, feminist theory is an attempt to analyse 'how one thinks of, or does not think of, or avoids thinking of gender' (Flax 1987:627).

The methods for this research were qualitative and grounded in a feminist theoretical and empirical approach. It best suited the research as it discussed the perceptions of people who were understood as being part of a particular community, culture, and religion. Interviews were held with five

http://live.huffingtonpost.com/r/segment/it-isnt-easy-for-a-single-muslim-girl/51e86826fe3444736d000298) and *Contemporary Muslim Woman Series: Over 30 and Unmarried – Breaking a Stalemate*.

men and five women aged between 19 and 32 from the Muslim Indian community in Johannesburg. The interviews were guided by a questionnaire that urged participants to discuss their understanding of marriage, and how it related to Islamic values and beliefs. Semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to probe into certain themes that were useful to the study and brought up by the respondents. Three interviewees were originally from 'farm towns'[4] in South Africa and were studying and residing in Johannesburg. This was an interesting aspect as these interviewees relayed the experiences from both their hometowns and the city; which added another layer to the research. The interviewees were of the same religion, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, educational experience, nationality and socio-economic class. They were all from middle-class families.

Snowball sampling was used to find interview subjects to ensure that I did not interview people whom I knew. Instead, I was introduced to the interviewees by referral. My first respondent was found via a social media, Twitter[5]. Upon viewing a tweet that was shared, a message was sent to the individual on Twitter informing them about who I am and requesting their email address. Thereafter, a formal electronic invitation was sent outlining the research topic and requesting an interview. This initiated the referral process. It is also a reason why all of the interviewees came from the same background – which is a limitation on snowball sampling. All of the respondents' identities are anonymous, as some interviewees were open and felt more comfortable speaking from an anonymous point of view.

Marriage in Islam

It is important to discuss the role and emphasis Islam places on marriage. An investigation of the Qur'an and its stance on marriage was required as all of

[4] I use the word 'farm town' to describe the small towns three interviewees are from as they themselves refer to their home towns as 'farm towns'. However, they moved to Johannesburg from their tertiary education and are settled in Johannesburg.

[5] Twitter is a public social platform wherein individuals who might not have necessarily encountered each other beyond an electronic medium are able to interact.

the interviewees regarded the Qur'an as divine law. This was helpful in creating a theoretical understanding of the issues that were raised and it created a framework that allowed a space to interpret social interactions.

Islam places immense importance on marriage. Sherif (as cited in Hassouneh-Phillips 2001:931) argues that 'throughout the Islamic world, marriage is at the heart of social and religious life'. The reason marriage is of significance is due to the fact that marriage is seen as 'the basis of society' (Hassouneh-Phillips 2001:932). In his work, Abdul-Rauf (1993:1) quotes God's assumed pleasure with marriage by citing from the Qur'an:

> Marriage is my recommended custom. Whosoever turns away from my recommended custom is turning away from me. Get married so you multiply. I shall indeed be proud of your multitude on the Day of Resurrection. … O you young people, men, and women! Whosoever can bear the burden of marriage, let him or her get married. It [marriage] is indeed contentment to the eye and a protection to the modest parts. When one is married, he secures half of his religion.

It is believed that whoever marries completes half of his/her *Imaan*, meaning, his/her faith is half perfect. When questioning each interviewee on the importance of marriage in Islam all interviewees referred to marriage as 'completing half of one's *Imaan*'. This was their only answer regarding why marriage is important. However, marriage is important for a number of reasons as well. First, it is an approved form for sexual activity to take place. Because dating and extra-marital relations are prohibited in Islam, men and women are socialized from an early age to find a spouse so that sexual activity may only take place between a husband and wife (Hassouneh-Phillips 2001:931-932 and Doi 1984:115). Secondly, marriage is important for procreation purposes. Abdul-Rauf (1993:1) describes procreation as a 'paramount advantage of marriage' as a couple is contributing to the human race through legitimate means. Lastly, Islam is not merely a religion regarding the performance of rituals, Islam is a way of life and Muslims are encouraged to remember God in all that they do and say. From this, it can be deduced that marriage itself can be seen as a form of *Ibadah* (Doi 1984:116).

The preceding part of this section will discuss the Islamic views on finding a spouse. Cunningham *et al.* as cited in Suleman (2011:19) argues that 'all societies place certain restrictions on the choice of sexual and marriage

partners'. They use the concepts of endogamy and exogamy to explain the choices of marriage partners. Endogamy refers to individuals who marry someone within their own group; which includes a language, culture, and religious similarity. Busby and Loyer-Carlson as cited in Suleman (2011:19) believe that if individuals choose spouses that come from different cultural or religious backgrounds, a strain could be placed on family relations. It could also result in the spouse having difficulty being accepted by the family because they are different. Using the definitions of endogamy and exogamy, one is able to gain an understanding of how Muslims are advised to choose their spouses (Suleman 2011:19). It should be mentioned this view is especially specific in Muslim Indian communities is Johannesburg. According to Islam, Muslims have to marry each other. An interpretation of the Qur'an (1:221) taken from Dawood (2004) says:

> Do not marry women (idolaters), unless they commit themselves to *Allah* until they believe, a slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman, even though she allures you. Nor marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe, a man slave who believes is better than an unbeliever, even though he allures you. Unbelievers do (but) beckon you to the Fire. But *Allah* beckons by His Grace to the Garden of Bliss and forgiveness and makes his signs clear to mankind: that they may celebrate His praise[6].

From the above, it can be seen that an Islamic marriage is an example of an endogamous marriage as Muslims cannot marry individuals who do not believe in God or those individuals who are idol worshippers (Suleman 2011:20). The second aspect an individual should look for is cultural and mental/educational compatibility, as these result in an understanding and mutual respect between the couple (Akbar n.d.:120). The moral character of the individual should also be taken into consideration. The Prophet Muhammad said that it is best to marry that person who is pious (Akbar n.d.:120). Therefore, it can be argued that one should marry an individual who is good and kind in nature and personality.

[6] Translation for N.J. Dawood can be found at: Dawood, N.J. 2004. *The Koran* Penguin Classics first written in 1956. http://al-quran.info/#home (http://al-quran.info).

As can be seen, marriage is viewed as a necessity and important for all Muslims as it completes half of one's *Imaan* and it is a legitimate channel within which sexual acts can occur. In addition, it is important for procreation, is viewed as a form of *Ibadah*, and is a means for companionship (Abdul-Rauf 1993:2). When looking for a spouse an individual should look for religion, similarity in culture, mental/educational compatibility and lastly moral character.

Pressures to Get Married

This section seeks to discuss the pressures that are placed on men and women to get married and whether it is the same for both men and women. Suliman's (2012:7) article alludes to the notion of there being a greater pressure placed on women to get married as opposed to the pressure placed on men. This is not to say that men do not experience pressure, however, they experience it differently as opposed to women. When conducting this research, Suliman's (2012:7) article was given to all interviewees to read. All ten interviewees agreed with the general sentiments of the article, yet, their understanding varied. For the purpose of this paper, marriage refers to a heterosexual, monogamous marriage as this view was discussed by the respondents. It is also the general view of marriage the Muslim Indian community in Johannesburg practices.

The interviewees agreed that indeed there is a pressure to get married; however, two interviewees believed the pressure is the same for both men and women, whilst the other eight believed there is a greater pressure placed on women. An interviewee, IC (12 June 2013) spoke about men and women experiencing the pressure differently as men are viewed as 'providers' and 'women are seen as caregivers and what better way to fulfill that role than by getting married?' (IC, 12 June 2013). However, she believes that:

> as Indians, it is more of a pressure because society has made it the next step after getting educated. My black and white friends do not face the same pressures; they all get married after being financially stable and being more experienced in life. I guess religion also plays a part to an extent because for us … marriage completes your faith (IC, 12 June 2013).

Two other women interviewees spoke about women experiencing pressure at a greater degree as opposed to men. An interviewee said:

> In Indian society, if you're not married … and if you're a woman, then it's automatically assumed there must be something wrong with you … Indian women almost need to be married to be taken seriously. If you're not married you're immediately judged. … I most definitely don't think it's an issue or pressure in other races as much as it is with Indian Muslims. Taking away the element that it's considered half our *Imaan*, the Indian society, in general, puts a lot of emphasis on marriage when compared to other races and ethnicities. Unmarried women in other cultures are subjected to far less judgment than we are (AS, 19 May 2013).

As stated above eight of the respondents echoed the same sentiments as AS (19 May 2013). Some of the men went further to suggest the pressure begins in high school and escalates after Matric. All of the respondents argued there is a stigma attached to unmarried women especially as the woman gets older. However, this is not unique to just Muslim Indian communities but to Muslim women globally, and perhaps women in general. Patriarchy has manifested itself in such a way that women feel 'anxiety about remaining single and report pressure from family members and others to marry and have children' (Blakemore *et al*. 2005:327). In addition, like argued by the respondents' society perceives unmarried women as being 'deficient' (Blakemore *et al* 2005:327). Therefore, a critical look at societal structures and values needs to take place.

Another aspect that was discussed in great detail was that marriage fulfills half of one's *Imaan.* However, the respondents believed the pressure and stress on marriage are more socially related as opposed to religiously related. Their reasoning lies in the fact that Muslims are taught to believe in fate as it is the principle aspect of faith in God and Islamic belief. Muslims believe that God has already written out when and to whom one will get married to and if one believes this to be true then there would be no need for this constant pressure as an individual will get married when he/she is destined to.

It should be mentioned that nine interviewees resolved the pressure to get married is more socially constructed due to the cultural heritage of Indian

people. Their reasons being the ancestors of Indian people in South Africa, come from India; therefore many have been indoctrinated and socialised with some of the ideals that were practiced upon when their forbearers lived there. Even though Muslim Indians living in South Africa and some have not visited India for years if at all, many of those ideals are still practiced by them today as it is a hegemonic discourse. Adila Abusharaf (2006) explains the cultural/religious binary by arguing that:

> [S]tudies have shown that religion influences gender relations and outcomes, but the effects of specific religious affiliations vary, due to different interpretations and obligations of codes of conduct in cultural settings (Abusharaf 2006:716).

From the above, it can be understood that even though Islam places an immense importance on marriage, cultural and social interpretations on the importance of marriage have taken prevalence. If Muslim Indians focused on Islamic principles it would be realised that trust should be placed in God as no one has control over when one will get married. This analysis 'has established that old traditions have become accepted as religious simply because they are persistent. It is fundamentally important to note that some of these practices are based on cultural norms' (Haeri citied in Abusharaf 2006:722).

Where Does One Find a Suitable Spouse?

Samoosa Run

The *Samoosa Run*[7] is an alternate form of an arranged marriage in that the man and woman both agree to it and at any point either may refuse to marry the

[7] It is called the *samoosa* run because usually the first snacks Indians serve when visiting their home are *samoosas*. Samoosas are triangular pastries filled with a savoury filling, which are usually fried or baked. The filling is made with either potatoes, onions, lentils, lamb, beef or chicken. To add flavour to the filling spices, coriander, and mint are added. 'They are a popular appetizer or snack in the Indian Subcontinent, Southeast Asia, Central Asia and Southwest Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, the Mediterranean, the Horn of Africa, North Africa and South Africa. The samosa has been a popular snack in the

other. If there is a single man or woman in a household someone (either one of the parents, a family member or friend) will suggest the two individuals meet. It begins 'with parents and relatives making it known that they are seeking suitors for their children' (Al-Johar 2005:564). The meeting will usually take place at the woman's home and thereafter the two individuals will speak in an effort to learn more about each other; if they like each other and think they are compatible, they will inform their parents and the marriage will be arranged.

AS (19 May 2013) a woman interviewee shares her views on the *samoosa run*; she would prefer this method as opposed to 'falling in love, Westerny nonsense' (AS, 19 May 2013). She further argues:

> Someone would … suggest it to my parents and then first they would tell me if I am interested in the idea of marriage … he would come home and if I like him then it would be my choice. So even if they really liked him and I don't like him at all then I wouldn't get married to him. The first meeting would ideally be with the parents. And then obviously communication like WhatsApp and calling. … I'd pray and then whatever I feel after that, like put it in God's hand rather than my own, because I trust Him, more than I do myself. And then if we do get married if I feel it's the right thing to do after I pray (AS, 19 May 2013).

The above quote has vital information, first, she is describing that it is not a must that a woman gets married to the man who is brought to her house. Thus, there is a choice from both the man and woman. Secondly, she speaks about praying to God and if he is the right man for her she will know through her prayer. The prayer the respondent is referring to is *Istikhaara Namaaz*.

It should be mentioned the decision to call the woman back is solely up to the man, this is described as the general unspoken rule of the *samoosa run*. Even if the woman felt she was not her usual self or felt slightly drawn to the man and would like to meet him again she is not allowed to contact him at all. None of the respondents could say for sure what would happen if the

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Indian Subcontinent for centuries' (Kaminsky & Long 2011:151). See further *India Today: An Encyclopedia of Life in the Republic* by Arnold P. Kaminsky and Roger D. Long

woman contacted the man but the general sentiments were 'it would be bad', as it is seen as unacceptable and the woman would probably be seen as 'forward'[8]. Haeri, as cited in Abusharaf (2006), proposes that the tensions between religion and culture are an outcome of the restrictions placed on female agency. Patriarchal understandings of religion and culture place constraints and scrutiny on women and their behaviour.

The difference between the *samoosa run* and a generic view of an arranged marriage is that a *samoosa run* is the introduction of two single people looking to get married or are of a marriageable age. Once they are introduced they then decide whether to take it further or not. Whereas, an arranged marriage is a marriage formed by the individual's parents or another family member often without the explicit consent of the couple involved.

Arranged Marriages

Three respondents said their parents' marriage took place via an arranged marriage. There is a general assumption that arranged marriages have a history in Indian communities especially with those who are 50 years of age and above. This assumption can be seen as an interviewee NC (4 June 2013) speaks about her grandparent's marriage arguing:

> With my father's family, his parents were born in India, in the same *gham*, and their marriage was like, like my father's father immigrated to South Africa and then his mother was just shipped over and my grandfather just had a picture of my grandmother and it was like the *Nikah* was already made, he just had to look for her on the ship and was like oh you're my wife (NC, June 4).

An arranged marriage is generally understood as a man's family asking the woman's family for their daughter's hand in marriage 'marrying someone whom their parents, relatives, or family friends had found for them' (Al-Johar

[8] Forward in this sense refers to the woman acting out of turn and is not conservative. She may also be viewed as 'easy' in terms of partaking in sexual activity. The man is responsible for contacting the woman and he has all the decision making power.

2005:562). In some instances, the bride and groom only meet on the wedding day. They could meet once or twice before the wedding either at the woman's home or at a chaperoned meeting. 'Meeting the proposed groom before marriage appears to be the norm for brides entering arranged marriages' (Al-Johar 2005:562-565).

SS (16 June 2013), a 32-year-old woman shared her views on arranged marriages. She says that when she was in her early 20's she had a desire for a fairy-tale, falling in love romance; but now that she is older her views have shifted. She further adds:

> Now I think it's just about meeting the right person and being ok with marrying that person and if love happens to come afterward it's ok. 'Arranged' marriages aren't loveless marriages. The two people involved just happened to fall in love after they tied the knot. There are many cases where people who were in love, married and they weren't able to make the marriage work (SS, 16 June 2013).

Love Marriages

There is a divide on the notion of love marriages. A love marriage is a marriage in which one finds his/her own partner. Four interviewees would prefer what Al-Johar (2005) describes as a 'self-initiated Islamic marriage' as opposed to a love marriage in the Western sense; that is the man and woman meet, fall in love, the court for a period of time and then settle down.

A self-initiated Islamic marriage is a marriage wherein the man and woman find each other on their own yet do not court. Al-Johar (2005:567) describes this as 'meeting and choosing spouses and then following Islamic prescriptions … Initially encountering their future spouses independent of family and relatives'. They are friends and on knowing they want to get married, usually after performing *Istikhaara Namaaz*, they inform their parents about each other (Al-Johar 2005:568). Thereafter, the families meet each other and a proposal and wedding follow. Two interviewees speak about the manner in which a self-initiated Islamic marriage functions within their understanding. NC (4 June 2013) argues that she does not want to have a relationship with the person but rather know that he is the one and they will get married when they are both ready for marriage. She explains:

> I would first want to like the guy and we both have a discussion andwe mutually agree that we both like each other and then decide if a relationship suits us or not. But I wouldn't want a relationship. So I would just prefer where you and the guy just know you like each other and you know when the time is right to get married then he'll come home and he proposes and you get married (NC, 4 June 2013).

NC's views are further supported by IC (12 June 2013) who says that her parents' marriage was based on a love marriage and she would prefer something similar, yet not the same. She explains:

> A marriage like my parents because they got to choose who makes them happy. Just like you know what page we're on, I mean we've all been through a dating experience at some point but you realize it doesn't really work out that way, because you don't want to get too familiar with the person but you just want to know that when you come to certain life points and you want to make certain decisions you want to know that you can both be on the same page and challenge each other to be better than what you are.
> [Interviewer says: one of my interviewees doesn't want to date anyone, she wants to know that she likes this guy and he likes her and when they're ready for marriage then they will get married].
> To this IC responds 'I think it's better that way … I think that's good because you don't have to spend long hours with someone to see where things are going. A lot of the time like certain questions you ask them and the answers they give can tell you all you need to know. Also, it saves you from doing wrong by being unmarried and with another person, in terms of Islam (IC, 12 June 2013).

From the above discussion, it can be deduced that there is divided opinion in the Muslim Indian community in Johannesburg when it comes to methods of finding a suitable spouse. The reason for this divide could be: on the one hand there are institutions such as religion which act as a guiding force and stipulates how one should live their life. Yet, on the other hand living in a Westernised and globalised world, exposes individuals to various forms of living. This puts pressure on Muslim Indian individuals to find a balance that suits them best. For some, this includes courting and self-initiated marriages,

whereas, for others, it means following Islam strictly and to the best of their ability.

Marrying Non-Muslims and Non-Indians: Limits of Choice

Suliman's (2012:7) article does not address certain tensions, one of which is the issue of marrying a non-Indian. In the interviews marrying a non-Indian was a controversial issue. All of the interviewees except two said that they would marry a non-Indian. Of those eight, seven said that they would marry a black person, however, noted that it would not be readily accepted, if at all, by their families and it would be a challenge to get married. This can be seen by AS (19 May 2013) who said:

> I really don't see the problem with that … I think that his character matters more and in the end, that's just like a husband who allows me to live ideally as a Muslim. … if he's not Indian [it's fine] a lot of the revert brothers [AS is referring to non-Indians who have converted to Islam] I've met are even better Muslims than what we are so I don't see any problem. But then again my parents would come into it and Islam demands that you treat your parents with the utmost of respect and I don't know if they would be open to those ideas. So it would be, if I were faced with this situation I would just pray and hope for the best (AS, 19 May 2013).

One interviewee said that he would marry a non-Indian but is selective of race. Another said his parents would be open to the idea of an inter-racial marriage, however, bringing home a black 'girl' would not be accepted. From the interviewees as well as my social interactions it can be argued that race is an important factor when considering a spouse. From the responses, there seem to be elements of racism or racialism within the Muslim Indian community. The word racialism was used by one of the interviewee who said that it would be hard for the two cultures and families to join together as marriage is not just a union of two people but the coming together of two families. He further added that he is not racist but racialist. IC (12 June 2013) speaks about marrying a non-Indian including a black man as well as the alleged racism within the Muslim Indian community. She argued:

> Ya, I would [referring to marrying a non-Indian including a black man], but like at the same time you have to think of the repercussions it has … that's exactly where the pressure comes in because for me it would be a free choice and I'd do it but then at the end of the day … what will my parents say, what will my family say, how would the future be in terms of that. For some people it would be ok to date a white guy but then if it's a black guy then it's different, so there are lots of factors that play into that decision, you can't just make the decision based on how you feel; which is what I find really sad because how can you even change that when society is being … brought up in a like in a tunnel almost … I don't know about my dad but maybe my mother, she says that as long as the guy is Muslim it's ok. But at the end of the day, the extended family would be a bit hard to break through and like that would make it very hard because we're a close family (IC, 12 June 2013).

Given that this research is conducted in South Africa, it is important to contextualise the issue of racism and prejudice that exists within the Muslim Indian community in Johannesburg. South Africa is a country that has been deeply affected by the social engineering of apartheid and the racial categorisation that this produced, and that continues to be used today. The reason for this is pre-1994; South Africa was an apartheid state which racially categorised and segregated individuals based on their race. In addition, racial segregation was not introduced by the apartheid system alone yet dates back to colonial rule and their construction of race and racial differences.

Another important point that should be mentioned is the notion of *gham* that was spoken about by two respondents and to an extent is quite prevalent in the Muslim Indian community. The notion of caste limits choice even further, not only must your spouse be Muslim and Indian but in some instances or families, he/she must also come from the same *gham* as you.

Al-Johar (2005) speaks to this in her work *Muslim Marriages in America: Reflecting New Identities* when she addresses the case of a Pakistani man who desired to marry a Pakistani woman but she was from a different linguistic background and it was a struggle. Although the couple married Al-Johar (2005) explains that 'she and her husband were both Pakistani, they had different linguistic backgrounds, Yazeed was an Urdu-speaker whose parents had moved to Pakistan from India and she was not an Urdu-speaker' (Al-Johar

2005:569). This problem is similar to the problems faced by some individuals in the Muslim Indian community. NC (4 June 2014) describes this as:

> Like you *memon* you have to marry *memon*; you *surtee* you have to marry *surtee*; you *alipor*[9] you have to marry *alipor*, *memon akni*, *surtee biryani*[10], like how can you even make your taste buds be like caste. … it's so silly. My mum's parents, were both born in South Africa, so it's like you know if my father has this whole thing like if he has to say something about caste then I would understand, because his parents were both born in the same village and married to the same, so I would understand from his perspective. But like with my mother I just wouldn't because they were born in South Africa like we're all South Africans, not Indian nationality, we are South African nationality.

The frustrations from the above quote are clearly visible – the respondent is clearly unhappy with the restrictions placed on men and women and views them as feeble and irrelevant. The notion of marrying someone from the same race and *gham* as you is contradictory to Islamic beliefs and principles. This idea was inherited from Indian custom as the ancestral lineage links to India as discussed in earlier. 'A person is not allowed to discriminate on the basis of class, ethnicity, and race when choosing a marital partner … it upsets a social order that preaches unity amongst Muslims' (Jaylarnie as cited in Suleman 2011:22).

Conclusion

This paper has been set as a case study which discussed the institution of marriage. It has shown that marriage is a necessary condition, especially for a

[9] Memon, Surtee, Alipor are all different *ghams* (villages) in India that South African Indian Muslims' ancestors come from.

[10] *Akni and Biryani* are rice-based dishes made from various spices. The rice, spices and fish, chicken, mutton, steak or vegetables are cooked together to form one dish. This is usually accompanied by a special yoghurt made with mint, coriander and chillies or and onion, tomato and cucumber salad.

Muslim Indian woman's participatory role in society. The interviews have indicated that unmarried women feel 'judged' and 'scrutinised' because of their marital status. In addition, the interviewees argued the older one becomes, individuals are 'looked down on' as members of society assume there is something wrong with them because they are unmarried.

The study took into account the article by Sakeena Suliman (2012:7) to establish the framework for identification of the underlying problem. The significance of marriage can be seen as embedded within Islamic practices. The interviewees often quoted 'marriage is half of one's faith' to justify the importance of marriage. However, this dogmatic view of marriage does not explain the pressures placed on individuals to get married. The primary research question aimed to give insight into which societal pressures regulate the social practice of marriage in Muslim Indian communities in Johannesburg. The paper has depicted that there is pressure on both men and women to get married, however, the pressure experienced by women far outweighs the pressure experienced by men.

From the perspective of society, marriage is an obligatory condition for a Muslim Indian individual's constructive and participatory identity in society. The pressures to get married can be associated with Islam to a certain extent, however, Islam advocates for fate and trust in God. Therefore, it can be argued that these pressures are socially constructed by using religion as a tool to guilt men and women especially into living their lives in a specific manner. Lastly, this paper has demonstrated the manner in which the conditions for marriage are restricted in Muslim Indian communities in Johannesburg by discussing the issues of race and *gham*. These issues are restrictions placed on an individual with regards to whom one may or may not marry. It expresses to young individuals that they are allowed to marry anyone as long as the person's identity fits within the specific, stipulated parameters.

From a qualitative research point of view, I would suggest a wider and more extensive study of this topic could also yield positive research on this topic. In addition, I would suggest further research into the discourses surrounding sex and sexual relations before marriage. It would be interesting to understand in what way, sex and sexual relations before marriage are viewed as taboo in Muslim Indian communities or in Muslim communities as a whole. This research noted that sexual relations outside of marriage are prohibited in Islam, yet, one interviewee said that due to the world we are living in 'these things could happen before marriage and one should be open-minded' (SV, 20

August 2013). The nature of honour societies is interesting especially when attempting to discover what would happen to an individual who has had sexual cohabitation before marriage.

In conclusion, society needs to award agency to men and women in the same manner. The Muslim Indian community in Johannesburg should not view women as only 'single women that can't be recognized because she doesn't have a male partner' (MAO 3 July 2013). The life of a woman is not merely 'about marriage and about trying to get married [nor is it a life where] everything else doesn't really matter, there are so many other more important things' (ZM, 4 June 2013). Whilst Islam says that both men and women should get married early, it is important they find a partner that satisfies the functions of a marriage. There is a disjuncture of Muslim Indian pressure and Islamic views. What one should avoid is falling for the pressures as this can act as a barrier to finding a partner or choosing the wrong partner in an attempt to abide by societal expectations.

Glossary

- *Gham* – Caste. Individuals who belong or ancestors are from a certain village in India.
- *Ibadah* – Worship
- *Istikhaara Namaaz* – A prayer asking *Allah Ta'ala* for guidance and goodness in the decision one wishes to pursue.
- *Imaan* – Faith
- *Nikah* – An Islamic marriage ceremony
- *Qur'an* – The central religious text of Islam
- *Shariah* – Islamic Law
- *Sunnah* – The recorded life of the Prophet Muhammad. It refers to the words spoken, actions done and likes of the Prophet Muhammad.
- *Taqdeer* – Fate

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