

50 Years after Hilda Kuper: Case Studies of Courtship and Marriage in the Hindustani¹ Community in Durban

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ABSTRACT The Hindustani community of South Africa was researched and written about by Hilda Kuper in the 1950s and 1960s. One of her papers was on marriage within the orthodox (Sanathanist) segment of this population. This paper revisits the issues that she focused upon then (in 1955) by providing a critique and an updated account of courtships and relationships among Hindustani couples in Durban. It focuses upon the changes that have taken in the ways individuals are choosing marriage partners, the courtships that precede their marriages and the changes that families are exhibiting in their once strong proclivity towards caste choices. The evidence herein demonstrates that while caste is not as much an issue as it used to be, linguistic background and academic cum professional status are the new norms in marriage choices.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is about two issues viz. marriages in the Hindustani community in Durban in the twenty-first century, and a response to a paper written on this issue by Hilda Kuper (1955) fifty years ago. Between 1955 and 2005 customary values and normative behaviour within the Hindustani community have undergone numerous changes that are in keeping with the dynamism of the political, economic and technological transformations in South Africa. The information that is presented below is intended to capture some of these changes and illustrate how adaptations and compromises are made by people who are referred to as Hindustani, as responses to the ongoing challenges that they face in the political economy of South Africa. Hindustani as it is understood in Durban, South Africa, is generally a reference to Hindi speaking Hindus who originate mainly from the provinces of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in northern India. These two provinces are also a part, of what has become widely known among scholars of the Indian Diaspora, as the *Bhojpuri Belt* – where a regionalized form of Hindi is spoken. However, in Durban, reference to “Hindi speaking people” particularly within the Indian population, is more about regional origin than about their medium of communication. Besides what is left of the elderly population in the early twenty-first century, who are still conversant in Hindi, the majority of this group “.....now have English as the medium of communication”. English has become the major

medium for most forms of communication in the greater Durban metropolis, especially with respect to communication with people from different linguistic backgrounds and in enacting and documenting policies and procedures at formal levels. Although English now serves as the lingua franca of the region and has facilitated linkages and networks across ethnic and racial boundaries, there is still an insular approach to religious and socio-cultural practices within each group that make up the heterogeneous population in the metropolis.

Having given English and Afrikaans constitutional protection in South Africa, Whites² were able to use this privilege during the colonial and apartheid eras to build their regionalized forms of socio-cultural institutions and traditions. These two languages became important political tools that served to mobilize support and entrench the power of White English and Afrikaans speaking political elites. History is replete with such examples in various parts of the world. For instance, in Canada, when the Canadian Confederation was established in 1867, the English and French languages were accorded constitutional status. Having been granted substantial powers in each of the provinces, political elites began developing a regional culture that was based on language. While Francophone Quebec built theirs around French, the remaining provinces concentrated mainly on English, making it the dominant language in Canada (Kottak 2006: 339). But in South Africa, Hindi speaking people as well as other linguistic groups

from India, who were brought to work in the sugar plantations of the Natal colony since November 1860, were denied such constitutional privileges. The regionally based culture that emerged since then among Indians had to depend upon the syncretism³ of localized customs and traditions from the Indian provinces to ensure the maintenance of an especially linguistic identity during various historical junctures since their settlement in South Africa. It was their adherence to numerous customary practices that became institutionalized through their households and religious centres such as temples and ashrams that allowed for continuity and solidarity among this ethnic minority. When individuals and communities have to change their languages through powerful economic and political forces, they also have to change their individual and social habits. Marriage too becomes an institution that is susceptible to change. Kuper (1995) captured some of these changes in the mid-1950's and this paper attempts to do the same, but with respect to a different period viz. early 21st century. It addresses the problem of the need for a more appropriate research approach into tackling the issue of marriage among Hindustani people, as well as questions around how couples meet, how they make their decisions, and how families are changing to meet the challenges that are produced by their younger generation who have progressed to higher levels of education and better paid professional occupations. These factors are intrinsic to the cohesion and solidarity of a linguistic group, especially if they are a minority in a heterogeneous society which is characterized by persuasive liberal forces that can easily sway people away from conventional norms and practices. Since Hilda Kuper wrote about them in the 1950s, anthropologists did not do more research in this segment of Durban's population.

An Insight into Kuper's Paper of a Hindustani Marriage

In 1955 Hilda Kuper wrote a paper on "An Ethnographic Description of a Hindustani Marriage in Durban". Her focus was on a single case study that intended to cast a generalized perspective about the way marriages in the Hindustani⁴ community were arranged and conducted. Kuper rightly covered several important characteristics, particularly on rituals, with respect to marriages, that were prevalent in

the community during the mid-1950s. She provided insights into rituals and consultations that only approximate an exhaustive list of these features that are intrinsic to people who practice the Sanathan way of life (orthodox Hindustani). This paper will not endeavour to rehearse these aspects⁵. Most of these practices are still prevalent, albeit as adaptations that are reflective of the historical junctures in which they find themselves. In the 1950s marriages were based on caste, language background, level of education (at least a few years into the primary level), age and age differences of the potential marriage partners, occupation of the male, willingness of the bride-to-be to ensure a completely domesticated role as housewife and mother, and willingness to remain within the household of her husband after marriage. There was a common understanding based on a prevalent norm that the newly wedded couple would be unquestionably part of the extended household. The division of labour within the household during that historical juncture was distinctive – males were the breadwinners and females were the housekeepers. The comparatively low levels of education of women were deliberate in most households "so that young girls would make good housewives."⁶ Up to the early 1960s it was prestigious for young girls to have at least some education, but seldom beyond standard six (eighth-grade). A young woman without any schooling was not respected equally and was seldom a choice for a family that was looking for a girl to be matched with a young man who had completed up to standard six in school. Any person with at least a measure of secondary education was held in high esteem and easily made a match within a family that placed a high priority on education, especially if they were of the preferred caste.

The house of each party was usually the site from which respective rituals took place, as Kuper pointed out: "The engagement takes place at the boy's home, the wedding at the girl's. The period between the two ceremonies is never very long – it is seldom more than a couple of weeks and frequently a *thilak*⁷ is on the day before marriage." However, this statement is only partially correct. While there is a gendered differentiation about where certain rituals and ceremonies should be performed, the alleged difference in time between the engagement and the weddings is inaccurate and over-generalised. Responses from random

interviews with twenty elderly people whose ages ranged from 65 years to 87 years provided more elaborate descriptions to the process that gradually bound two families together through marriage⁸. Marriage was generally described as a three-fold process that included the proposal – when the two families met with the facilitator/matchmaker (*agwa*), the engagement (*chekai*) and then the wedding (*vivasanskar*). Often, even before two individuals were paired off or introduced to each other, parents first consulted with their family Brahmin/priest, who was asked to consult the Hindu Almanac to affirm compatibility of the proposed couple through their birth dates and names. In time, if the two families were in agreement to marry off their respective children to each other, the family priest also advised on the times and dates of the engagements and the weddings. During such consultations the priests were informed about when the families might prefer to have the wedding ceremonies. Numerous factors had determined this date, and it (very importantly), included when the families would be in a suitably strong financial position to have the wedding. But this was often matched against the advice of the priest who provided the date and time of day for the ceremony. Waiting for a family member to complete his/her studies in a distant town or overseas, waiting for a period of time to lapse after mourning the death of a close family member, which is one year in the *sanathan*⁹ tradition, and a range of other family related issues often dictates the times that weddings may occur. Being in a strong financial position is important because a wedding (*vivasanskar*), is as important in the life of a *sanathanist* Hindu as is birth and death. So the occasion, in conventional terms, has to be a glorious event during which time little or nothing should be spared to ensure availability of all ritualistic, clothing, jewelry and cuisine items. In addition no member of the family or from the neighbourhood should be precluded from attending and participating in the event.

Wedding dates are seldom arranged without due regard for immediate relatives and their personal circumstances. Attendance at such a function is viewed as an act of support, of approval for the marriage and of solidarity with the family. Kuper's omission and possibly ignorance of these reasons has led to a grossly inaccurate statement about the setting of wedding dates – which are situated at the core of joint and

extended family relations. In some ways her descriptive commentaries about numerous rituals alludes to the roles of various members of the families. Careful and more accurate scrutiny that is more reliably acquired through an insider approach to such a study will reveal the dynamism and tensions that emerge from the roles that each family member has to play in the run-up to the wedding and the wedding ceremony itself. Failure to allot traditionally defined roles to the respective family members can lead to serious differences and tensions within the family that often serves as a catalyst for what is a major pastime among Hindustani families i.e. gossip among extended family members and behaviour that is also intended to lead to divisiveness. "There is always someone in the family who wants to be noticed and who wants to be in charge and who wants everything to be done subject to their approval....Just wanting to be noticed is all they want", said one of the respondents to a question on familial involvement in the process of the engagement and wedding arrangements. Another replied in similar fashion but added: "This is what makes a Hindi wedding. In the build-up to the actual occasion there are those such as the elderly who want to be fussed over, there are those who want to be seen doing things, then there are the women who just want to stand out through their dressing and will spend thousands for it - even if they have to go to India just to shop, and then there are those who just go on doing what really should be done. All of this adds to the atmosphere and excitement of our weddings – I say to family that you must just accept the good and the bad and carry on."

Kuper only briefly alludes to the roles of some of the bride's and the groom's family members in the course of the ritual observances, but does not specify how choices are made in those instances where particular individuals are chosen. For instance, in the wedding (*vivasanskar*) when six unmarried boys from the home of the groom are chosen to eat *meeta keer* (sweet rice) with him they should ideally be children of his brothers and sisters. There is tremendous emphasis placed on the selection of such children to avoid family members being left to feel marginalized and as outsiders. It is meant to demonstrate affinity and wantonness to the groom's siblings and their children as well as to make them feel an integral part of the wedding process. Kuper mentioned this part of the ceremony in only one sentence,

without specifying who these boys should be and built the respective paragraph upon another related issue. It is only when there are not enough boys from within the immediate family that others may be called.

Each occasion, ranging from the proposal, to the engagement and to the wedding was deemed to gradually intensify relationships between the families, culminating in a bond that brings together both the newly wedded couple and the two extended families. These bonds are especially visible during social gatherings that are hosted by either party, especially during *katha* (the Hindustani equivalent of thanksgiving) rituals, weddings, birthday parties and funerals. Each of these occasions are also often used by relatives and other invited guests to spot for prospective partners for their children who are of or who are nearing marriageable age i.e. in the region of their mid-20s, or who have completed their tertiary education, or who have earned a respectable reputation through disciplined work.

Glimpses of a Survey among Unmarried Hindustani Youth

A survey with fifty unmarried individuals of Hindustani background was done on marriage and courtship in November and December 2005 and in January 2006. Their ages ranged from 23 to 31 years and were chosen randomly through my association with them, from three private companies and from the university itself. This age group was chosen because I premised this research upon the idea that if they went into tertiary education they would have at least completed their degrees or diplomas by then and they would be thinking about relationships and marriage more seriously. Twenty three of this fifty were male and twenty seven were females. Five questions were put to them viz. What is the level of your education? How would you prefer to make a choice for marriage i.e. arranged marriage or your own choice? Would caste and/or linguistic background be a criterion for your choice? Should women remain at home after marriage or should they have a career? And will you prefer to live on your own or live as part of a joint or extended family? Twenty three of these fifty were to be married by the end of 2006. Second interviews were done with twenty of these twenty three respondents to acquire more information about how they met, for how long they courted,

what were their families' reactions to their choices if they were personal choices and what were their longer-term career interests. An analysis of the first set of five questions is presented below and the analysis of the set of four questions in the second round of interviews is done in the next section.

All of the fifty interviewees had completed their matric¹⁰ (twelfth year of schooling) and were employed. Thirty eight of them had university degrees, seven had done diplomas and degrees in technikons, two had dropped out of university without completing their degrees and three had not attempted any tertiary education at all. All of them felt that at least a secondary education was a basic requirement, but that a tertiary qualification was becoming increasingly necessary to compete successfully for well paid employment and to live reasonably in a marriage. Among the five that did not have a tertiary education, one was from an upper middle-class family that ran a successful business. While he was intrinsic to the family business he was regretful about dropping out of university. Another was a self proclaimed millionaire who earned his money by becoming a loan shark¹¹ and later joining the insurance industry – where he was rated among the top ten achievers whose earnings are significantly above the average earnings of professors in universities or Directors in state departments. He was to be married in a very lavish wedding in April 2006. The remaining three of this group had resigned to the possibility that their lives would be restricted to a low to middle income earning and that their married lives would require a combined income between both spouses. From the forty five respondents who were graduates, their responses were generally very positive about what they earned or what they were destined to earn in time. Because of this they felt confident about living comfortable married lives.

Responses to the question about how a choice should be made produced both common and multiple responses. Often, respondents tended to split the question into two viz. how a choice is made and what the background of that choice is. The common response was that parents should no longer dictate how individuals should make their respective choices and that caste should no longer be a major determining factor in the choice of a marriage partner. They were literally in unison on this issue. However, the issue of

arranged marriages is not entirely an abandoned concept. Choices of individuals are still widely subject to parental approval and usually from within the linguistic group (the case studies below will amplify this).

It has become normative that women, especially with tertiary education, should remain employed if they pleased. While there was no disagreement among the respondents on women working, many, including women themselves felt that as potential mothers they could play a more important role than fathers in child rearing. Many therefore drew a distinction in the roles between husbands and wives as parents, particularly in the formative years of the child. But this they felt should not preclude women from resumption of their careers.

Living in joint or extended families was viewed by 38 of the 50 respondents as a temporary measure only, while twelve of them believed that it was a necessary institution for a wide range of reasons. Among the 38, four of them stated emphatically that living in an extended family situation had to be for no more than the required period only immediately after the wedding when the rituals were completed. They preferred to live on their own as a potential nuclear family to avoid personality clashes that are inevitable in crowded extended family situations. However, among the 34 of these 38 respondents the concept of "temporary arrangements" was not as clearly defined and could be a situation that continued into several years. Two common issues that emerged were that it was expensive and often unaffordable to go out on their own immediately after marriage and that when both of the married couple felt that only when they were mentally ready to part from the extended or joint family, then only they should depart.

Most of the 50 saw their future as manifesting in this particular manner. Their responses generally revolved around what their families might have to say about their decisions and how they may respond to them. Although all of the fifty respondents saw their lives as being part of nuclear families after marriage, their decisions still appeared to be conditioned by parental and wider family decisions. Whether they remained in Durban or whether they decided to work in another part of South Africa, depended largely upon this issue. However, six of the fifty were already exploring career options overseas. Two of them were to marry first and then seek work in

the United Kingdom. Their applications for this purpose were already in motion. In both cases the parents of the women had allegedly expressed relief that their daughters had chosen Hindustani partners and were going to work as teachers in England with their support. However in another case a university graduate student in audiology stated that her parents were concerned that she "might return with a White or African boy who is unlikely to fit into the family situation". Although she hoped to meet a suitable match in a Hindi boy, she was not prepared to remain steadfast about who she ends up marrying. Her statement was a reflection of an important trend that serves as a departure from the rigid and dogmatic past of a community that is noted for its normative orthodox socio-cultural positions.

Courtship and Marriage in the 21st Century

From among the 20 of the 50 respondents that were revisited each case provided a unique set of circumstances that showed variation in the way couple's met, courted and finally agreed to marry. None among the twenty had undergone a process of introduction to an incumbent partner for marriage such as the one described by Kuper (1955: 208). A common feature that emerged was that in conceptualising an approach towards a long-term relationship, individuals began from an almost hierarchically constructed cognitive map of racial, ethnic, religious and linguistic preference. Marriage across the racial and ethnic lines was completely taboo to eighteen of the twenty respondents. Their reasons for such a hard-nosed position in the choice of a marriage partner stemmed from a generally conservative upbringing. So although their reasons varied, they ultimately converged to one common justification viz. compatibility, for the sake of family and religious values. While in one case, which captures the essence of what many were trying to say and which was reflective of a widely spoken reason, the respondent, a 23 year old man, stated: "We are different. It's really difficult to have someone in your kitchen who does not know how to cook what your family is used to or to offer prayers that they don't know the meaning of." Another university female Pharmacy graduate responded by stating that "My family's expectations of me is one of the reasons why I will not marry outside of my religious group. But I am also disinclined towards others who are not

of my background. Of course I enjoy looking at some good-looking White, Muslim and Black guys, and I enjoy the attention that I get from some of them, but my mind does not take me any further than that. My boundaries are clearly marked.” One of the captivating responses came from another avowedly conservative young man, an industrial electrician, who insisted that his choice had “...to be not just a girl from my own religion but she also should be Brahmin¹², because I am one. This kind of matchmaking makes life with my parents and for me a lot easier. And nobody in my family can look down upon us”. A fourth response was interesting, from a disappointed Hindi woman who was an Audiologist and Speech Therapist: “You might want to end up with a boy from your own background and think you will live happily ever after. But you are damned if you end up with the wrong one like me! It’s worse than living in hell. And then you will realize that you cannot afford to be so sectional in your choice, especially when you meet up with someone from a different background but with all the qualities that makes him a genuine person.” Each of the four responses is amplified below.

In the first quotation above, the respondent, a Bachelor of Commerce graduate married a woman graduate in Computer Science and who was his personal choice. Both were originally from Durban. They courted for fourteen years - since they were in high school. The boy was from an extremely poor family of five - constituting parents and three sons, who rented in a one bedroom outhouse in a lower income suburb. His father, the sole breadwinner of the family, was retrenched in 1994 and was unable to find suitable employment again. The young boys association with an Ashram situated close to them ensured that they were supported over the years with food and small contributions of money for their education. After completing his first degree in commerce, the respondent (eldest of the three sons) sought employment with his university and worked there for one year. Thereafter he sought employment in a multinational auditing corporation in Johannesburg and relocated there in 2002. Soon after, his fiancé sought employment there too and also relocated. She used her married sister’s relocation to Johannesburg as a justification for also wanting to go there to work. He introduced his fiancé to a branch of the Ashram near Johannesburg to which he was also

very close. Both made this centre a core part of their religious life. After contributing to their respective families’ expenses on a monthly basis they saved enough to pay a deposit for a house in Johannesburg and for their wedding. But they only made their announcement to their parents to marry, in December 2003, when they felt that they could manage to do so financially on their own. The girl was from a Kshatriya family who until the father’s generation focused on marrying strictly within their respective caste. But her elder sister married a young man of Gujarati background and of a different caste. Since there were no objections from her parents on the marriage of their first daughter they did not object to this proposition either. Although the young suitor was not of the Kshatriya caste, his fiancé’s parents were satisfied that he was from a Hindi family and his caste was unknown. In September 2005 the young girl and her fiancé’s mother and several relatives made a trip to India to do their wedding shopping. In the second week of January 2006 they returned to their respective families’ homes to carry out their marriage rituals that make up the *tilak* ceremony and were married by the next week. The day after their wedding they left for a week’s holiday to Mauritius and returned to Johannesburg to begin their married lives and restart their work. The *bidhaai*¹³ had to be the very same day because of their tight schedules and working lives.

In the second respondent’s case, a 24 year old pharmacy graduate originally from Newcastle¹⁴, the introduction to her husband was based on an adapted version of twenty first century arranged marriages. Prior to her introduction to her husband in November 2003, arrangements for a meeting between the incumbent couple began from an extended social and familial network. It was her mother’s brother’s father-in-law that was asked by a friend who was a doctor, to be on the lookout for an educated girl to introduce to his son who was serving internship as a doctor (to act as an *agwa* - marriage facilitator). Her uncle’s father-in-law brought this to the attention of his daughter, also a professional - who suggested several names, all of whom were university graduates. After long deliberation about three young women who were “short-listed”, it was the pharmacist that appeared to be the first choice. Thereafter her aunt contacted her mother who was said to have responded very positively to the suggestion.

Four criteria appeared to have been given precedence in this case: the boy was a doctor, he came from a family that was well educated (his father, brother and sister were all doctors' and his mother was an attorney), he was of Hindi speaking background and was light skinned like her daughter – constituting all the criteria for a good match. Caste was not an issue, although the pharmacist's parents were from families that at one stage emphasized caste as the sole determining criterion for marriage. The father was a Brahmin and mother of Kshatriya¹⁵ background. All of the father's and mother's siblings were known to have married into only either one of these two castes. After several telephone calls it was agreed that the couple be introduced to each other in a casual way at a commonly agreed venue and their decision to continue with a friendship that would eventually lead to marriage was entirely their decision. Her uncle's father-in-law then went on to arrange a meeting between them at a popular shopping mall. After having done this he left them for an hour and then returned to take her back home. The pharmacist was initially stubborn and evasive in that she did not return several of the doctor's calls to her, although they did exchange telephone numbers and she did not say no to him. Only when her uncle's father-in-law was recalled by his friend to complain that the girl seemed dismissive and disinterested and that he should think about someone else to introduce to his son, did the pharmacist's family encourage her to begin talking to the doctor. Between January and March 2004 the families had paid reciprocal visits to each others homes, facilitated by the *agwa*, to concretize the agreement between their children to marry. An engagement took place several months later in a major venue in Durban and was paid for by the doctor's family. A wedding date was then set for December 2005, since this event, in terms of tradition, had to be paid for by the bride's family, who required time and money to prepare for their only daughter's wedding. In September 2005 both mother and daughter went to India to shop for the wedding. Two weeks prior to the wedding extended family members and neighbours were already converging at the pharmacist's house to render assistance and to be part of the festive mood that this created. The occasion went off smoothly after months of planning, despite the tensions and differences among various family members. Since the wedding took place in Newcastle, the

bidhaai had to take place from a venue in Durban, for convenience, to avoid the discomfort of more than three hours of driving between Durban and Newcastle. The venue was her granny's home and her extended family from Newcastle and Durban made it an opulent occasion, showing satisfaction and contentment in the bride's and groom's achievements in their education and professional careers.

In the third instance the 27 year old man, whose sister is referred to above, was an industrial electrician, who made his own choice for a bride. She was from the town of Ladysmith, approximately 100 kilometers from Newcastle. But he was conscious about his caste and believed that because of this his parents should not object to his pronouncement. An announcement was made by him to his parents in January 2005. Reciprocal visits were made to each of the families' homes to confirm the acceptance of the couple's commitment to marry and an engagement was done in August 2005. At this point a wedding date was set for July 2006 - giving the family sufficient time to recover from the costs and arduous preparations of their daughter's wedding. However, the incumbent bride was unemployed, of a slightly darker appearance and did not have any career in mind. Gossip from family members suggested that the young man's mother was unhappy with this but that she had to accept her son's choice for his sake. Although his mother also did shopping in India for her future daughter-in-law in September 2005, there was more talk of returning "...to India in April/May 2006 to do more shopping – just to be fair to both children."

The fourth comment that was noted above was made by a 26 year old Speech Therapist/Audiologist from Durban who was in a relationship with a quantity surveyor for more than two years. He worked in a hinterland town that was approximately 600 kilometers from Durban. They married in March 2004 and then left together to live in the town where he worked. However, she admitted at the interview that she was living in denial about the nature of her relationship with him for almost a year prior to her wedding because she recognized that her fiancé was losing interest in her. He was being evasive, aggressive and threatened to terminate their relationship several times before their wedding on the slightest pretence of an argument. But she claimed to have avoided arguments with him to avoid breaking up. Her timidity stemmed

from her domestic situation – her mother was widowed at the age of 37 years and their childhood was affected as a result of this. She found that her relationship worsened after she accompanied her husband to their new home after their wedding. By the second week of her marriage she found out that her husband was having an affair with a Coloured¹⁶ woman in that town – which brought her to ascertain why they did not even begin copulation by then. By the beginning of the third week she returned home with her belongings and began the process to annul the marriage. It was only then that she realized that his family was insisting upon them marrying to avoid her husband marrying someone of a different racial background. They were apparently aware of his relationship with another woman there but did not mention it to her, in the hope that marriage would have forced him to forget her. But it did not work and her status became tainted because of her marriage to him. By January 2005 she was befriended by a chemical engineer and gradually built up a relationship with him. By the month of June they agreed to get married and immediately after bought a house in an upper class area close to the beach just north of central Durban – which they leased for a year only. The importance of this relationship was that the woman initially preferred to marry within her own linguistic group – which she did but it ended up disastrously. Her new found partner was of a Hindu Tamil background. It was a compromise she believed that she had to make because, as she stated, “...was just not fortunate in meeting the right person from within my own community. In any case my own experience shows that idealism is a far fetched dream and my mother understands that. And the man I will now marry has all the qualities that I have been looking for in a soul mate.”

CONCLUSION

The evidence in the sections above produce a picture about courtships and marriage among Hindustani couples that on the one hand shows the oversimplification of Kuper's account in 1955 and the complexity with the ways in which marriage arrangements are actually made even in the progressive age of the early part of the 21st century. While the data in Kuper's paper only alludes to change in values among Hindustani people, the evidence in this paper revealed a

broader range of issues that are pertinent to a paradoxical situation of change and transformation versus a wanton continuity towards customary practices. In the only case study that Kuper did and used to write her paper, it was clear that caste was only an ideal for the family because of the limited number of such families that lived in South Africa. Their choice therefore had to be based on a compromise imploring them to choose someone from outside their caste. But the suitor had to still be from within the linguistic group. Very similar trends, as the case studies and interview data reveals, exist among Hindustani youth in the early 21st century. However, a major difference between the period in which Kuper did her research and research for this paper, is that in that period parents were responsible for finding suitors for their children at marriageable ages. Fifty years after Kuper's research, the data shows significant changes have taken place with respect to marriageable Hindustani youth in terms of their statuses and their options for marriage. At this particular juncture, the high levels of educational achievement and well paid professional employment among men and women capacitates them with mobility and leverage to make choices of their own, including choices in marriage. The four case studies above showed that not only did individuals have a right to their own choices in marriage but also reveals a profound shift away from the customary role that was played by the parents and the *agwa* (marriage facilitator) in choosing suitors for their children. While the majority of the 50 respondents professed a preference for marriage to partners of similar backgrounds, they were not as concerned with caste as they were with linguistic background. To this extent, continuity reveals itself as a relative concept and is likely to undergo even more change in time. In another 50 years from now i.e. by 2055, it would be revealing to see what anthropologists of that forthcoming age would find out about Hindustani marriages.

NOTES

- 1 The word Hindustani is also widely used to refer to Indian immigrants who settled in Surinam and were under Dutch influence. But in Surinam it is reference to anyone who is of north Indian origin, irrespective of religious or regional background. This paper is based on research among the Sanathan (orthodox) sect of the Hindustani population in Durban.

- 2 This word is used in the context of the now defunct Population Group Areas of 1950, which served as one of the pillars of apartheid on racial classification. It is not meant to be used in a pejorative way.
- 3 Several theories have been used by Anthropologists to describe continuity and social change among Indians living abroad, such as Furnival's (1948) plural society, Klaas's (1961) social organization, Jain's (1970) and Mayer's (1973) adaptation model, Jayawardena (1980) on ethnicity, Drummond's cultural continuum model, among others. This paper does not focus on these theories, especially since they did not focus on marriage per se.
- 4 Kuper's descriptive footnote on the word 'Hindustani' is adequate – referring to people who from mainly North and Central India – who spoke Hindi with a strong Persian influence.
- 5 See Kuper (1995) for reference to these rituals and consultations.
- 6 Interview with a pandit (Hindu priest), 23 December 2005.
- 7 A ritual that usually occurs a day or more before the wedding ceremony when an uneven number of males from the brides side visits the groom's residence to exchange gifts and partake of a vegetarian meal.
- 8 Interviews with elderly people of Sanathan background were done in the latter part of 2005.
- 9 Kuper rightly describes this term as referring to Orthodox Hindus of Hindi speaking backgrounds.
- 10 This is the final year of secondary schooling in South Africa, before being admitted into tertiary education.
- 11 One who lends money outside of the formal sector at very exorbitant rates.
- 12 A priestly caste - one of the four major castes among Hindus. The other castes are Kshatriya (military and land owners; Vaishya (commerce and tradesmen), and Shudra (responsible for menial work).
- 13 The farewell ceremony from the bride's home several days after the wedding. The bride and groom should not sleep together until this ceremony is completed. Spelt by Kuper (1955: 214) as "bida".
- 14 Newcastle is a town that is approximately 360 kilometers from the major coastal city of Durban in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 15 Brahmins are of a priestly caste and Kshatriyas are of a military-administrator and agricultural background in the Hindu order of caste hierarchy.
- 16 This term is not used in a derogatory sense, but only to convey the rigidity with which Hindi speaking families would extend themselves to maintain boundaries in marriage.

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