South Asian Women in East London

The Impact of Education

Kalwant Bhopal

THOMAS CORAM RESEARCH UNIT, UK

ABSTRACT   This article examines the impact of education on South Asian women's participation in traditional practices of 'arranged marriages' and dowries. It is based upon research carried out by the author in East London. Sixty in-depth interviews were conducted with South Asian women, as well as participant observation of living with a South Asian community for a period of six months. The article explores which women participate in 'arranged marriages' and receive dowries and which do not. The data indicate that women with high levels of education are rejecting certain aspects of their traditions ('arranged marriages' and dowries). However, women who continue the practices of 'arranged marriages' and dowries have lower levels of education. They feel the continuation of such practices are part of their own South Asian identity in British society. The research demonstrates that women's level of education affects their participation in traditional South Asian practices. For some British-born South Asian women a process of redefinition is taking place. Their identities are shifting, complex and multifaceted and take on new meanings as they choose whether or not to participate in South Asian traditions.

KEY WORDS   arranged marriages ◆ dowries ◆ education ◆ South Asian women

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the impact of education on South Asian women's lives in relation to participating in 'arranged marriages' and the giving of dowries. The article is concerned with exploring the following questions: to what extent do South Asian women participate in 'arranged marriages' and the giving of dowries? Which women participate in such practices and which do not? How does education influence whether women will have an 'arranged marriage' and receive a dowry? The article discusses

how women with high levels of education are rejecting 'arranged marriages' and dowries. These women are defined as 'independent' women because they are seen to be breaking away from traditional South Asian practices. Yet other women, those who are defined as 'traditional' women, want to continue traditional South Asian practices as they feel these practices confirm their South Asian identity in British society.

'ARRANGED MARRIAGES' AND DOWRIES[1]

'Arranged marriages' have received a great deal of attention in India (Caplan, 1985; Rao and Rao, 1982). The research has demonstrated that marriage patterns in India reflect changes in social customs, attitudes and values occurring within the 'arranged marriage' system. Other researchers (Mitter, 1990; Papanek, 1990) have highlighted the position of women in the conjugal realm and their value in wider society, the purity of women at marriage (Yalman, 1963) and status differences between the bride and groom (Trautmann, 1981).

Research carried out in the UK (Bhachu, 1985) has argued that the traditional criteria of spouse selection and kinship organization of South Asians in the UK follow much the same pattern as those of north India. '"Arranged marriages" take place within one's own caste and inter-caste marriage is uncommon. Caste endogamy is a basic criterion of marriage arrangement in the UK, as it is in India' (Michaelson, 1983). Marriage is based upon the rule of exogamy, including the rule of village exogamy. Ascribed and achieved status is important (Pocock, 1972). Residence after marriage is predominantly with the joint family of the groom, in which the daughters-in-law have subordinate positions in the family (Vatuk, 1972). Recent research (Drury, 1991; Gardner and Shukur, 1994; Stopes-Roe and Cochrane, 1990) has indicated that there has been a shift from viewing marriage as a match between two families, to the more individualistic 'western' notion of marriage between two people. Others (Ballard, 1994a; Shaw, 1994) have indicated that few young South Asians experience any difficulty in conforming to their parents' values and expectations of marriage. More recently, Modood et al. (1994, 1997) have found differences within the 'South Asian' category regarding marriage. They found that while first generation Muslims were stricter about endogamy, they were the only South Asian group who were open to marriage across ethnic and religious boundaries. Hence, their children had more freedom in partner choice than children from other South Asian groups.

The 'arranged marriage' itself is related to the dowry. The term 'dowry' as commonly used in the South Asian context conflates several different gifts that are given by the bride's parents at the time of her marriage

(Bhopal, 1997a; Sharma, 1994; Uberoi, 1994). Some research (Caplan, 1994) has defined the dowry as consumer goods and cash which are laterally transferred from the bride's family to that of the groom.

Little research has examined the phenomenon of dowries in the UK. Different researchers have given different reasons for the importance of the dowry. Some have indicated the inferiority of 'bride-takers' to 'bride-givers' (Macleod, 1976; Wilson, 1978). Others (Bhachu, 1985; Westwood, 1988) have demonstrated the weak position of the bride in her marital home. Yet some research (Bhachu, 1985; Westwood, 1988) has demonstrated a change in the dowry system, where the control of dowry has shifted from mothers-in-law to daughters-in-law, which is based upon the earning potential of brides. More recently, Bhachu (1991) has described how the elaboration of the dowry practice among Sikh women draws upon and reproduces their class locations. According to Werbner (1990), however, women are central to the Punjabi Muslim system of ceremonial exchange. Part of this ceremonial exchange includes the dowry. The cost of the dowry given by the woman's parents is based upon the setting up of an independent household as well as affinal giving, which continues long after the marriage. Werbner (1990) also demonstrates that some (though not all) features of the Pakistani marriage payment system tend towards mutuality and reciprocity.

Overall, the research which exists on dowries and 'arranged marriages' in the UK is both descriptive and dated. It has not attempted to analyse dowry giving and the practice of 'arranged marriages' as systems which may disadvantage women and advantage men. How does level of education affect whether women will receive a dowry and enter into an 'arranged marriage'? To what extent are women rejecting 'arranged marriages' and dowries? How does this contribute to notions of social change for South Asian women in British society? This article addresses such questions and explores the relationship between participation in traditional South Asian practices and level of education.

GENDER, ETHNICITY AND EDUCATION

While many of the writings on gender and education have underestimated the significance of difference and diversity (Delamont, 1980; Weiller, 1988), other writings have attempted to examine the relationship between ethnicity and educational achievement (Ghuman, 1994; Penn and Scattergood, 1992; Tanna, 1990). The existence and nature of ethnic and gender differences in attainment in national qualifications have been identified as significant factors in determining future educational and employment prospects, and are considered to be of particular relevance to the consideration of equality in access to such opportunities. Modood and

Shiner (1994) argue that academic performance is an important part of the explanation of ethnic differences in access to higher education. Recent research suggests that the performance of ethnic minority groups may now exceed that of majority groups (Sammons, 1994; Thomas et al., 1992, 1993, 1994). Some researchers (Dex, 1983; Tomlinson, 1983) have examined the identifying factors associated with educational attainment and emphasized the relationship between gender, ethnicity and 'race'. Tomlinson (1983) has suggested that the high achievement of girls from ethnic minority groups in schools also extends into higher education. The chances for black, Afro-Caribbean girls to pursue a degree are higher than for black, Afro-Caribbean boys. More recent research (Mirza, 1992) also suggests that black, Afro-Caribbean women obtain higher qualifications than their male counterparts.

Recent research (Ballard, 1994a; Bhopal, 1997b) has demonstrated that compared with the white majority, a higher proportion of South Asians continue in full-time education. Furthermore, their rate of enrolment on degree courses is double that of the white norm. Yet they still continue to suffer the same forms of discrimination and social exclusion as their parents. Gardner and Shukur (1994) have indicated that an increasing number of Bengali women are continuing into higher education and within the next few decades the numbers of Bengali women in the labour market will show a significant increase. One of the reasons for this is that higher education is seen as a route for greater earning potential and upward social mobility (Bhopal, 1997b). Shaw's (1994) research on the Pakistani community in Oxford demonstrates that only a small minority of girls have gained higher qualifications, but have stayed within the community, finding few problems in combining career with an 'arranged marriage' and participation in family and community events. Shaw (1994) argues that even though the younger generation obtain educational and professional qualifications, they are often still committed to upholding their community values and identity.

Although many studies have attempted to investigate the relationship between 'race', ethnicity and education, very few studies have examined the educational achievements of *South Asian women*. Examining the relationship between gender, ethnicity and education enables us to explore the issue of difference for South Asian women. For instance, how do South Asian women perform in education? How do performance levels affect their participation in traditional practices such as 'arranged marriages' and dowries? Such questions will enable us to explore the impact of 'race', gender and education upon women's lives.

THE RESEARCH

The research examines the intersection of gender and ethnicity with specific reference to South Asian women. It examines the dynamics of gender relations within households in order to explore the differences that exist among South Asian women. The precise focus of the study is the South Asian community in East London.[2] Sixty in-depth interviews were carried out with South Asian women living in East London as well as participant observation, this included living with a South Asian community for a period of six months. The setting in which the research took place is an immensely varied South Asian community. The large South Asian community has individuals from diverse social and economic backgrounds. Many of the South Asians in East London are owners of different retail and wholesale businesses. They are a close knit community who feel proud of their identity as South Asians and of belonging to a community where they feel accepted. Other members of the community are from professional and non-manual occupations. There is a feeling of immense belonging and acceptance for all members of this close-knit community. Family and non-family members meet regularly to maintain social support within their community away from an outside world which can often be hostile and racist.

South Asian was defined as women whose ancestors originated from the Indian subcontinent: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Women were from different educational backgrounds; a total of 11 percent of respondents had no formal qualifications, 3 percent had CSEs (Certificate of Secondary Education) and 27 percent had 'O' levels (Ordinary level examinations). Others had 'A' levels (Advanced level examinations, 7 percent) and BTEC/HND (Business Technology Certificate/Higher National Diploma, 10 percent). Some had a higher level of education; 27 percent of respondents had a BA (Bachelor of Arts) and 15 percent had an MA (Master of Arts). A total of 50 percent of respondents in the study were married. All respondents who were married in the study had an 'arranged marriage' and were given a dowry. There were no respondents in the study who were married and had a non-arranged marriage. Other respondents were living with their partners (38 percent) but were not married to them and 12 percent of respondents defined themselves as single (some who were with partners and some who were without partners).

THE FINDINGS

'Arranged Marriages'

Respondents were asked whether they felt 'arranged marriages' were important in South Asian communities. A total of 55 percent of

respondents said 'arranged marriages' were important. Different responses were given for the importance of 'arranged marriages'; 25 percent of respondents said 'arranged marriages' were important due to traditional expectations which existed in South Asian communities, these were linked to South Asian identity. It was felt that the cultural identity of South Asian people was a very important part of an individual's life. This was influenced and reinforced by having an 'arranged marriage'.

> The arranged marriage exists and we follow it because it's part of our Asian identity and it's part of what we believe in, it's our tradition . . . mostly it's our whole identity. (Surinder, married with two children)

Participating in an 'arranged marriage' also demonstrated respect for parents.

> If you have an arranged marriage it shows you really do respect your parents and you respect what they think and so you do what they tell you to do, the best thing you can do is show that respect by doing what they tell you to do. (Kulwinder, married with a son)

However, a total of 45 percent of respondents said 'arranged marriages' were not important. Different reasons were given for this; 32 percent of respondents said it was pressure from the community which made individuals feel 'arranged marriages' were important. These respondents had high levels of education (those who had a BA or MA).

> It's Asian people, they make us think they are [important] . . . they make us think that's the only thing we have in our life to aim for and if we don't have an arranged marriage we are nothing . . . and we've done nothing with our lives . . . people just make you think you have to have an arranged marriage and so you have to make sure you please them . . . like people in the community. (Serena, cohabiting with partner)

The pressure from the community was immense and South Asian parents felt they had to conform in order to be accepted and to preserve their *izzat*.[3] However, it was only women who were able to alter, destroy or enhance their family's *izzat*.

> You have to make sure you have a good clean reputation and a good *izzat* and so you want all your children, especially your daughters to have an arranged marriage . . . and you do what has to be done to make sure this happens. (Dalgit, married with four children)

A minority of respondents said 'arranged marriages' did not bring happiness to women (5 percent), degraded women (3 percent) or gave women no choice in their lives (5 percent).

> I think they [arranged marriages] degrade women, they make women look worse than men, and it's always the men who have the choice and not the women . . . men are the ones who benefit from the arranged marriages, women don't . . . it's the worst thing for women. (Kirpal, single)

The idea of parents emphasizing the 'arranged marriage' for their daughters was based upon the need for a separate South Asian identity, which was considered to be a powerful and strong indicator of social control. If women rejected 'arranged marriages', they were not only rejecting their communities, but their identity. The whole notion of 'arranged marriages' being part of South Asian identity was seen to be more important for women than for men. Women were the ones who felt they had to hold onto their identity, because the 'arranged marriage' was part of their life and part of what the community dictated to them. Part of being a woman was to have an 'arranged marriage' and this was part of being identified as a *South Asian* woman.

However, some South Asian women did reject 'arranged marriages' and saw them as being oppressive, degrading and entrapping for women. These women, however, paid a high price for their freedom. They were punished for having broken the rules of South Asian communities and were regarded as sexually promiscuous. It was their parents and in turn their family members who were punished. If a woman decides she does not want to have an 'arranged marriage', her whole family is affected by her actions.

> When women say they don't want to have an arranged marriage, it's a very dangerous thing to say and you have to be strong . . . people just judge you, they think you just want to sleep around and then they say things to your family . . . and your family blame you and wish you were dead . . . it's all your fault because you didn't have an arranged marriage and you have just brought shame to your father. (Serena, cohabiting with partner)

Those women who opposed 'arranged marriages' saw themselves as having broken away from their family traditions. These women felt their actions had affected their relationship with family members.

> I found it very difficult to tell my parents that I didn't want an arranged marriage. They were so shocked when I told them. My mum sort of was grieving and my dad just told me to leave the house . . . now I don't see them so much, but when I do, nobody in the family wants to speak to me. My brother hates me and my sisters just don't care about me. (Kirpal, single)

Women who decided to leave home felt it was something that was very hard to do.

> When you're brought up thinking your life will be one way and your family expects it to be one way and then you decide to go another way, it's a very difficult thing to do. Leaving home has made me very alone and I have more or less lost my family because of it. They will never accept me as their daughter again . . . only if I do what they want me to do . . . and they want me to have an arranged marriage. (Mina, cohabiting with partner)

For these women their entrance into education had a significant impact upon the decisions they made in their lives and starting a new life for

TABLE 1
Effects of Education on the Importance of 'Arranged Marriages'

	Education							Row Total[a]
Important	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Part of South Asian traditions	20	7	27	13	7	20	6	25
Respect for parents	10	–	60	10	20	–	–	17
Work and last	25	–	25	25	25	–	–	6
Commitment to family	67	–	33	–	–	–	–	5
Part of religion	–	–	100	–	–	–	–	2
Not important								
Community pressure	–	5	11	–	5	53	26	32
Give women no choice	–	–	–	–	–	33	67	5
Make women unhappy	–	–	33	–	33	33	–	5
Degrade women	–	–	–	–	–	50	50	3
Column Total[b]	11	3	27	7	10	27	15	100

Education, chi square value (48 d.f.) = 0.01224

Key: 1 = None, 2 = CSEs, 3 = 'O' levels, 4 = 'A' levels, 5 = BTEC/HND, 6 = BA/BSC, 7 = MA/MSC.
[a] The figures in each row add up to 100%.
[b] The figures in each column indicate the total number of respondents who had no qualifications. CSEs, 'O' levels and so forth. See key.

themselves. Their level of educational achievement made them realize they would be able to provide for themselves.

> When I lived at home, I always thought I would get married and not have to worry about money because I would be looked after, that's the way it goes for us. But then I decided I would go to university and that changed me. I decided I wanted to do things for myself and look after myself. I wanted to be independent. (Jaswant, cohabiting with partner)

Women's entrance into education had a significant impact upon their lives.

Table 1 demonstrates the relationship between women's level of education and their responses on the importance of 'arranged marriages'. Highly educated women did not think 'arranged marriages' were important and gave a number of reasons for this. Yet those with lower levels of education *did* emphasize the importance of 'arranged marriages'. Educational background made a significant difference to respondents' views on 'arranged marriages' and whether they had an 'arranged marriage'. Respondents who said 'arranged marriages' were positive for women had an 'arranged marriage' and had low levels of education (those who had

no formal qualifications or 'O' levels). On the other hand, those who said 'arranged marriages' degraded women had not had an 'arranged marriage' (and did not intend to). They had high levels of education (those who had a BA or MA).

Dowries

Respondents were asked why they felt dowries were given in South Asian communities. Most respondents said dowries were given as they were part of traditions and customs, they were part of the 'arranged marriage'.

> It's the tradition, it's expected . . . like the arranged marriage is expected and you don't question it . . . you know you're going to have an arranged marriage and you know the dowry comes with the arranged marriage . . . if you don't have a dowry, it would be like getting married without the wedding ring . . . that's how important it is to us. (Satvinder, married with three children)

Some respondents said parents gave dowries as this enabled them to achieve respect in the community (18 percent). The larger the dowry, the more respect they would gain.

> In our communities, people only respect you if you have money, then they think you are a good person . . . if you don't have money, then they don't want to know you . . . everyone in the community knows how much dowry you give and so all the parents want to give a large dowry . . . then other people talk to them and sort of look up to them. (Kamalgit, married with one daughter).

However, other respondents did not like the idea of giving dowries and some felt they were given so parents were able to display their wealth to the community (13 percent). These respondents were highly educated (those who had a BA or MA).

> . . . just to show who has the most amount of money, so they can then show this to other members of the community and so they think other people will like them, because they have lots of money . . . rich parents enjoy it all, they can show other parents they are really rich . . . and then they are seen as the most important people in the community. (Nirmal, cohabiting with partner)

However, other respondents said dowries were given as women were seen as being inferior to men (8 percent), were sold to men for marriage (5 percent) or their parents wanted to keep the groom happy (2 percent).

> It's degrading really, women have to be sold to men otherwise they won't marry them . . . all the men want to do is marry a woman who has a large dowry and then they will be happy . . . it's alright for them, they get a wife and they get lots of gifts and money, they don't have to move away from their house to a strange town . . . parents sell their daughters to men . . . and the one with the highest price gets the best husband. (Kirpal, single)

Parents have to give dowries regardless of their financial situation. Those who do not are heavily stigmatized and those who have little money are left with unmarried daughters. Unmarried daughters are seen as a burden and their parents are seen as having failed, not only themselves, but the community. Women are constantly being judged on their performance as women. They must behave in accordance with community rules and so must become marketable (marriageable). They must be trained to be the dutiful wife, so that men will want to marry them. Parents are prepared to spend great amounts of money on their daughter's dowry. The bigger the dowry, the more offers of marriage their daughter will receive.

Respondents were asked whether they would give their own children dowries. Half of the respondents in the study (50 percent) said they would give their own children a dowry. These respondents had low levels of education (those who had no formal qualifications or 'O' levels). Most of these respondents said they would give their own children dowries as they wanted to continue the traditions and customs of South Asian communities (40 percent).

> If we keep giving dowries and having arranged marriages that's the only way we can keep our culture and be proud of our customs. . . . I have a daughter and I will give her a good dowry . . . and I also have a son and will expect to receive a dowry for him . . . it's my right . . . it works both ways. (Kanta, married with three children)

A small number of respondents said they would give their own children dowries as they wanted their daughters to obey them (5 percent).

> I want my daughter to do what she is told and that means she will be told who she will marry and I will give her a dowry . . . that's why I feel parents should give the dowry, if you have a son, you get it back when he gets married . . . it's what you're entitled to . . . by rights you should give the dowry and you should automatically get it back when your son gets married. (Kamaljit, married with three children)

However, many respondents said they would not give their own children dowries (42 percent). These respondents were highly-educated (those who had a BA or MA). Many of these respondents said dowries portrayed women as being inferior to men (23 percent).

> . . . no, I think it's like a payoff really . . . it's an insult to women and they are the ones who suffer in the end and are seen as being worse than men are . . . because people carry on giving dowries, women keep being seen as lower than the men and people continue to treat them like that. (Seeta, cohabiting with partner)

Other respondents said they would not give their own children dowries as they wanted their children to have their own choices in life (17 percent).

> I don't want to give my daughters dowries . . . when I have children, I want

TABLE 2
Effects of Education on Why Women Are Given Dowries

Why Women Are Given Dowries	Education							Row Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Seen as a burden	–	–	–	3	8	21	68	22
Sold to men for marriage	–	–	–	10	24	56	10	42
Have to be looked after	10	70	20	–	–	–	–	17
Dowries part of traditions	26	–	74	–	–	–	–	8
Parents demonstrate love	33	–	67	–	–	–	–	12
Column Total	11	3	27	7	10	27	15	100

Education, chi square value (24 d.f.) = 0.00000

Key: 1 = None, 2 = CSEs, 3 = 'O' levels, 4 = 'A' levels, 5 = BTEC/HND, 6 = BA/BSC, 7 = MA/MSC.

> them to have their own choices in life and make their own decisions . . . it's their life and they should be allowed to make their own choices. (Kirpal, single)

Educational background made a significant difference to respondents' views on dowries (see Table 2). Respondents who felt dowries were used to sell women as property, had not been given a dowry themselves and were highly educated (those who had a BA or MA). Yet those who felt dowries enabled parents to demonstrate the love they had for their daughters had been given a dowry and had low levels of education (those who had no formal qualifications or 'O' levels).

'TRADITIONAL' AND 'INDEPENDENT' WOMEN

Education is an important variable which affects South Asian women's participation in 'arranged marriages' and dowries. Women who had low levels of education were defined as 'traditional' women. Women with high levels of education were defined as 'independent' women. 'Traditional' women had an 'arranged marriage' and were given a dowry. 'Independent' women had not had an 'arranged marriage' (and did not intend to) and were not given a dowry.

'Traditional' South Asian women who participate in 'arranged marriages' and the partaking of dowries have limited resources and access to power. They are economically dependent upon the men in the family and do not share in access to new economic opportunities with men. These

women also *want* to continue in the traditions of their ancestors. They feel doing so enables them to maintain their own identity, belonging and security within their communities. Women with different attitudes are more likely to stay in the education system longer. These women decide *not* to participate in 'arranged marriages'.

'Independent' women are moving away from the marriage relationship, as they want more freedom of choice to choose their own partners and see 'arranged marriages' and dowries as degrading and oppressive to women. 'Independent' women who become educated and move away from the expected standards of behaviour for men and women in South Asian communities are no longer adhering to the strict codes of submissive behaviour which are applied to South Asian women. These women are adopting independent values as they become educated.

Previous research (Ballard, 1994a) has argued that a process of 'code-switching' takes place in which the younger generation of South Asians are able to switch from one set of norms (such as at school) to another (such as at home). Ballard (1994a) argues that this involves a process of 'cultural navigation', the means by which individuals manoeuvre their way inside and outside the ethnic colony to their own advantage. So to say that some South Asians are in the process of 'culture conflict' is incorrect. I would argue that my research does not demonstrate that 'code-switching' takes place, rather some women are openly rejecting aspects of South Asian traditions in favour of other British ones. These women define their own sense of being, they accept their British-born identity and feel they *have the choice* to reject the traditions of their ancestors. They recognize the status and opportunities that educational advancement brings. They also recognize that change is an inevitable process for British-born South Asian women. These women's lives are different from those of their mothers and they do not want their own daughters to engage in traditional practices. 'Independent' women see themselves as British based, some of whom have never travelled to the homes of their ancestors. As these women reject 'arranged marriages', some enter into relationships with non-Asian men to cohabit, moving away from the traditional stereotype of South Asian women in British society.

However, Shaw's (1994) research demonstrates that some Pakistani girls had gained higher educational qualifications, but had stayed within the organization of the family in which they found few problems in combining careers with 'arranged marriages'. My research did not demonstrate this, rather 'independent' women indicated entering into an 'arranged marriage' would hinder their chances of participating in higher education and having a professional career. These women saw marriage as a disadvantage. Many 'independent' women did not want to leave their place of residence to move to a strange town and live with

their in-laws, something which happens often in the process of 'arranged marriages'. On the one hand, these women were openly rejecting traditional South Asian practices, yet they still recognized their *difference* in a predominantly white British society. For them, racial exclusion was something they felt they would always encounter. Ballard's (1994a) research has also demonstrated that although a high proportion of South Asians are in higher education, they still encounter similar forms of racism and exclusion as their parents. Despite these prejudices, however, the younger generation have made a substantial shift towards professionalism, where many British South Asians are becoming more middle class. Ballard (1994b) indicates that these individuals sustain a sense of their own distinctive identity, in complex and varied ways, but few have turned away from their traditions. This is also demonstrated by Gardner and Shukur (1994) who explore how some British South Asians have constructed new and varied lifestyles of their own. They have adapted and readapted their identities to interpret their values and lifestyles in their new settings. Yet Gardner and Shukur (1994) argue that young British South Asians continue in the tradition of 'arranged marriages', but at the same time have compromised between the traditional 'arranged' form to western-style relationships. It may be that differences between my research and that of others (Ballard, 1994b; Gardner and Shukur, 1994; Shaw, 1994) is due to sampling techniques. Respondents in my study were selected by snowball sampling, whereas others have used more rigorous techniques. In snowball sampling, the researcher has no control over the nature of the sample. There is always the danger that the sample will be heavily skewed in favour of particular types of women. I tried to overcome this by using different starting points from which to contact my respondents by placing advertisements at local universities, as well as contacting women in the community. It may be possible that the research attracted particular types of women, which may have affected the research findings.

More recent research (Modood et al., 1994, 1997) suggests a far more complicated picture than that revealed in my research. Families may follow the tradition of an 'arranged marriage', but at the same time the 'arranged marriage' process may actually involve a great deal of negotiation in which daughters may have more choice in the selection of a partner than their mothers once had. Furthermore, many daughters are reluctant to cause conflict with their parents in the choice of a marriage partner. This can be seen as part of an ongoing process of women recreating and reformulating both their ethnic and gender identities, while at the same time fusing them with new meanings. This is also supported by previous research (Modood et al., 1994, 1997; Rassool, 1995, 1997) which suggests that the younger generation of Asian groups strongly identify with their ethnicity and attach great importance to their

cultural background, which they then differentially incorporate into their various subjective biographies. Others (Drury, 1991; Eade, 1994) have also found that Asian young people do not have to choose either one or other polarized identity. Instead, they can pick and choose, or even negotiate, very complex forms of different identities.

Hall (1996) has argued that identities are not necessarily unified, they are fragmented and fractured and intersect across different discourses. Indeed, identities are constantly in the process of change and transformation, they are about the process of *becoming* rather than *being*. Identities are part of 'the changing same' (Gilroy, 1994). Furthermore, Hall (1991) has emphasized that identity is based upon multiplicity and differences rather than singular notions on the connections or articulations between fragments and differences. Gilroy (1992), on the other hand, has emphasized identifications or affiliations as ways of belonging. They are the positions which define us spatially in relation to others, as being entangled and separated. So, the self can be examined in spatial terms, as different types of existence.

Grossberg (1996) relocates the discourse of identity by placing it within the larger context of modern formations of power, whereas Clifford (1994) prefers to use the term diaspora to emphasize the historically spatial fluidity and internationality of identity. He argues that diaspora links identity to spatial location and different identifications. As a result, identities are best understood as the outcomes of processes of hybridization and creolization (Hall and Du Gay, 1996).

As Asian women are able to move in and out of different forms of identity, their identities are changing and multifaceted, enabling them to reinforce one particular mode or form of that individual identity. For some women this may be to enter into an 'arranged marriage'. For others, it may be to reject an 'arranged marriage', but at the same time to recognize their *difference* in a white British society. Although some South Asian 'independent' women have adapted their lifestyles in British society, they *do not* continue with the practice of 'arranged marriages'. For 'independent' British-born South Asian women a process of redefinition is taking place, in which their identities are shifting, complex and multifaceted. Their identities take on multiple meanings and are based upon multiplicities. Identities, then, can be reconstructed and redefined, they can be adopted and changed. So, for some Asian women their identities are constantly undergoing processes of change and transformation. These changes are affected by their participation in traditional South Asian practices, which are often the defining features of what it means not only to be a woman, but a South Asian woman in British society.

CONCLUSION

The present study indicates that there are significant changes taking place for South Asian women in contemporary British society. Those women who continue to participate in 'arranged marriages' emphasize the importance of women's value in South Asian communities and the purity of women at marriage. This has also been shown in previous research (Mitter, 1990; Yalman, 1963). Previous research has also indicated that the traditional criteria of spouse selection in the UK follow much the same pattern as north India (Bhachu, 1985) as well as residence after marriage being with the groom's family (Vatuk, 1972). The present research also found similar findings: the importance of caste in marriage as well as daughters-in-law moving to reside with the groom's family.

Previous research (Drury, 1991; Stopes-Roe and Cochrane, 1990) has argued that the 'arranged marriage' system has moved from being a match between two families to a more individualistic notion between two people. However, this was not found in the present research. Those who participated in 'arranged marriages' saw 'arranged marriages' as being an arrangement between *two families* in which families played a fundamental part in all decision-making processes. Families continue to play an important part in the selection and arrangement of 'arranged marriages'.

Dowry giving continues to take place in South Asian communities in Britain. Previous research (Bhachu, 1985; Wilson, 1978) has pointed to women's lack of power within the dowry system and women's position within the martial home. This was also found in the present research in which many respondents indicated that dowries were given for women and not men, which demonstrated the lack of power women had in South Asian communities. Other research (Bhachu, 1985; Westwood, 1988), however, has argued that the control of dowries has shifted from mothers-in-law to daughters-in-law, and that dowries are based upon the earning potential of brides. Nevertheless, the present research did not find this. Indeed, even though some women were in the labour market, they were in low positions in the labour market and the control of dowry was based upon *both mothers-in-law and husbands*.

Previous research (Ballard, 1994b; Gardner and Shukur, 1994; Shaw 1994) has indicated that significant numbers of South Asians are in higher education and during the next few decades the numbers will continue to increase. However, despite this, most young South Asians still continue to stay within their community and participate in traditional practices such as 'arranged marriages'. However, my research did not demonstrate that women with high levels of education were committed to upholding their community traditions. These women were moving away from such traditions to create an identity of their own. I would argue that the present research has revealed new empirical data on the lives of South Asian

women in British society. It has argued that women's participation in education affects their attitudes towards traditional South Asian practices. These women begin to question their own identity as South Asian women in British society. They are able to redefine and renegotiate their identity by choosing whether to participate in traditional South Asian practices.

NOTES

1.   Dowries are defined as gifts that are usually given to the groom by the bride's family on the day of the wedding.
2.   Women who participated in the study were aged between 25 and 30 and they were all born in the UK. Half of the women were married and had an 'arranged marriage', others were single or cohabiting. Twenty women identified themselves as Hindu, 20 as Sikh and 20 as Muslim.
3.   *Izzat* is based upon family pride, honour and reputation in the community which is primarily related to male members of the family.

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Kalwant Bhopal *is a research officer at the Thomas Coram Research Unit (University of London, Institute of Education). Her research interests include 'race'/ethnicity, gender/feminism and the use of different research methodologies. Her book* Gender, 'Race' and Patriarchy: A Study of South Asian Women *was recently published by Ashgate (1997).*

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