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Cosmopolitan Romance in Nepal: An Investigation of Young Newari Women's Emerging View of Marriage and Dating

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Cosmopolitan Romance in Nepal:
An Investigation of Young Newari Women's Emerging
View of Marriage and Dating

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Abstract

For decades Newari women have been limited to marriages arranged by their families and *lamis*, or matchmakers. There has been a recent shift in marital views among the youth has led to more courting among young Newars as well as a significant increase in the number of love marriages. Through in depth interviews with fourteen young Newari women, this ethnography attempts to illuminate current attitudes towards marriage and courtship exemplified by young Newari women in Kathmandu. I also argue that being a cosmopolitan Newari woman requires a negotiation of traditional gender roles and requires a balance between tradition and modern aspirations.

Dedication

For my aamaa and baa who have taken me in as their own daughter and shown me nothing but mayaa.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

“I’m never going to be a housewife in my life,” Gita Shrestha declared early one Saturday morning over *chiyaa*, or tea. “I cannot be a housewife after studying so much and after giving so much time to my education. I cannot expect myself to be a housewife and stay in the house doing nothing. Maybe I’m too much focused on women... but it’s important for me.”

This ethnography is an investigation of the emerging change in views of marriage and courtship among young Newari women amidst a period of cosmopolitanization in Nepal. My study not only attempts to illuminate some current marital views and practices of young Newari women from Kathmandu, but provides a lens through which social change can be observed in a country in a unique socio-cultural position, tottering between old and new. I argue that Newari women’s views of marriage and courtship are gradually becoming more cosmopolitan and that this trend reveals a process of negotiating traditional gender role ideologies, emphasizing a growing sense of agency and independence among young Newari women living in Kathmandu. Furthermore I contend that cosmopolitan Newari women are finding a balance between opposing forces of old and new, by maintaining a sense of tradition while also forming modern visions and aspirations for themselves.

The Landscape

My interest was initially piqued by women’s conspicuously subordinate role to men in Nepali society that I encountered. I chose to focus my study on women belonging to the Newar ethnic group, indigenous to the Kathmandu region, because the traditional gender ideologies of Newars are particularly challenging for women, especially when a woman marries and assumes the

onerous role of daughter-in-law. Katharine Rankin (2004), for example, describes the ways in which Newari women's social and physical mobility are limited by their "dangerous qualities," which are attributed to their temporary low caste status of contamination during their menstruation period. Women are socially condemned for asserting agency or assuming an autonomous role, because it does not follow the social code of Newar culture (Rankin 2004).

Kathmandu's unique position as a social space of both tradition and tourism made it the ideal location for my research. Mark Liechty (2003) illustrates the constant negotiating of "what it means to be both Nepali and modern" in Kathmandu. Newari women living in Kathmandu face the daunting challenge of forming beliefs within the context of a traditional background amidst a cosmopolitanizing society, struggling to balance the old with the new.

Love Investigation Methods

I discovered ample opportunities for my research in Kathmandu, where I spent the entirety of my four weeks of study. During this time I conducted fourteen in-depth interviews with young Newari women between the ages of 20 and 30. All interviews were recorded, with the informed consent of all participants, and subsequently analyzed for the purposes of my study. While I had prepared questions that I asked during each interview, the interviews generally had the natural flow of an informal conversation during which the participants would volunteer anecdotes about past experiences and about their relationships. All participants felt comfortable speaking English, although there were varying degrees of fluency and comfort, which affected the quality of some of the interviews. A few of the interviews took place in cafes, but in many cases I

was welcomed into the participants' homes to meet their family members, look at family pictures, and of course share a cup of tea. The goal of each interview was to obtain something of a "life story," focusing on the history of the participant's relationships or marriage and their beliefs about marriage and courtship.

During my interviews at homes, family members would hover, eagerly anticipating my interview with their daughter or sister. I preferred to conduct interviews one on one with the participants so they would feel comfortable sharing private information and could be candid in conversation. I would somewhat awkwardly ask the woman, in front of her family, if there was somewhere we could speak alone, as it would make the interview easier and more comfortable. Some parents insisted that their daughters could speak candidly in front of them, but in all cases participants preferred to speak alone and often indicated that they felt uncomfortable discussing their relationships in front of their parents.

While many participants were open to sharing intimate details about their relationships, some interviewees were much less forthcoming in the information they chose to share with me. In most cases, the interview was my first meeting with the participant. If time had permitted, I would have preferred to spend time with these women in a less formal context so they would feel more comfortable speaking openly with me, which would help me gain more insight into the intricacies and nuances of their relationships and marriages. However given the circumstances, I was able to acquire many personal anecdotes and intimate details about participants' relationships.

The Words of Cities and Romance

In order to accurately report on my findings, I must first define some key concepts and terms: *love, dating, courtship and cosmopolitanization*. These terms are loaded with Western interpretations and assumptions but for the purposes of this paper it is important to understand these terms within the context of Newar culture.

Love is an emotion constructed through a complex framework of cultural expectations and religious doctrines at a specific place in time and history. I do not believe that love is a universal emotion that every human being is capable of feeling. Love is inevitably tied up in cultural values, and throughout my ethnography I attempt to illustrate Newari women's understanding of romantic and marital love and the associated factors in influencing this complex emotion.

A *date* is a meeting or interaction between non-family members of the opposite sex who may be love interests. *Dating* is a part of *courtship*, which is the process of getting to know a love interest before engagement and marriage.

Finally, I will use the term *cosmopolitanization* to describe the dual nature of the changes Nepal is currently undergoing. Nepal is struggling with the tension of holding onto tradition while incorporating modern ideas into society. Global exposure, realized through many mediums including media and technology, is impacting Newar tradition and *cosmopolitanizing* the way young Newari women view marriage. It would be presumptuous, in my opinion, to label Nepal as a modernizing country, as modernization implies a sense of betterment, therefore

incorrectly assuming that modern or western countries are superior to “underdeveloped” countries.

The View from Above

The findings of this ethnography are organized into two main sections: before marriage and after marriage. I tried to follow the chronological order of the process of dating and marriage in order to most effectively and logically report on my findings. In the *Before Marriage* section, I will introduce the concept of dating, women’s expectations for both their husbands and themselves and the debate between love versus arranged marriage. Following this section, *After Marriage*, will address the issue of family involvement in marriage as well as the Newari woman’s role as a wife and daughter-in-law.

Research Findings

Before Marriage: The Proposal

For young Newars, all relationships begin with a proposal. The proposal is traditionally made by the man but these days it is becoming increasingly common and acceptable for women to initiate the proposal as well. However when I asked 21 year old Anju Shrestha about women proposing to men, she explained that even though women can propose to men, “when the girls love the person she wants him to propose first.” Additionally many of the women I spoke with claimed that their boyfriend or husband was the first one to experience and express romantic feelings. It was clear that the women did not want to assume responsibility for initiating their relationship. In 28 year old Nirmala Kayastha’s recollection of her fiancé’s marriage proposal, note the allocation of responsibility:

I was just treating him as friend but he liked me like from inside. But he never talked about it. He said when the time comes, the right time, he will tell me. He told me actually last year but I was like “let me just think.” It took me a couple of months to say yes. I told him yes and then I told my parents if it’s okay.

In Nirmala’s description of her fiancé’s proposal, her fiancé was responsible for initiating a romantic relationship with her. And even after he proposed to her, she needed a couple months time to consider. Throughout Nirmala’s narrative she mentions that he was the one who “liked her from the inside,” emphasizing her passive role. Her illustration hints that she may even be embarrassed by the idea of the woman initiating romance. Nirmala seems to make every effort to avoid looking eager and instead expresses that she is happy it *happened* to her. This intentional attribution of responsibility seems paradoxical when Nirmala later emphasizes the importance of being able to choose her own husband:

Generally I prefer love marriage because it is me who is going to spend my whole life with the guy, not my parents, right? That’s why I told my dad, “it’s not you who is going to stay with him forever, it’s me so I have to know if that guy is okay with me.”

Here Nirmala asserts her agency in choosing her husband, claiming full responsibility for her decision. Unlike before, Nirmala describes herself in an active role. Nirmala’s paradoxical responses reveal an emerging sense of agency and independence that is still in formation. Nirmala is comfortable asserting her agency in the context of choosing a life partner but made sure to describe herself as a passive participant in the initiation of her relationship.

Manisa Shakya, a 23 year old Newari woman who has been married for three years, also highlighted her husband's role in initiating their romantic relationship. In Manisa's description she makes it sound as if she felt indifferent towards him until he declared his love for her. Only then did she realize any romantic feelings towards him:

Actually he was the one who fell in love at first. He proposed me then and after that I just think ok he's independent, he had a shop and he's mature. And I just thought he is a good person so I can be with him... and after that I also started liking him.

Despite Manisa's apparent surprise and initial indifference, she accepted his proposal on the spot. During the proposal, he proclaimed his love for her, declaring, "if I don't get you, then I won't marry any girl." Manisa giddily reflected on this moment, recalling "this statement affected me very much." Manisa's husband's proposal is one example of many grand gestures made by young Newari men when proposing to their love interest. Typically during a proposal, for either a relationship or marriage, a man declares his love for the woman. Love is commonly expressed at the start of a relationship, confirming that the couple has mutual feelings towards one another.

During an informal conversation with a male Newar friend, I asked him how he could declare his love at the start of a relationship before getting to know a woman on an intimate emotional level (clearly revealing my very Western ideas of love). He explained that sometimes the declaration of love does not necessarily mean that the man is "in love," but more importantly signifies that the man is ready to commit himself to one woman because he is "infatuated" with her. He

further explained that this is expected during a proposal. “We have to say ‘I’m deeply, madly in love with you’” because the woman expects this. Love in this case may represent an intense emotional draw as well as feelings of commitment.

What is a marriage?

Depending on the stages of life the women were in, I heard vastly different views of what marriage meant to each woman. Soon to be wed Nirmala had a very romantic definition of marriage in mind:

It is like bonding of two souls together and spending the life together. Putting all your time and efforts to each other, just to, how do you say like, let it go the life like it is. Marriage is whole understanding between two people just to spend your life. Basically just to stay happy you have to have love within them, love, respect and understanding. Those three it matters a lot in the marriage thing. That’s how it became successful.

By contrast, Komal Shrestha, who has been married for seven years, called marriage the start of her “real life.” Before marrying she did not have to take life as seriously. “Now my life starts,” Komal explains. As a married woman Komal has obligations to her husband, her husband’s family and her children. Abha Shrestha, who has been married for five years, similarly addresses marriage as a new reality, a “new life, new family.” Marriage has given Abha a new direction and she encourages her friends to marry soon so they, too, find their new direction.

Gita, who is in a relationship but is currently unmarried, views marriage as an official commitment between a man and a woman. When Gita marries, she expects her marriage will last forever:

It's a part of life. And in Nepal marriage is so holy and marriage is so sacred and then once you marry that person people expect or even you expect to be with that person for all your life because divorce is not so prevalent in Nepal, we don't really hear people getting divorced. Even in arranged marriage, looks at mother and father, grandmother and grandfather and they're still married. Marriage is something which is forever in Nepal"

Rupa Shakya, who is also unmarried but has never been in a relationship, views marriage in more matter-of-fact terms. "It's a religious institute where you continue generation, build a social life, network." She believes that it is a necessary step in life and that "at a certain point in time you need someone."

Manisa also view marriage as a natural part of life. "It's a step that we take in our life. It's kind of a good step. By marrying a person you get a lifelong partner to be with."

What Women Want

There seems to be a general consensus among young Newari women as to what qualities an ideal boyfriend or husband should possess. To start, all informants described their ideal partner as caring, supportive and understanding. Additionally women expressed that their husband should be family oriented, honest, loyal, helpful, educated, employed and career oriented. Manisa, for example, was very impressed by her husband's ability to run his own jewelry store. "Without any family support he started this shop, without any financial support of the family. That thing I like the most... so much confidence." Gita also emphasizes the importance of a man's career. "He has to be successful, he has to be career centered." After a pause Gita focused on another, possibly the most important quality she looks for in a man:

He has to believe that even his second half, his better half, has a life, and even she needs to do what she needs to do and even she has a right to do everything that he does. That's so important to me and I've always been telling my boyfriend that. I always tell him that if you expect me to understand your problems, if you expect me to understand your situation, your family situation, then I think I do expect the same from you. I always tell him that because that's important. For example he wants me to come to the US. But if I'm getting a better deal somewhere else, like a better scholarship, then I will go there.

For Gita, equality in her relationship is essential, especially when it is a matter of her family or education. Anjali Shreshta, 22 years old, also describes her boyfriend's lack of dominance as one of his best qualities. "He is not so much dominant. If I want he says, 'okay fine, do it.' He keeps my wishes first, gives me priority." Anju also expects that she and her husband will be equal "in every sector." Anju plans to have a nine to five job and will need her husband's help in the household work, including cooking.

While many women expressed their desire for an equal relationship, a few conceded that men are still men and there are sacrifices that they will have to make as a girlfriend or wife. Nirmala, for example, highly values her career and her independence, yet she admits that there are some things she cannot do because of her husband. Initially she told me that when it comes to her education and career, "he is totally ok whatever I do. He said that he will always support me no matter what." Nirmala later admitted that when it comes to the small things, such as where she goes at night, "he's kind of like a little strict for things, but he's a man so what you can expect, right?" Manisa expressed similar frustrations about her husband. "He is elder than me so he sometimes he used to say no to things which I want to do." Manisa, however, did not contemplate this as a factor

when deciding whether she would marry her husband. She laughingly told me, “I was totally in love and my eyes were blind... thank god for that.” By contrast Abha knew in her first meeting with her husband that he would not be a dominating figure:

In our first meeting, you can tell everything by first talk, he is not that type. I noticed he is not like that. He also gave me the priority to make the decision (of marriage)... he said “it’s your decision if you want to get married it’s ok, if not also we are friends.” ...Basically he is not dominating at all like other people. Because of him I was able to complete my masters. He joined (night) classes with me, for me, because it would be very late... after work I have to go to classes and then it would be too late to go home, that is why he also joined the classes...Now he has not passed but I have passed, because of him and his support.

In addition to support with Abha’s education, her husband takes care of her family as well as his own. In Nepali culture, the daughter-in-law is often expected to move into the husband’s family’s home and take care of his family. The husband, however, is not obligated to care for the woman’s family. Abha explains that in her marriage, “it’s two way. I love his mom and dad and he loves my mom and dad.” After a moment she continues saying, “I think it’s different from other men. Most of the men don’t do like that.”

Independent Women

Eleven of the fourteen informants were unmarried and all of them expressed the importance of marrying after the completion of their studies. This emphasis on education is pushing back the typical age of marriage for young Newari women. When I asked 22 year old Rupa when she planned on getting married, she seemed surprised, replying, “I have not thought about it (marriage)

yet because I am still studying. Talks are going on in my family but they are still saying that ‘she’s studying, she has to have a job, and then we’ll think about it.’ Even my parents are not in a hurry so I am safe.” Rupa has completed her Bachelors and it currently in the process of writing her thesis for her Masters. It is noteworthy that all fourteen informants had either completed their Bachelors or were in the processes of getting their degree. Nirmala describes the importance of having a career in addition to being educated:

Women are more career oriented right now. Before, in my mom’s time, they would just think that having a high school degree was enough for them and then when they will be twenties, early twenties, they just get married right away. But right now people are more career conscious. They think that only education is not enough. They have to also work for a while so that they can be independent, they don’t have to rely on their husbands.

Having a career frees women of their financial dependence on their families or husbands, giving them a sense of independence and control over their own lives.

Abha similarly expresses the satisfaction she gets from having her own source of income:

I think it has made me more mature. I can spend my money. I don’t have to ask to my mom, to my dad, to my father-in-law, to my husband too. I can buy anything for them also. If I take money from them and buy gift for them it will not be so...when I give gift to my mother-in-law, father-in-law, mom, dad, everyone, they will be happy. And I feel very much happy.

Abha does not want to have to rely on her husband or relatives for money and being able to give gifts to her family makes her feel happy. Abha had an arranged married at the age of 23, before she was able to complete her masters, and

explained that it would have been much easier for her had she married after her graduation. “I still feel if I had completed my masters and then gotten married it would have been easier for me. Because for completion of two years master I got four years... I thought it would have been better if I got married at 25.”

When Ranjana Manandhar returned to Kathmandu after living in Thailand for seven years, she felt like a stranger in her own home. However her work gave her a sense of purpose. “It made me feel important. It made me feel like if I’m not there at work then there is a difference. They do want me there.” Ranjana’s job played an integral role in her adjustment back home. Staying home made her feel anxious and angry, but working reminded her of her independence.

For Gita, having a career not only gives her a sense of independence but is an essential part of her identity:

For me my independence is very important. I need to have my own identity. No matter how rich my husband is, how successful he is. I think for me to have my own identity is very important. You know my boyfriend used to tease me that “You’re going to be a housewife after marriage” and I used to beat him up. I used to tell him “I’m never going to be a housewife in my *life!*” I used to tell him like that. Because I cannot be a housewife after studying so much and after giving so much time to education. I cannot expect myself to be a housewife and stay in the house doing nothing. Maybe I’m too much focused on women or I don’t know, but it’s important for me.

Gita takes a strong stance in expressing her distaste for being a housewife. All eleven unmarried women expressed that becoming a housewife was not a viable option. Komal, age 30, also never imagined herself as a housewife. She planned

on pursuing a career after finishing her studies but her future took an unexpected turn when she “suddenly” got married:

“I never thought of getting married and being a daughter-in-law, doing household things. I was different. I was studying. I just finished my studies and after that I just went in a different world. I have to get up early in the morning, things like that. I just finished my studies and all I was planning on doing something for myself, I mean some work, and suddenly I got married and they stopped me from doing anything. They were not supportive for me because they don’t like me doing work. They want me to stay home and used to tell me that you don’t have to do work, you don’t have to do work, you just stay here, we’ll fulfill everything.

Komal did not consider her husband’s family before marriage and as a result she was unable to pursue a career. This was a hard adjustment at first but since having children Komal feels very dedicated to spending her time at home taking care of her children. However after her children grow up Komal plans to work. “I will not stay home,” she says firmly. She hopes to pursue a career in business.

Meeting before Marriage

The practice of dating before marriage has become fairly commonplace in Kathmandu. There is no real Nepali term, however, that translates to date. When I asked Anjali what women call “dates” in Nepal, she responded, “we say date.” The incorporation of English jargon in the Nepali courting culture inextricably ties Western influences in with the concept of dating in Kathmandu. In many ways, dating in Kathmandu looks almost identical to dating in the US. Anjali describe a typical date as “romantic, emotional... we talk about our daily lives, our plans, what to do next... go for trekking... sometimes two of us and with friends.” Muna Pradhan, 23 years old, provides a similar description of a date in

Kathmandu. A date is basically “going out, just two of them, going out to places like coffee shop, or some restaurants, spending some time just talking to each other about what they like or what they feel about something.” While the concept of dating in Kathmandu is widely understood, there limited space available to young lovers who want to spend private time alone together. Anju describes a common frustration experienced among young couples:

There are very limited spots here for dating.... The religious places, they have made that the dating spot. There are not very many places for people to go for their lonely time. At Pashupatinath and Swoyambhunath, they cover a lot of space so they can sit anywhere and they can have their lonely time in there. Restaurant is a bit public place, people come and go and it’s a disturbance. There are very few parks in Kathmandu and there is one that is very costly and people here don’t want to spend such money on dating and the temples are free to go.

Dating at religious sites in Kathmandu, especially Pashupatinath and Swoyambhunath, has become a popular trend among young couples, but the couples are being banned from the temples because of their public displays of affection. On dates, it is very common to see couples holding hands. Kissing in public however remains a less common practice. “Nowadays we do see kissing. Holding hands—it’s very common. Kissing—not so common but it’s growing. The trend is coming, you know?” Muna explains.

Dating before an arranged marriage is also becoming more common and provides women with not only the opportunity to get to know her husband before marriage, but also allows time for her to say no to the marriage. Rupa describes this practice as a positive change for women:

This is one thing that has improved in our society. Previously it was not so. Now with more advanced and everything, we get to meet the guy beforehand, talk to him, get to know him and then if you have positive then you say it otherwise you don't.

In the past, couples were typically only able to meet a couple times before marriage and in some cases met for the first time at their wedding. Although Abha's marriage was initially arranged by her family, she describes her marriage as "arranged then love" because she fell in love with her husband while dating him. Abha and her husband only met two or three times before agreeing that they would marry, but they did not marry until a year and a half after their engagement. During this period of courtship, Abha and her husband went on dates and talked on the phone on a regular basis:

We were like friends before. Everyone told us you must have had love marriage because we don't seem like arranged marriage. No one believed we were arranged marriage. Everyone is like "sure you had love marriage. You didn't tell us."

Abha's arranged marriage looks very different from traditional arranged marriages because she was able to get to know her husband and fall in love with him through dating before they married. This cosmopolitan factor is not necessarily new to Kathmandu but is certainly an emerging concept within the realm of arranged marriage. Abha's unique story provides an example of how even the most traditional form of marriage, arranged marriage, is being cosmopolitanized through dating practices prior to marriage.

Levels of Intimacy

I found varying views among the fourteen informants about appropriate levels of intimacy before marriage. About half the women liked the idea of living relationships, or living with a man before marriage, but knew that their parents as well as the rest of society would condemn this decision. Anjali explained that if she and her boyfriend ever decided to move in together they would have to keep it a secret. She likes the idea of living with a man before marriage because “you get the chance to know him and live with him and figure it out before getting married.” The remaining women had simple explanations for not liking living relationships. Anju, for example, thinks that if you are already committed to that person then marriage should be the next step. The women I interviewed were also divided on whether they supported physical relationships before marriage. Women who liked living relationships, however, did not necessarily approve of physical relationships prior to marriage. Women’s feelings about living relationships and physical relationships seemed mutually exclusive.

Across Seas

A recent and significant change in Kathmandu is the availability of communication technology. Mobile phones, computers and access to Internet are changing the possibilities within the realm of relationships. Five informants were either currently in or had previously been in a long distance relationship. Although I cannot claim that long distances relationships are a novel phenomenon in Kathmandu, it seems safe to assume that in the past, long distance relationships were not widely practiced due to the lack of technology available, making frequent and fast communication across distances extremely difficult if not impossible. Gita has been in a relationship with her boyfriend for

five years, three of which have been long distance. They keep in touch mostly by phone and sometimes chat via Yahoo messenger or email. Gita's busy schedule, however, does not allow her to devote very much time to her relationship during the week:

I am very busy right now and I don't have time and he is also very busy with his studies and everything else. So we talk maybe properly once a week on weekends. He comes every year (to Nepal) so we get to meet... But we are not totally out of contact for a week. We talk for five to ten minutes a day maybe if we have time, like "hi, hello, how are you? I'll talk to you later."

Gita's boyfriend is currently studying in the US for his masters and she plans to apply for schools in the US and in other countries for her master's program next year. Even though they do not have much time to devote to each other and are separated by thousands of miles, Gita describes her relationship as very solid:

It is difficult. I mean each and every friend of mine tells me, "how do you maintain it? Is it really possible?" And you have so much problems in long distance relationships because the guy is not here, and practically you are alone. But it really depends on you and how much you want to work it out between you two. So I think that's what matters the most. The individual matters the most, more than the distance... I cannot imagine myself with anyone else so maybe that is what is keeping it on.

For Saphal Shrestha, age 27, her boyfriend's move to the US has prompted discussions about marriage. They have been dating for two years and he will be interviewing to go to school in South Dakota. Saphal plans to apply to school in South Dakota as well and attend graduate school with her boyfriend.

Although Saphal and her boyfriend have discussed marriage, she does not want to get married until after her graduation.

Ranjana is currently in communication with a Nepali man living in Australia, whom she was introduced to by her parents. Although they are not in a relationship, they will be meeting in person in December and have established a close bond through online chatting, emails and phone conversations. Ranjana is exciting anticipating his arrival and thinks there may be potential in a future relationship with this man. She is aware, however, that their relationship may not manifest the same way in person as it does online and does not want to get her hopes up too high.

The Issue of Caste

There is a divide of opinions when it comes to marrying within your own caste. Some women feel very strongly about marrying within their same caste while others are unconcerned with caste. For Gita, marrying and dating within her same cast is “a must.” If she does not marry in the same caste she fears that society will not view her marriage in a positive way. Komal also believes that marriage within the same caste is very important. Komal’s parents had a love marriage and came from different castes; her mother is Muslim while her father is Hindu. She has personally seen the struggles her parents have gone through and believes that marrying within the same caste is easier culturally.

While some of the informants preferred same caste marriage, seven of the informants are in or have been in intercaste relationships. For these women, caste is not an insurmountable issue that cannot be conquered by love. They seemed unconcerned with any cultural adjustments that may be required when the time

for marriage comes. Nirmala expresses no resentment or displeasure that she will be raising her children Buddhist, like her husband, even though she is Hindu.

Love Versus Arranged Marriage

While eleven of the fourteen informants expressed their preference of love marriage, I have discerned that current love and arranged marriages are similar in many ways. Most informants prefer love marriage because they can get to know the man before marrying him. However in current arranged marriages, women are generally able to meet and date the man before marriage and have a choice in marrying the man their family picks. Ranjana describes arranged marriage as a “blind date” set up by your parents. When I asked her whether she would have the opportunity to date the man her parents are setting her up with she responded “of course!” While there is more choice in arranged marriage these days, there is still a lot of pressure surrounding arranged marriages because parents are involved. Many of the unmarried women, for example, have already been receiving proposals arranged by their parents even though they have boyfriends and would prefer to have a love marriage.

Rupa exclusively prefers arranged marriage because she feels uncomfortable with the idea of dating a man without first receiving her parents’ approval. After marriage, “in the back of your mind you can feel secure,” Rupa explains. Then the couple has the freedom to go around openly without the fear that they may be hurting their parents.

Saphal describes a cosmopolitan trend that incorporates both love and arranged marriage in order to please all parties involved. “The system is like first love marriage then arranged marriage.” The woman first falls in love with a man

of her choosing and after receiving her parents approval, the parents arrange the marriage. This gives women the agency to choose their husband while incorporating the tradition of having parents arrange the marriage.

After Marriage: Family Matters

Family is a very important factor for many young Newari women when choosing a husband. In Newar culture, a marriage signifies more than just the union of a husband and wife; the husband's family becomes the woman's new family. In Anju's description of an ideal husband, she mentions her husband's family status as an important quality. She explains that marrying a man means marrying his family. "We are not marrying to a person only. We are marrying to a whole family, all the members of the family, therefore we need to look all the family also. Family matters." It is important for women to consider the family when choosing a husband because after marriage the husband's family will play an integral role in shaping their life. Anju wants her husband's family to be educated and employed. Additionally "they need to give their daughter-in-law freedom." Unfortunately, Anju fears that most families will want her to be a housewife. After marriage many women have to leave their jobs to look after their families. "I won't marry to such family," Anju contends. "I will make it clear before getting married about such matters. If they won't allow me to pursue my job then I won't marry."

The idea of moving in with a new family after marriage can be very daunting for young Newari women. Even though Rupa has always known of this tradition, she still finds the concept very strange:

That is one thing I'm scared of. Living with a new family, a mom and dad and go and introduced to a new family, and you will be calling them mom and dad. Yeah that's a pretty weird concept. Not just for you but even for me. I will be calling someone else mom and dad, my mom and dad.

Abha initially found the transition of moving in with a new family very difficult.

Abha comes from an educated background and her husband's parents are uneducated. Additionally her in-laws have different traditions. For example, in Abha's new home, her family performs *bali*, or animal sacrifice, for holidays such as Dashain. After five years, Abha has adjusted to this new tradition but if it were in her hands, she would still chose to not do *bali*.

While Gita understands that her husband's family will become like her own when she gets married, she also expects that her husband will love her family in return. "My family should be important to him. Because my mom is a single mother and I would want him to love him like her own mother." Gita also expects that her husband's family will treat her like a daughter, not a daughter-in-law. "I don't want to feel awkward in someone else's family," she explains. Gita is ready to accept and love her husband's family as her own, but she expects the same from her husband in return.

Parental Support

While many young Newari women prefer to choose their own husbands, their parents' approval remains of value. Saphal explains that her parents' support is integral to her relationship. Before entering into a relationship with her boyfriend, she and her boyfriend discussed the importance of having their parents' support, "otherwise we will not continue our relationship." While Anjali

and Muna also value their family's support, they will not give up on their relationships if they meet resistance from their parents. If Anjali's parents do not approve of her intercaste marriage, she will "make them understand and make them say 'yes'" before she marries. Muna similarly explains that she will do everything in her power to convince her parents if she does not initially get their approval. "I will give my 100% to convince them because I just can't leave him."

For many of the women, telling their parents about their relationships is a delicate dance. A few of the informants discussed the roundabout way in which they told their parents. Gita, for example, told her aunt that she was not interested in the arranged proposals she was receiving because she had someone else in mind; her boyfriend. Gita intentionally told her aunt, knowing that her aunt would inform her mother of Gita's relationship. Muna was too nervous to tell her uncle, whom she was living with in Kathmandu, about her relationship but she knew he suspected her of having a relationship. When her uncle would ask she would jokingly respond, "yeah I have many boyfriends!" Anjali has also jokingly told her parents about her boyfriend but has yet to have a formal conversation with them about her relationship. She wants to wait a couple of years to tell her parents when she and her boyfriend are more "stable on our own."

Role of the Newari Wife

While all of the informants expressed a desire to marry, they all acknowledge that after marriage they will have less freedom in controlling their own lives. Gita explains that because Nepal is a Hindu country, the daughter-in-laws are expected to assume many responsibilities, which inevitably means the loss of some individual freedom. "You won't be as free as you are right now

when you are married. I think I would want to enjoy my life first before getting married. Enjoy everything in life first. Be settled.” Before Gita marries she wants to enjoy and take advantage of her freedom as an unmarried woman:

Maybe I would want to go for clubbing, things like that, because I won't get to do that maybe after marriage. After marriage have to answer people, like why are you so late, answer in-laws and husband. I would want to go abroad and stay alone and do all that. Because you won't get to stay alone after marriage. You're husband is always with you. Maybe I'd like to go to Europe or America or some other place and then just enjoy myself.

Gita's fears about losing her freedoms after marriage are not unfounded. Abha describes the biggest change in her life since getting married as being “trapped:”

Basically I'm trapped. Not in a negative sense. But also I have more responsibilities, I have more people to answer and before I have to answer only my mom and dad and now I have to answer to my mother-in-law, father-in-law, husband. I can't be with my friends anytime I want now. I am not like a college going girl now. I am a mother. I have to be with her.

Although Abha uses the word “trapped,” which has very negative connotations, she claims that being trapped is not necessarily a bad thing. Abha is very happy being a wife and mother and has been able to continue working as a businesswoman in Kathmandu. When she says trapped, I believe she is referring to the loss of some of the freedoms that come with youth, such as being able to seeing friends anytime she wants. Abha also describes her family's expectations of her as the wife of a Newar family:

They expect a lot from you. They want their daughter-in-law to be very much responsible. They expect that she should know everything, family matters, for examples, if any program is there, wedding, we should be an

active participant. We also have to be involved in all the things, all the puja, Dashian, Tihar, we should know everything how to do puja, when to go to puja.

Abha is now in charge of knowing all of the traditions specific to Newar culture. She is expected to not only understand all of the worshipping practices but to be an active participant in every religious event. As a wife, Abha must balance the roles of being a business woman with her religious and cultural responsibilities in the home.

Komal explains that not all Newari wives have the same role. She considers herself very lucky to have married into a family that is not overly demanding of her. “In our home it’s not traditional, it’s not so hard.” Komal’s in-laws do not force her to do any of the housework. “I have to do it for myself,” she explains. “I love to do that, I’m not forced to do that.” She has witnessed, however, how hard the life can be for a Newari wife by watching her friends. “I’ve seen my friends. They have very hard life. Their studies no use, they have to do everything, very hard.” This observation struck me as somewhat alarming because Komal is currently a housewife who is unable to put her studies to use, yet she views herself as lucky in comparison to many of her friends. Earlier in her narrative, Komal explained that she had planned on working after marriage but her husband’s parents were not supportive of her pursuing a career. It appears that since marrying, Komal has adjusted her expectations and aspirations, revealing the level of compromise she has made for the sake of her marriage. What Komal now considers lucky may not have been her definition of lucky when she was a student. Komal understands, however, that marriage requires

compromise. When describing her sacrifices, she jokingly describes her least favorite part of being a wife. “Before marriage I used to get up whatever. That’s the worst part of married. I hate to get up.” On a more serious note, Komal explains that her complete dedication to her children and family leaves little to no time for herself. “Look at me,” Komal said dejectedly. “I hate this. I have to lose weight and I don’t know how. I’m busy, no time for myself.” Regardless of whether Komal has had to readjust her expectations, she still contends that she is very happily married and loves her life with her husband and children.

Discerning Trends in Cosmopolitanization

These young Newari women’s narratives about marriage shed light on the greater trend of cosmopolitanization happening in Nepal. Within the sphere of personal relationships, the cosmopolitan views expressed by young Newari women highlight the need for compromise between tradition and modernity. It would be narrow to conclude that Newari women are becoming cosmopolitan by shedding old traditions and replacing traditions with new ideas. In fact, cosmopolitan involves a mix of both the old and the new; Newari women are maintaining their loyalty to their roots, embedded in tradition and family, while simultaneously forming modern aspirations for themselves.

In order to understand the complexity of this concept, I return to the opening quote of this ethnography, in which Gita Shrestha declares her refusal of becoming housewife after marriage. It would be narrow to interpret Gita’s declaration as a denigration of the value of running a household. To the contrary, Gita’s narrative highlights the value of home and family, revealing the duality of what it means to be a cosmopolitan woman. While Gita is an independent young

woman who is not afraid of expressing her distaste for male dominance in Nepal, her modern assertions are not a dismissal of traditional practices. In fact, Gita's beliefs about marriage are founded on the value of family. Gita expects that her husband will love and take care of her mother as his own. Furthermore she wants to be accepted into her husband's family as a real family member, eliminating any formality or stigma that is attached with the label daughter-in-law. Gita understands marriage as a sacred commitment that requires compromise and adjustments in order to be sustained. Her definition of marriage hints at the very essence of what it means to be a cosmopolitan Newari woman. Compromise is necessary in order to reconcile between the opposing forces of old traditions and new ideas. Neither, however, must be completely eliminated. Gita and the other women I interviewed are in the process of finding a balance between their roots and their future.

The struggle of finding this balance is exemplified through the tensions revealed in Nirmala Kayastha's narrative. Nirmala makes somewhat paradoxical claims of asserting her independence while also shying from responsibility for initiating her relationship with her husband. While Nirmala feels deserving of her agency in choosing a husband, she appears embarrassed at the idea of initiating a romantic relationship with him. Most of the informants made sure to allocate primary responsibility for their relationship onto their boyfriend or husband, even if they believed in the value of being able to choose their own husband. While it is increasingly appropriate for Newari women to express their agency in choosing a husband, it remains taboo for a woman to boastfully claim responsibility for initiating a romance. Thus Newari women must continue to follow a traditional

social code that requires them to be somewhat passive participants when it comes to romance.

While it could be interpreted that having more choice in choosing a husband has increased the happiness of young Newari women, this would be a very Western interpretation of the process of choosing a life partner. From listening to these women's narratives, it has become clear that a woman's agency matters much more than having the choice of any man. Rarely did women mention the issue of choice when describing their preference for love marriage. Rather women preferred love marriage because it gave them the chance to get to know their partner before marriage. Moreover the women expressed the importance of having control over making the decision rather than allowing their parents to decide for them, thus illuminating the importance of having *agency* in choosing a husband, not the importance of having the *choice* of many men.

In addition to having agency, a young Newari woman's cosmopolitan view of the world has become connected with visions of life that require their husband to provide a supportive environment for pursuing their careers. Women are no longer willing to sacrifice their years of investment in education for a man. Women expect to be able to continue pursuing their careers after marriage, which requires the support of their husband and husband's family. For most informants, having their husband's support in their career is nonnegotiable. Having a career not only entitles women to financial independence but is symbolic of their individuality, creating an identity that is separate from their husband and marriage.

Throughout this ethnography, I have attempted to shed light on some Newari women's views of love. While I cannot provide a succinct definition of what love means to a young Newari woman, I believe I have found evidence revealing where love finds its roots in Newar culture. For young Newari women, marriage is not only about finding a life partner but about continuing the generations of their family and creating a new family for themselves. Solidarity of family amidst so much uncertainty in a country at political unrest provides a pillar of stability in many women's lives. A stable family can serve as a solid grounding for women, emphasizing the importance of family and tradition for Newari women. Newari women's cosmopolitan views of marriage are undeniably linked to family solidarity, the foundation from which love can grow.

Looking Forward

Young Newari women are constantly redefining their views of marriage and dating and this ethnography marks specific views at specific point in time. Through these women's narratives we can see social change manifesting in the form of new marital views and practices. While the fourteen young Newari women I interviewed had opposing views in many areas of marriage, there were some significant themes that arose as I was doing my research. Preferences towards love marriage and the value of a career reveal young Newari women's emerging sense of agency and independence. Furthermore we can see from these women's narratives that within the sphere of personal relationships, young Newari women's cosmopolitan worldviews negotiate a balance between tradition and modern aspirations.

I predict that future trends will continue on a path towards the equalization of gender, though this process will likely take place over a long period of time. Newari women feel passionately about their independence and will probably continue to express their independence in the realm of personal relationships as well as in other areas of their lives. Additionally, the increasing availability of technology in other regions of Nepal may lead to similar trends of cosmopolitanization outside of Kathmandu. While new ideas will continue to influence young Newari women's marital views, I do not believe modern ideas will ever expel tradition completely. Marriage is deeply rooted in family and tradition, and while marital practices are gradually becoming more cosmopolitan, tradition remains inextricably linked with Newari women's views of marriage.

Future areas of research would do well to examine young Newari women's views of marriage and dating in areas outside of Kathmandu in order to compare the influence of cosmopolitan factors present in urban and rural areas. Additionally, in the future I would like to expand upon my research by interviewing more young Newari women in Kathmandu as well as the older generation of Newari women in order to better understand the nuanced ways in which marital practices have changed over the last couple decades.

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