

ARRANGED MARRIAGE IN MALAYSIA AMONG MILLENNIAL NAGARATHAR

NATTUKOTTAI CHETTIARS

By

RAMANATHAN SOMASUNDARAM

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Approved by:

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Dr. Mimi Nichter  
Professor  
School of Anthropology

## Foreword

This thesis is written as a combination of both a research paper and an auto-ethnography from the author's standpoint. This is about young Chettiar millennials in Kuala Lumpur and their ideologies towards traditional arranged marriage in an era where most millennials are allowed to do as they please. I research and uncover the perspectives, feelings, attitudes towards arranged marriage and thought processes of young millennials whom I have had the pleasure of getting to know better over a cup of coffee and a good interview. This work is not meant to criticize or put down the idea of traditional arranged marriage in any way, an ancient practice that has its benefits, but to rather serve as a medium for these millennials, who are soon-to-be married, to share and voice out their minds anonymously. Being a millennial myself, I take on the lens of a young Chettiar in understanding this process better and in dissecting the dilemma of tradition versus modernity in a globalized world that many of us young Chettiars face. To my knowledge, no such research or work has been conducted and published in this topic amongst the Nagarathar Nattukottai Chettiar community.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Mimi Nichter, for her constant support, motivation, encouragement, time and love in assisting me with and for diving into this thesis with me. Thank you for your interest in my culture and for being more than an advisor – more like a mother – many times when I ran into dead ends or needed some advice or someone to talk to, usually of other things not related to this thesis. Lastly, thank you for your patience as I juggled this with my other Honors thesis and some 30 units per semester (crazy, I know!).

Secondly, thank you to the key informants who have graciously provided me with a bundle of knowledge and insight into the complex world of Chettiar matrimony. I learned a lot

myself! Thanks also goes out to the bulk of this thesis' content – the subjects. Thank you for being so open-minded to be interviewed, for your time and for sharing your deepest thoughts and insights into the topic of arranged marriage. I very much understand and feel where you are coming from, as we are both more or less in the same boat. I hope marriage life pans out well for each of you! Thank you as well to the many people who have shown so much interest in this topic and who have supported the writing of this thesis.

Lastly, I have saved the most important people to be thanked for the end – my family. Thank you *appa*, *amma* and Sathya for the endless support, love, concern and care throughout the writing of this thesis. I always knew I had a place to vent or speak freely without being judged. Thanks for everything.

## Abstract

This research is based on a South Indian community, the Nagarathar Nattukottai Chettiars, an elite and wealthy merchant community traditionally comprised of businessmen and traders. My research seeks to investigate the acceptance of traditional arranged marriage practices by millennials of the Chettiar community currently residing in Malaysia. Marriage practices are slowly changing in most urban-dwelling communities in India to a more informal, love marriage system but the practices in the Chettiar community, both in India and abroad, are still similar to traditional practices of arranged marriage and have undergone minimal evolution. The Chettiars are a very forward-thinking community and have ventured into many top fields since their rise as a money lending community. Therefore, the practice of arranged marriage amongst the Chettiars is paradoxical as its community members are quite global and modern in thinking. Some of the research objectives include, the current expectations of millennials towards arranged marriage, its evolution, the engagement and opposition of millennials, factors such as family wealth, educational attainment, personality traits, physical appearance, status and social class on the selection of a mate at the time of marriage, the economics of marriage – the dowry system, the influence of social media in arranging a marriage and the competency of the system of arranged marriage as an integral part of the community's trademark. Arranged marriage amongst the Chettiars is a very complex system and difficult to unpack for a non-Chettiar. I take on the lens of a young Chettiar, like myself, and interview young adults, older community members and parents of marriage age men and women to explore their perspectives on arranged marriage in this increasingly globalized world.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Brief Overview of Chapter 1

This thesis draws on data collected among the Nagarathar Nattukottai Chettiars of Malaysia, and focuses specifically on arranged marriage among millennials. In this introductory chapter, I provide an historical overview of the community in India and their migration to Malaysia and then discuss the community as they are settled in Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia, today.

### 1.2 History of Nagarathar Nattukottai Chettiars in India and South Asia

The Nagarathar Nattukottai Chettiars are a South Indian sub-caste of the *Vaishya* caste in the Hindu caste system of India. The *Vaishyas* are merchant people whose primary means of living is through business and trade relations. *Nagarathar* means “townsfolk”, *Nattukottai* means “land-fort” and *Chettiar* is a word specifically used for this community, derived from *Shetty* or *Chetty*, used to describe merchants in India. The Chettiars, for short, are a community that has been in existence for more than 5000 years, since the time of the earliest kings of South India. The history of Chettiars are mostly inscribed in The Five Great Epics of Tamil Literature<sup>1</sup>, notably the *Silappathikaram* and *Manimekalai* epics that still exist until today. Although some accounts of Chettiar history and life are mentioned in these epics, as with most of Indian history, very little has been written or documented about the Chettiars in full. Hence, a lot of the history of this community is a combination of legends, myths and oral stories which have been passed down through generations. These accounts proliferate and form the Chettiar history as we know it today.

There are a lot of theories and hypotheses of the origins of the Chettiars and also many legends on their migration patterns to present-day Chettinad, but they are said to have originated from Naganadu, a locality which is still quite uncertain but believed to be a city or state bordering the current South Indian states of Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh in modern-day India. Another legend has it that the Chettiars originated from Kanchipuram of the Pallava Kingdom (acquired in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD). In the *Silappathikaram* epic, it is listed that the Chettiars were salt and gem traders. The Pallava rulers ill-treated the Chettiars by heavily taxing them. Due to severe oppression, they eventually moved to a port city called Kaveripoompattinam, in Tamilnadu in search of better hospitality and livelihood after an invitation from the Chola king who saw their value in business. The proximity to the Indian Ocean and the booming port of Kaveripoompattinam were great advantages to this community of traders who may have migrated from injustice in Kanchipuram. In this port city, the Chettiars were called *Danavaisyas*. They flourished and blossomed in this active port city and were later sent by the Chola King and entrusted to expand their trade across the Indian Ocean in various Southeast Asian countries, such as Malaysia, Singapore, Myanmar, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Thailand. What started as gem trade, later evolved into money-lending businesses across all these countries. A discussion of this expansion into businesses and communities far away from home will be further discussed in the next few pages. Due to their high standards of integrity, professionalism, business acumen and culture, married Chettiar men were given the honor of crowning new kings of the Chola Kingdom. The Cholas were of the Chola Dynasty, the longest ruling empire in Southern India from about 300 BCE to 1279 BCE. They were very powerful and strong in the region and expanded their empire to Southeast Asian countries, like Malaysia and Indonesia.

Unfortunately, the successors of the Chola dynasty were not as hospitable as the Chola king who invited the Chettiars. The successors were jealous of the Chettiar's booming business and community's wealth, which surpassed that of the king. Legend has it that the Chettiars had silver doors to their homes and lots of jewelry. The jealous king ordered his men to take down the doors and bring them to him. In response to this, the Chettiars erected doors made out of pure gold. Adding insult to injury, one of the Chola kings abducted a young Chettiar girl and married her, knowing that the Chettiars would never allow such a marriage outside their community (kings in India are of a different caste, the Kshatryia caste). A community that prides itself on chastity of their womenfolk and the sanctity of marriage, were insulted and ashamed of such an incident. Many legends denote this rebellion in various ways. One legend speaks of the migration of the entire community to Pandya Nadu of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Pandyas. Another legend tells the story of how all the women of the entire community committed mass suicide in a large pit of fire, also known as *sati*, leaving all the males in the care of their guru. When it was time to crown the new king, the Chettiars pointed out that all males were unmarried and hence, cannot crown the king. The king ordered the Chettiars to marry girls of the Vellalar community, a farming community. Although this arrangement was made, the Chettiars did not find a happy marriage in the Chola Kingdom after all the ill-treatment they had been through.

Thence, as another legend goes, they moved to the Pandya Kingdom in 13 Century following an invite by the King Sundara Pandyan who saw their talent in business. The Pandya king granted vast amounts of land to the Chettiars and told them to build their homes and temples in this area, giving rise to present-day Chettinad, meaning the "land of the Chettiars". It is stated that the Chettiars built nine temples in a 12-year span. Over time, there existed 96 villages in a 600 square-mile area; Chettinad. A legend indicates that the Chettiars divided

themselves into nine groups, meaning each group is a brother to the next. Hence nine temples were built, having every family or group, belong to one. This was a brotherhood system that was established to ensure marriages between closely related Chettiars do not occur. For example, Chettiars of the same temple and brother temples cannot engage in marital relationships. This establishment indicates that the Chettiars were well aware of the consequences of marrying too close to their family bloodline, even when modern science had not proven this yet. Even to this day, regardless how diasporic and varied the community may be genetically, this practice is followed very closely. Every temple has a point system for each family, known as *pulli*. Through this system and bookkeeping, all temples have an accurate count of the number of families present. This system also tells us how many Chettiars are present at any point in time.

Coming back to their ventures in Southeast Asia, the Chettiars started money-lending businesses soon after the switch from a barter system to a monetary system happened. In Malaysia for example, the Chettiars had their businesses under the Malay kingdoms followed by British colonialism. They flourished and gathered riches from many countries through their businesses and trade, most of which were sent to Chettinad for purposes of dowry and home ornamentation. Some of the items the Chettiars acquired include Burmese teak for the building of their mansions, Belgian mirrors, China porcelain, Burmese lacquerware and rattan materials, Malayan umbrellas and kitchen jars, as well as Italian tiles. For many years, the Chettiars were the appointed financial advisors to the British and some local rulers of the countries in which they conducted business. History has it that at one point in time, the Chettiars controlled almost 70 percent of Burma, present-day Myanmar. The Chettiars were also pioneers in banking systems as they were the earliest to introduce the idea of credit and debit in bookkeeping. This community of traders were very influential in the overall economy of Southeast Asia, especially

in the 1800s to 1900s, and controlled most of its economy before World War II, before their golden era came to its end. As it can be seen, the Chettiars were highly regarded for their business acumen and value, integrity and honesty in conducting business, economical influence, banking systems and culture. This resulted in them being able to build fortresses as homes, when the majority of India was still beginning to plough. Despite the Chettiars being very charitable and communal, making sure lower caste communities were aided in agricultural and educational affairs, this success was bound to cause some resentment of other communities towards the Chettiars. After the war, Chettiars had no choice but to undertake positions other than money-lending such as professional careers like medicine, engineering, law, etc.

### 1.3 Millennial Chettiars in Malaysia

The Chettiars in Malaysia settled in the 1800s. Before bringing families over, in the early stages, just the men would travel for safety and liability reasons. They opened private money-lending houses or shops, called *Kittangi*, in which they would conduct all business transactions. These shop houses also served as their temporary house, when they were away from their families. It is said that most Chettiar men travelled to Chettinad every three years to visit family. Through money-lending, the Chettiars owned acres of land and established bigger businesses in some of these countries. While far from home, they remained true to their identity and practiced their traditions and cultures as strictly as possible. Chettiar culture is very well-known in these countries, especially India. Elements such as their hospitality, cuisine, architecture, marriage practices and religious ceremonies are unique compared to other Indian communities and centuries old. These customs are heavily laden with intricate steps and rituals, most of which are still followed today. Albeit being very adherent to traditional customs, the Chettiars are modern

in their livelihoods and outlook. They have assimilated into the local communities to which they have migrated to as much as possible through adopting their language and combining certain traditions of the country to theirs, creating a unique amalgamation that still persists until today amongst the Chettiar diaspora, whilst still keeping their traditions intact. The population of Chettiars worldwide approximates to about 150,000 currently. Specifically, the Malaysian diaspora has around 800 Chettiar families, or about 3000 people. Increasingly, with the day and age, the strong link to tradition maintained by elder members of the community us a problem to the younger generations of Chettiars who are caught between the worlds of globalization and traditionalism. The question I ask in my thesis is how young Chettiars manage to follow tradition when required—particularly at the time of marriage – while at the same time living as a modern millennial that is expected to be a global citizen. I explore to what extent, and how, millennial Chettairs resist and challenge traditional notions of arranged marriage. To do so, I take on the lens of a young Malaysian Chettiar like myself in exploring this paradox, specifically in the culture of arranged marriage within the Chettiar community.

#### 1.4 Overview of Research

My research is on the acceptance of traditional arranged marriage practices by young millennials of the Chettiar community currently residing in Malaysia. Marriage in the Chettiar community is not only a marriage between individuals but a marriage of families. Marriage practices are slowly changing in most urban-dwelling communities in India to a more informal, love marriage system but the practices in the Chettiar community, both in India and abroad, are still similar to traditional practices of arranged marriage and have undergone minimal evolution. As mentioned before, the Chettiars are a very forward-thinking community in terms of outlook

and have ventured into many top fields such as medicine, engineering, law, dentistry, and entrepreneurship since their rise as a money lending and business-oriented community. Therefore, the practice of arranged marriage amongst the Chettiars is paradoxical as its community members are quite global and modern in thinking. This thesis is an ethnography exploring the approach of young Chettiars towards arranged marriage in Malaysia, with perspectives from members of older generations as well as youth themselves I researched the arranged marriage preferences, ideologies and willingness to continue traditional marital customs amongst emerging adults, both male and female, aged between 20 to 30, of the Nagarathar Nattukottai Chettiar diaspora in Malaysia. I conducted interviews to shed light on how these millennials feel, react and respond to societal norms, customs, expectations and increasing pressure to marry within the community at a time when they are living in an urban, globalized world and are highly educated.

There will be another section on marriage throughout all communities in India but generally, marriage in India has predominantly been arranged, meaning they were arranged by parents of both parties involved. Dagmar Markova, the author of an article titled “Love Marriage and Arranged Marriage in India (1999)”, has written that Central Europeans who come into contact with Indians are astonished that Indian parents select grooms and brides for their children and conversely, Indians are astonished that Central Europeans do not practice arranged marriage. However, that is not the case in recent decades, especially in urban communities like Mumbai, New Delhi and Chennai. Although many families still practice arranged marriage, it may not be so for the whole community or caste. Specifically, among those who are highly educated, there has been a shift toward greater flexibility in marriage patterns. While many youth continue to marry within caste, there is currently a greater acceptance of choosing one’s own partner. Clearly

this is not the case for all. What is interesting is that the Chettiars in Malaysia, who are higher socioeconomic class and are highly educated, still favor. marriages that are completely arranged and this practice is followed by almost the entire community wherever they may be. In yesteryears, these marriages did not involve the consent of the betrothed but rather a parental or familial decision. Nowadays, the practice of arranged marriage is evolving such that the children have as much say as their parents and need not agree to the proposal or arrangement. In some families, love marriage, if and only if within the Chettiar community, is being accepted and then the marriage is arranged by the parents. This form of marriage is better known as companionate marriage (Amanda Gilbertson, 2014) and love-arranged marriage. Predominantly in India, arranged marriage has always been the primary mode of getting married. However, nowadays, love marriage or love-arranged marriages are accepted and are on the rise, mostly in urban cities or developing towns. These love-arranged marriages can be considered “companionate marriages”, meaning youngsters choose spouses based on personality, compatibility, with emphasis on self-realization and pleasure, rather than fulfillment of kin obligations (Gilbertson, 2014). Therefore, it can be seen that companionate marriage allows for the youngsters to have a stronger voice in the decision-making process of nuptials and marriage arrangements. This form of marriage sees the couple as more of friends than strangers before getting married. Although they are in control of who they pick or deem suitable for themselves, their parents still arrange the marriages for them. In the Chettiar community, marriages that happen nowadays are either fully arranged or companionate-type marriages. In spite of this evolution to a more lenient and opinion-inclusive marriage practice, the Chettiar community being proud of their marriage practices contributes to the younger generations being cemented between romance, love and individualism and having to agree for an arranged marriage. Most of the times, although the

children are allowed to meet for some time prior to the wedding, it is almost impossible to determine in that short period of time if that person is compatible with the likes of another.

As I analyze and uncover the responses and personal lives of the young millennials in this thesis, I seek to determine, if at all, how the acceptance of arranged marriage is changing in terms of demands made, customs followed, and the degree to which personal preferences influence a marriage. Some of the questions I investigate are the current expectations of arranged marriage, the evolution of arranged marriage, including the importance of one's consent, the engagement and opposition of young millennials of the Nagarathar Nattukottai Chettiar community, factors such as wealth of the family, educational attainment, personality traits, self-confidence, physical appearance, status and social class on the selection of a mate at the time of marriage, the economics of marriage – the dowry system, how social media is used in influencing marital decisions, the continuity of traditional methods in arranging marriages and its place in today's increasingly globalized world, the competency of the system of arranged marriage as an integral part of the community's trademark, the role of personality traits and appearance in affecting marital choices, how marriage patterns among Chettiars in Malaysia and Singapore are similar or different than in mainland India and the impact of marrying outside the Chettiar community on the family and the couple. Moreover, this research is also a way to bring to light the problems, concerns and issues faced by the millennials I have interviewed, and by extension, the younger generations. This thesis will feature direct quotes from them and for them to have a voice of their own in discussing their concerns freely while maintaining anonymity. The next chapter reviews the methods taken to conduct fieldwork for this ethnography.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

### 2.1 Methods of Data Collection

The results of this study and observations made are primarily drawn upon personal one-on-one interviews with twelve informants – six males and six females who are of the Chettiar community and are aged between 21 and 30 years of age. These are the millennials who are the center of this research. The process of acquiring these interviewees were through local phone calls using an approved script by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of The University of Arizona. Through these phone calls, I managed to get thirteen respondents. After this, I sought to seek two Key Informants (KIs) to be interviewed using the same recruitment process. KIs are people of the community that is being researched who are well-versed with the community and are usually members of older generations. These individuals provide in-depth qualitative interviews that factor into the background and understanding of the study, community and its people. I managed to get two KIs. Once I gathered my target number of interviewees (fifteen), I assigned a pseudonym for each one of them. These pseudonyms are listed in the table that follows this paragraph. This table also contains important information about the quality of each interview and biodata of each interviewee. All interviewees were of the time living in the capital city of Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur when I interviewed them. The interviews of the millennials took place in public settings such as coffee shops and libraries. However, the interviews of the KIs were in their respective homes. All interviews lasted a grand total of 60 to 90 minutes, but not more than that. The interviews for both millennials and KIs were based off of an interview questionnaire that comprised of 46 questions. The questions were not compulsory and all interviewees had the option of choosing to answer a question or neglecting it. The list of questions is included in the appendix of this thesis. The interviews were recorded using a

recording device and quickly transferred onto a password protected personal computer for storage and safekeeping. Before every interview, all interviewees had to fill out a Demographic Information and Biodata of Subject Form and sign the IRB Consent Form that indicates their approval to take part in my research. These forms and the transcribed versions of my interviews were securely kept in my thesis mentor's office throughout the duration of this research and will be kept for an additional 6 years as required by the IRB. As a token of appreciation and compensation for all the interviewees, a gift card and souvenir were provided.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Quality of Interview (10 being the highest)</b>
Roja	66	10
Anand	62	10
Aananthi	23	8
Boomi	22	8
Aadhi	24	5
Divya	24	9
Bharath	26	8
Elamalar	23	7
Thendral	24	5
Kanthan	27	4
Ranjith	28	2
Shyan	25	6
Kauveri	24	9

Varun	23	7
Dharshini	25	8

Table 1: Table of Interviewees. The quality of interviews is not based on any rubric but rather my personal intuition and satisfaction, by comparing all the interviews when deciding a suitable score.

## 2.2 Description of Interviewees

Format of presentation is as follows:

Millennial or KI: Pseudonym (Male/Female)

Description of age, personality, appearance, education, background, and other characteristics of millennial/KI.

### **KI 1: Roja (F)**

A very poised and well-educated woman in her late sixties. She completed a Doctorate and has two girls both whom are married. Her husband passed away in his forties due to a heart attack. She is quite the philanthropist, very charitable and promotes education in Tamil literature. She writes and reviews books, scholarly journals, articles and magazines. She loves the arts and encourages the youth to be more involved in Tamil literature and to have a good command of the language. She grew up in Malaysia and has lived in Kuala Lumpur ever since. One of her daughters married within the Chettiar community and one of them did initially and then got a divorce. The divorcee married an outcaste. Her take on arranged marriage was that youngsters should embrace the idea of arranged of marriage and be more open to possibilities. She was for arranged marriage. She pointed out the current issues in marriage and the problems in finding a suitable match. She voiced her concerns on the ideals of arranged marriage and how youngsters

nowadays do not invest much effort and faith into their relationship. She stressed how easily newly married couples pick the option of divorce without giving the marriage a try. She also shared her opinion on how the parents of newly married couples should stay out of their children's relationship and let them figure it out on their own.

### **KI 2: Anand (M)**

Anand is the CEO of a very reputed and well-known company in Malaysia. He is very well educated and has one son. His son is married within the community through an arranged marriage and lives in Texas. Anand also helps with matchmaking whenever he gets a chance and by request. Since he is well-known in the Chettiar community, he is often asked to help with the matchmaking and arranged marriage process. He shared his views on the issues of matchmaking in the modern day, the issues with youngsters on arranged marriage, background and the benefits of an arranged marriage within the community. He is very well-spoken and presented his ideas clearly, an indication that he has had a lot of experience in arranging marriages for youngsters in Malaysia.

### **Millennial 1: Ananthi (F)**

She is an undergraduate student studying in Kuala Lumpur. She is the third out of four children in her family. She was tall, in modern clothes and spoke English well. She was very sure about her opinions and was confident in her answers. She was for arranged marriage and presented many ideas which she thought were becoming of arranged marriage in 2016.

**Millennial 2: Boomi (F)**

An undergraduate student studying in Kuala Lumpur. She is the second out of three children. She was a little shy, nervous but very bubbly in character. She had a lot to say about arranged marriage. She presented her views clearly and was very jovial in the conversation. The interview started out a little formal but then became more and more informal with lots of laughter. She dressed modern and had a good command of the English language as well. She shared her respect for her parents and the community in continuing with the practice of arranged marriage. She believes that she will get one too but would not mind a love-arranged marriage within the community either. She shared her opinions on dowry as well.

**Millennial 3: Aadhi (M)**

He is pursuing his Masters in MIT. He was a little shy and brief with his answers. He didn't have much to say but to agree with the questions I posed. He was for arranged marriage and shared his opinions on what he felt would be a suitable proposal. He gave his thoughts and ideas on the process of arranged marriage.

**Millennial 4: Divya (F)**

Divya was a very confident and brave girl. She was against arranged marriage and did not want to get one. She has been in previous relationships with outcastes before and has had experiences dating. She works as a software developer in the headquarters of a bank. She spoke freely about her ideas on marriage and discussed the particular stress points she's facing when it comes to marriage talks at home. She dressed very modern and behaved very openly. She had a great personality and argued her ideas well.

**Millennial 5: Bharath (M)**

Bharath works as a doctor. He has been in relationships before, with the latest one being with a girl within the Chettiar community. He is neutral with the idea of arranged marriage and presented a lot of ideas that many other interviewees did not. He talked about how important it was to let the boy grow up independently without having his mother talk him into or show him ways, arguing that this would make him more difficult to adjust with his spouse later on. He did sidetrack a lot in the interview.

**Millennial 6: Elamalar (M)**

She works in a law firm and was for arranged marriage. She did not want to answer the question on divorce when asked. She dressed traditionally and answered questions fluently. She mentioned the issues of arranged marriage from her point of view and how important it is to continue the traditional forms of marriage to keep the tradition alive.

**Millennial 7: Thendral (F)**

She is a newlywed and works as a software engineer in Kuala Lumpur. She was dressed traditionally. Her marriage is a love-arranged marriage with Interviewee 8 and she is very happy with the arrangement. Her parents were for their love but her in-laws were not because she is from a socioeconomically lesser family than her spouse's. However, in the end their marriage was a success and they live with their parents-in-law. She shared her views on arranged marriage and the opposition that she and her husband faced when they were in love and told their parents about their relationship. She talked about how rumors spread and how it affected her marriage.

She also mentioned how supportive her husband was and how footed she was on their relationship.

### **Millennial 8: Kanthan (M)**

He is quite reserved and did not share the issues he faced in their relationship as openly as Interviewee 6. He spoke much less and dressed modern. One of the highlights of this interview, although he didn't speak much, was that he shared ideas that were not mentioned by his wife and that were for love-arranged marriage.

### **Millennial 9: Ranjith (M)**

This interviewee was rather different compared to all other millennials I interviewed. His ideas were very spaced, fragmented and unique. He is the oldest I interviewed and is yet to get married. His ideas were against marriage in general. He does not want to get married at all. He told his parents that he wants to wait ten years to get married and his parents, very reluctantly, agreed to that. He is the youngest of three male children in his family and he has seen his brother's relationships and isn't quite satisfied with them. He agrees that a relationship takes time to mend and so fights do occasionally occur but after witnessing all that goes on between his sisters-in-law and brothers just discourages him from marriage. He is very, very spiritual and religious. He says he wants to find "who he is" first before getting into a marriage. He is very reluctant on the idea of marriage and spoke very hesitantly. He has been on dates before and has loved a girl for a long time. The girl rejected him and so I think he has lost hope on relationships after that. His interview was one of the longest because he had very little to say and he was uninterested with the idea of marriage from the very beginning.

**Millennial 10: Kauveri (F)**

Kauveri is a dentist by profession. Her parents are currently looking for a suitable match for her. However, she seems quite uninterested with the whole idea of marriage at this point. She wants to focus on her career first. She also wants a groom from the USA or the UK so that she can further her studies there. The profiles that she has viewed have been encouraging but also not her “type”. She claims she has not yet found her man but she continues to view profiles like most of my other interviewees. She has some ideas of a perfect man for her but does not seem very interested in marriage at this point. She had a lot of good ideas that she brought up and pressing issues/ideologies of marriage that are of major concern for millennials and their parents. Her interview was insightful. She dressed casually.

**Millennial 11: Shyan (M)**

He works as an auditor for a firm. He had a lot of good ideas that he brought forward. He is for arranged marriage but would prefer the idea of a love-arranged marriage more. He mentioned his ideals of a perfect woman for him and also some issues about arranged marriage. He was very happy to be interviewed. He dressed casually.

**Millennial 12: Varun (M)**

He is an undergraduate student. He presented some ideas on marriage and was quite neutral about the whole idea. He said he does not mind an arranged marriage. He presented some pressing concerns of an arranged marriage to him and spoke about traditions and upholding marital practices.

### **Millennial 13: Dharshini (F)**

She is a professional dentist working at a hospital currently and is 25 years of age. She is demure, strong-willed, modern, open-minded but culturally and traditionally aware (conservative at times), and is the second of three siblings. She spoke very well and was articulate about her ideas of marriage and knew exactly what she wanted. She believed that this topic of arranged marriage is a sensitive one.

### **2.3 Difficulties Encountered**

As with any other qualitative research, this ethnography encountered some difficulties along the way as well. Since I am taking an approach to this thesis as a member of this community and also a millennial residing in Kuala Lumpur, I know a lot of the millennials very well on a personal level. We know each other's background, family history and other information. Therefore, it was hard to recruit interviewees who would be open with their personal lives to someone who is also in the same community, known by other members because word travels fast in tight-knit communities like the Chettiars and so divulging too much information is always a hazard as it may backfire. Although the interviewees were aware that this is a professional research, many of them were hesitant and full of disapproval. On the other hand, I had interviewees gladly participate with much enthusiasm because they felt the need to voice out their concerns and opinions and the fact that this was anonymous made it more attractive to them. These individuals were also happy that I am conducting research in this topic that is of increasing concern to millennials and the younger generations. Hence, they felt that this is the best way to contribute and increase awareness while maintaining their identity through anonymity. Overall, most millennials were open-minded towards the idea of my thesis and

opened up about their personal lives and thoughts about marriage. Some of them, however, were very reticent to talk about their lives to me for the fear of word getting out and the fact that they knew who I was.

Secondly, there is bound to exist a personal bias when conducting this research and collecting data because no matter how unbiased I thought I was, I am still a member of this community and so could easily let personal bias come in the way. For example, I could have subconsciously thought about and pre-selected some millennials who I thought were good informants. This is wrong, if at all it happened, because the sample size of respondents are supposed to be random and varied to ensure a good mix and unbiased data.

Thirdly, the Chettiar community is a very closed and secretive community in comparison to other communities in India. What is meant by secretive is that the Chettiar families do not talk or share all happenings and certain things with other Chettiar families for some reasons, especially the topic of marriage, or at least until it is fixed and confirmed. Then the families will elaborately announce the wedding plans, proposal, engagement dates, etc. Therefore, when I interviewed most of these millennials, they were quite secretive about their plans and proposals that they had received to date. Again, this ties back to the fact that I am a Chettiar myself and they do not want me knowing before the marriage is confirmed. In addition to that, the topic of arranged marriage is not spoken of amongst millennials for the most part. Young men and women alike do not speak of topics related to marriage when they congregate for communal events in the temple, home or a public space. They may at home, however.

Moreover, some of the millennials may not have had ideas about marriage when I interviewed them because they could have been too young for marriage or because they were not interested in getting married. So it was hard to obtain information from these millennials. For

example, a few millennials were set on focusing on their career first before they consider the topic of marriage or a few millennials had just not been thinking about marriage yet. Thus, although I believe that my interview questions were complete and sought to address arranged marriage in a myriad of ways, some interviewees were just not prepared to answer such questions. This is perplexing as usually Chettiar millennials after the ages of 24 – which most of them were – should be thinking about marriage as their parents would soon be searching for a suitable spouse for them, but this just was not the case. This could also mean that their parents were willing to wait until their child (the millennial(s)) were ready for to begin discussing marriage, but more of these issues will be discussed in further chapters.

## Chapter 3: Arranged Marriage

### 3.1 Arranged Marriage in India: An Insight into the Complex World of Indian Matrimony

As we have discussed earlier, marriages in India are a union between two families and not just the betrothed. Although the caste system has been officially abolished in 1949, most arranged marriages still occur within the caste membership. This is so to preserve the heritage, culture, family lineage, traditions and religion. The marital process is very complex and difficult to unpack and digest in one piece of writing. There are so many aspects, themes and intricacies to marriage that this thesis is merely scraping the surface of what is a very complex idea. Like an onion, there are many layers to marriage and the core of it – the bulb – is a labyrinth of notions that build a community and culture. For many communities in India, the institution of marriage is as sacred as the notion of religion, and marriage is the main force that hold and bonds communities together, allowing them to continue, maintain, as well as continue their culture for generations to come. Hence, an arranged marriage within the caste (micro-community) is very important for its members to keep traditions alive, amongst other things. Some elements to a marriage in India include, a matchmaker, dowry, bride price, jewelry, visitations to each other's residence, horoscopes, astrology, religion, wealth, social status, social class, education, appearance, personality, and the list goes on. This list can vary greatly from community to community and individual to families as requirements change from person to person based on numerous factors. So, as you can see, an Indian marriage is a very, very convoluted process with so many things to consider before saying "I do". Now let's consider some past work in this area to shed light and give insights on Indian marriage.

One of the famous articles ever written in modern times about Indian marriages – which is a perfect example to my thesis – is by an anthropologist, Serena Nanda, who wrote an article titled “Arranging a Marriage in India (2000)”. In this article, she talks about the practice of arranged marriage in India and the complexities around it using simple terms that readers of any background can comprehend. She talks about how arranging a marriage does not just involve the parents nowadays, but also the individuals concerned. The bride and groom are allowed to meet for a short period of time right before the marriage date, either in person with a chaperone or through social media platforms, as allowed and advised. She stresses how personal choice is a big part of the decision. This can include personality, education, family history and/or background, appearance, career, etc. Nanda talks about the matchmaking process through a matchmaker. Matchmakers come in many forms; some are kin who help find suitable alliances, and some are professional matchmakers that do matchmaking for a living. One important aspect of her article, talks about the self-confidence and self-esteem of young, unmarried Indian women. These women have high self-confidence and self-esteem because they do not have the need, or find the need to date or impress any boy as their parents will find a boy for them anyway. So this means, not having to wear so much make-up or dress in the best fashion, because no one is “looking” and because there is no competition for a boy. Hence there is not a need to impress anyone. A stark opposite to this idea, based on my experiences I feel, would be the USA. Majority of American boys and girls regularly and constantly feel the need to make themselves look good because there are plenty of fish in the sea and the best one snatches! So there is no time to waste, as every moment counts to be as presentable (fashionable, make-up, etc.) as possible. This in turn rises very serious problems that many youths in developed nations like the USA face: anorexia, bulimia, low self-confidence and self-esteem, amongst many other

psychological problems. On the contrary, as suggested in Serena Nanda's article, because of arranged marriage and the way things are, Indian girls do not face any of these issues and have high self-confidence, esteem and a very positive outlook on their lives.

Another article that can be used as a good guide to arranged marriage and views on dating – a topic that I will discuss further in the next chapters – is by Susan Sprecher on “Attitudes about Arranged Marriage and Dating among Men and Women from India (1992)”. Her research focused on an area of marriage that was not actively researched at that time – the attitudes, views and perspectives on arranged marriage from young adults. This is exactly what I aim to find through my research, but just in the context of my community, or caste. In her study of subjects from India, she found that some young adults in India and abroad were favorable to the idea of arranged marriage because they saw the benefits of the traditional system. Other young adults, however, preferred autonomy and dating. One of the key factors that young adults favor in an arranged marriage is religion. They prefer to marry mates of the same religion rather than another. She found that social or cultural variables were far more important for the individual than personal or individual choices. Another main theme that emerged from the study was the importance of familial support. When asked about traits or characteristics, responses by both non-Indians and Indians were quite the same, however, a notable difference was that non-Indians preferred a “physically attractive, athletic and outgoing partner” (Sprecher 1992), compared to Indians.

We have looked at two publications out of the many that have been conducted. Research on arranged marriage in India is abundant, but since there are many perspectives and ideas to arranged marriage making it a very complex process, sometimes not everything is researched. Toward this end, and also because I had an interest in knowing more about the practice of

traditional arranged marriage in my community of Chettiars, driven by the passion that I had for the heritage of my community, I decided to focus on Chettiar millennials and their ideologies towards arranged marriage in urban Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Practices of arranged marriage in Malaysia are very similar to the practices in India, but there are some differences. These differences come in many forms, such as the openness of parents to let the mates meet, the duration and method of meeting, the idea of dowry, career prospects of the mate, etc. Ideologies and limitations to those ideas of Malaysian Chettiars towards the aforementioned characteristics vary compared to Chettiars in India. Ironically, although both countries are somewhat modern in many ways, Chettiars in Malaysia tend to be more conservative and traditional than the Chettiars in India. This could be because of the sense of pride as well as the fear of losing the Chettiar culture and heritage whilst being abroad, far from mainland India. This causes the Chettiars to hold onto their culture more strongly than the Chettiars in India, where the culture is rooted and may evolve naturally with a push and pull effect between other castes and the Chettiar community. However, in Malaysia and many countries, the Chettiars remain an exclusive society and practice their traditions as much as possible due to the high value associated with their culture and identity. The fear of losing their culture and the fact that they are in another country with constant influence and intermixing between the culture of their host country and their own culture makes them subconsciously maintain their culture while practicing it like always. This enables the Chettiar culture and identity to remain bright and strong in the presence of other communities in that particular country, in this case Malaysia. Therefore, because the Malaysian Chettiars prefer to follow their culture, they prefer an arranged marriage within the community over other forms of marriage despite the larger Malaysian Indian community being very open to all forms of marriage and not just traditional arranged marriage. This sets the Chettiars apart in

this sense, causing the millennials to face a dilemma in which they are stuck in a modern society like Kuala Lumpur with other Indian friends (who are of a different caste) being allowed to do whatever they please while they are expected to remain culturally aware and exclusive, by agreeing to a traditional arranged marriage. This has a tremendous effect on the upbringing and livelihood of Chettiar millennials from day one, in terms of who they can interact with, what they are expected to do, how they should behave, relationships they are allowed to have, intimacies that are acceptable, etc., all of which are quite different than non-Chettiar communities in Malaysia (Indian, Chinese, and/or Malay).

In the next part of this chapter, I will bring to light the viewpoints of two key informants (KI) of my research to better understand traditional arranged marriage within the Chettiars, why we still continue to do it, what the repercussions of not marrying within are, and many other topics that will shed light on this process, idea and millennial behavior. The analysis of the KIs will complement the interview results of the millennials in the next chapter. The KIs consist of one female and one male who are both above sixty years old, are a member of the Chettiar community and have experiences with matchmaking as well as community practices.

### 3.2 Marriage in the Chettiar Community: Perspectives of Key Informants'

Key informants were asked more or less the same set of questions with different additional questions throughout the conversation when needed. The first key informant for my research was Roja, a knowledgeable, well-educated and lovely lady in her late sixties. She has been a professor for 25 years and holds a doctorate in linguistics. Now she is retired and helps with dyslexic children and providing quality education for them. Our interview was very good and she brought a lot of issues of marriage and the Chettiar community to light. The second key informant was Anand, a man in his early sixties who is a CEO of a private fashion group and is very knowledgeable in the matchmaking process for arranged marriages. Both KIs are well-informed of the details and intricacies of traditional arranged marriage in the Chettiar community. They have both been president of the Malaysian Thanavaisy Association (the Malaysian Chettiar association) years before and have led the community well. Hence, they have and are still very involved in the Chettiar community and its activities, both in Malaysia and abroad. Thus, I found them to be the perfect KIs for my research as they not only know a lot about arranged marriage amongst the Chettiars, but are also very involved and up-to-date with happenings and cultural news.

To start the interview off, I asked them both a standard question about arranged marriage: How would you define arranged marriage? Their responses are directly quoted from their interviews below.

Roja says:

“To me, arranged marriage would be a marriage that is arranged by parents on both sides. And where, I mean it was different in the past, the girl and the boy in question

did not meet, sometimes did not even see each other's photographs. And parents decided everything because they are decided on other criteria like education, financial status, and of course sometimes it could, they could be relatives. So, these things decided an arranged marriage and this was decided by parents. But today in the Chettiar community, although parents are still very involved in the decision in a marriage, I think now they want to ask the opinion of the girl and the boy in question because with so many divorces happening, they feel that it is better to make sure that at least they like each other to start off with. But I feel that still, the bride and groom do not know each other enough to be married and parents are not looking into that. Arranged marriages as of now is like something the parents arrange and the girl and the boy know whom they are going to marry. They are not allowed to mix and know each other in any sense I feel, and that to me, is an arranged marriage.”

Anand on the other hand says:

“Arranged marriages most of the times are made through a well-known friend or another relative who is known to the girl's side or the boy's side. So, arranged marriages were successful in the past mainly because it was coming through a known person and the person knows both sides, the girl's side as well as the boy's side. So, in this sense most of the time people already knew each other and they know the weaknesses or strengths of the other family and after knowing that only they get into the wedlock. So, in that sense most of the time it is successful. And those days, the arranged marriages were more successful than current because, they were living together as a whole family; big family that means, grandfather,

grandmother, father's siblings and everybody was living together in a big house. Chettinad houses are very big, because of that they built houses between 7000 square feet, to 10,000 square feet which will have at least 10 bedrooms.”

Roja has two daughters, both of whom were married through a traditional arranged marriage. She talks openly about her daughter's marriages and the early marital life they lived, while giving her opinions and ideas on the topic of arranged marriage and children:

“I have two daughters and the first one was married very young. As I was just saying, we felt that it's better to marry young before they have a very strong opinion about things because we wanted them to marry within the Nagarathar Community. So, she was about 19 plus when she got married and the marriage went very well for 8 years. But then she went off to do her PhD in Cambridge and it was not so much that they did not like each other, it just happened that the parents-in-law were not understanding. They insisted that she comes home and has children and they were really pestering and that put a lot of pressure on both my son-in-law and daughter. Although my son-in-law was telling us, no, let her finish because we married young, we can start a family later. It put a lot of pressure on both of them. And she was an excellent academician and she was not prepared to give it up and come here and have children just all of a sudden like that. So, that sort of brought the marriage to an end. And in the case of the second girl, she too wanted to do her PhD in Oxford. Both my children are very academically inclined, I mean, both my husband and I are academicians that could have rubbed off. I mean, we never insisted what they become. It was their own choice and they got the best

scholarships around and they went on their own and it was decisions made by them and we couldn't stop them because both of us were academicians and we couldn't tell them, no, no, no, you cannot do your PhD, you've got to get married and things like that. So, in the case of the second girl, there were many proposals but she too wanted to do her PhD. By that time my husband had passed away and I was alone to make the decision and I didn't want to make the same mistake again. So, I asked my daughter whether she would give up her PhD if she got married and all that. She said, no. So, when other people, other than Chettiars, although many of them asked for her, there were also others in the community who asked for her. So, I told them too, she is going to do her PhD and she's in Oxford which is very difficult to come by and I can't tell her to stop her studies. But in the other community where she finally got married, they were very understanding. They said, 'wow, she's doing her PhD'. And finally, it was also an arranged marriage. The second girl too got married by both of the sides introducing the bride and groom. But it worked out very well because in their family, they thought that she was doing a great thing. So, it worked out very well and they are very happily married. I've got four grandchildren now, the older girl remarried a French Canadian and he's an excellent boy, very understanding, very supportive and they've got two children. And my second girl has got two children. And I'm very happy because at the end of the day, happiness is what matters. You can't force children to do what you want these days. Because of the mistake we made earlier, very young marriage, she didn't even know what she was going into. She was only 19 plus and she was studying in Singapore. So, we didn't want to – at least I didn't want to commit the same mistake. And it

worked out quite well because the family that she went into appreciated her a lot. My son-in-law appreciates her a lot and is very supportive and they are very happy. Now she has even left her job and looking after the children and he is still very supportive. Even after her PhD, she is now a homemaker. So, it has worked out very well.”

I proceeded to ask Roja about how they dealt with divorce for their first daughter:

“In the case of my first girl, it was not acceptable at all. A divorce was not acceptable at all. My husband and I went through trauma; we just could not accept it. But they made it so difficult that there was no other choice left. They wanted to get him remarried and all that. So, we went through a trauma and that was exactly the time that he too had a heart attack and he passed away, a massive heart attack. He has never been to the hospital in the 30 years that we have been married, totally healthy person but I won't say that it was the divorce that caused it, but it could have been the workload, it could have been so many other things. But he passed away and of course I went through a lot of stress. It wasn't easy. And his passing away of course added so much more to it. It wasn't easy because a divorce should be avoided at all cost, I feel. Things should work out and both involved should work it out. I feel marriages are, I didn't know my husband when I married him at all. So, we worked it out. We came from completely two different families, background, upbringing but we worked it out. It was difficult, I found it difficult to work it out. He found it difficult to work it out with me but we worked it out because we were conditioned to stay in a marriage. That was a conditioning that was, we

grew up with. There was no talk of, divorce was not an option. We grew up with that. So, we never, it never passed on our mind to even think about it. We knew we had to work it out. But nowadays, children have options. They look at the world around and they are not going to be, I mean, you cannot say that, oh, this has never happened in our community. You have to work it out. You can't say that to them because they look around and they see why should we be caught up in this and fight with each other or fight with the families every day in and out? Let us be free. Let us have our own mind, let us think, let us do our own things. If he can be free and do his own thing, good. I can be free, I can do my own thing, let me do it. Why stick to this and live for others? Children these days don't want to live for others. But we never thought like that. We thought a marriage was everything and that was the end of everything. So, we never thought of divorce and I think that has worked out beautifully for us. I've had a fantastic 30 years of marriage and it was an arranged marriage but now I can't say that to my children.”

When asked about how arranged marriages differ from the yesteryears to now, Roja says:

“Arranged marriages like 20 years back like when my daughter got married, it was easy because even my daughter thought, okay, fine ‘amma’ is saying this or ‘appa’ is saying this, I will do it. There was no objection on her side and neither did my son-in-law. But now, I don't think it's going to work that way. They've got to meet each other. They've got to know each other a little bit. Just by looking at the photograph and coming to a conclusion will not work out I think unless they have

known the family in some way or have heard good things about them. Some impressions must be there.”

When I asked why marriages these days still did not seem to work out even after meeting prior to the wedding day and when those days’ marriages worked out without being able to meet, Roja added:

“Simple one-word answer is, education of the girls especially. Those days the boys were educated. Especially in the Nagarathar community you don’t go and look for an uneducated boy, I mean, in the middle class at least. You never looked for an uneducated boy. You made sure that the boy was well educated. But then the girl was not that educated. So, she took everything and whatever the husband turned out to be, she put up with that nonsense. But now you can't do that because girls are equally or more educated than the boys. So, you can't tell them, oh you just listen to me and you just do as I say. Neither can parents-in-law do that. It’s wrong I think.”

I then proceeded to ask her about the dynamics of marriages these days, like housework, chores, etc., and what the millennials should expect or prepare to do, and for this Roja says:

“If they both understand each other and they both share the work and they know that they have to do it, it’s fine. It’s fine. That’s the way it should be. Ideally they should share the work because they are both working outside, they should share the work. But what has happened is, the boys having been brought up by Nagarathar mothers in a very different way, where the mother, they’ve seen the mother do

everything for the father. The man will not pick the paper and put it in its place. He will never touch the broom, he will never wash the dishes. They've seen this and they always say, "Shaan pullai irunthalam aanpillai". Even if you are small, you are still a boy. They have brought up their sons like that. I think that is what is causing the trouble. But girls now being educated, they don't want to do that. They don't want to be a slave to anybody and they think that equality means sharing everything half. Personally I don't think that should be the way. At least initially in the marriage, the girls too should understand the ways boys have been brought up, especially if they are overseas. The girl is from overseas and the boy is from India oh gosh, that's going to be a lot of problem because all, he has seen his grandmother, his aunts, his mother, all working for the men. So, he comes with that kind of upbringing, you can't blame him. He comes with that kind of upbringing.

And a Western educated girl in the United States is not going to like that. But I feel that they should learn to adjust, the boy should come down a little bit and know that this is a different country, this is a different culture where I too have to share in the housework and the girls too should give them time to change. I think they do go overboard sometimes and expect husbands to immediately come in and cook or wash the dishes or clean the floor or vacuum the carpet but that may not happen immediately. A lot of marriages break up because of that because girl's expectations of the boy are very high and that's why I feel they should marry somebody whom they know. I don't think there is any other option now. They have to know. Both sides have to know each other."

Analyzing the above response from Roja, this is seemingly becoming a huge problem amongst marriage-age men in the Chettiar community. They are expecting the wives to do everything when nowadays the workload must be shared as both spouses have to work to make ends meet and also because almost all Chettiar women are well-educated and have dreams and aspirations of their own, rather than be homemakers.

One important point that Roja makes in the quote below is about perseverance in a marriage and trying to make it work:

“If the differences are something that they cannot deal with or cannot overcome like, this really happened, like I said, the girl never wanted to have children in the first few years of marriage and the boy wanted to have children immediately. I mean it could be money matters which they feel that they just cannot put up with, then it is better that they breakup before the marriage rather than after the marriage. But it’s all very, I feel the way we have lived and seen life and the way our mothers and fathers have lived and our grandfathers and grandmothers have lived, the perseverance is not there. That I must work this marriage out, that is not there...They easily give up, that’s the word. They easily give up...and then they go for a divorce. So, it’s better that they know each other before the marriage whether it’s six months or a year or whatever and then get married.”

After this, we talked about the topic of parents-in-laws, the role they play in a marriage and the extent to which they have a say in their children’s marriage. Roja pointed out that:

“Actually in the era that I belong to, the mothers, the girl’s mother will never say anything after the girl is married off. They let the boy’s parents, boy’s side take all

the decisions. But now, it's not so. The girl's parents involve a lot in the marriage and they say, no, my daughter should not be treated like this, my daughter should not be treated like that. And I think that causes a lot of trouble. And the boy's side too, they say, oh this girl is so educated and she is showing it off here and she is not listening to us and they come in. I think both sides should not interfere completely, they should be left to live on their own, if possible in their own places. That distance maintained will have, I mean they'd be able to have a good rapport with both sides of the, both side parents by living out on their own. This joint family and all that, if it works out, excellent. I'm all for joint family living. That's why Chettinad houses are so big, they are built for joint living and extended families, completely meant for that. But now, the way things are, how many parents-in-law do not involve themselves with the children. If they can live together and not involve in the decisions that the children make, fine, excellent. But living together causes a lot of problem because they interfere. And the girl has to, although she is educated, she has to do a lot of housework. Like in India I see, a very, she's a professor, she had to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning and cook with the mother-in-law and then go to work. The mother-in-law will sleep after that but she has to go to work. And both of them are professors, they are in Karaikudi actually. It's actually my relative, my cousin. Sorry, my cousin's daughter. So, they both go to work and the mother-in-law expects the same kind of housework from a girl who works outside the whole day. She has to have energy to work there in the college. So, how does she perform at home as well? But they have to live together because the boy is not willing to give up the parents. They have to live together. So, these kinds of things I think will

not work out anymore and I think it's cruel also. I mean they have a life to live as well. Parents should come in when they ask for advice. Other than that I don't think they should interfere, both sides."

We discussed about expectations of a marriage shortly after and this is what Roja had to say about many things like dowry, personality traits desired, amongst many other things in this modern day and age:

"Expectations, okay, you used the word dowry. I don't think the boy to be married ever asks for a dowry. It is always the parents. I don't think, boys never even talk about it, I think. it is the parents who ask for it and there's been a lot of trouble in the past because of dowry. That has become the biggest problem and they expect even after the marriage, the girl side should pay so much for Dipawali, pay so much for Pongal, must bring a number of things when these festivals come. There's been a lot of trouble because of dowry. But I think the middle class now is slowly coming away from it because they know, girls are also educated, they are also going to work, they are going to bring in income. So, I think they are slowly coming away from it. And now the girl's number being less than the boys, I don't think that will play a big role anymore. Like during my mother's days, my father's side did everything for her. They put the diamonds and they paid her so much "Varahan" (It is a measurement of gold used locally), they call it. And they brought her over. The girls didn't bring a lot of stuff with them. The boys actually went over and they did all the diamond jewelry and they brought the girl over. So, it's not too away in the past that this was happening. So, all this is because of the affluence and the power

that the boys had over the girls. But I think now the thing will change because there are less girls than boys. And other expectations coming to that, other expectations like, well I think the girls want a very supportive husband. I think that's main thing that they look for. Support in whatever they do. Of course nowadays they are usually educated when they get married and perhaps they have a hobby, perhaps they are interested in other things. I think they expect the husband to be supportive of whatever they do. Like I got, I was 19 when I got married and my husband supported me all the way through all my degrees. He in fact encouraged me to do it. So, 'till PhD my husband was extremely supportive of me. He did a lot of things for me to complete my studies, very supportive. So, nowadays I think any girl in any marriage would want the husband to be supportive. And in a Chettiar family, that's what is lacking I think, where the boys are not supportive of the girls, so, that's the thing that she would look for. And the boys, I think they expect the girls to be, other than education, they expect them to be more home bound. They want them to be good cooks. They want them to look after the children well. Although they are working, they still expect that because this has come all the way down from ages. These were the roles of women and these were the roles of men."

About love marriage versus arranged marriage, Roja mentioned that:

"I think love marriages are great. The way things are going now, the way the rate of divorces, I think love marriages would work out definitely better than arranged marriages. Not that love marriage works out. There have been few cases, very, very few and far in between cases where the girl and boy loved each other, they knew

each other because they were family friends and they got married, they went to America and they broke up. After having two children they broke up. So, not all love marriages workout. But if within the community you can fall in love and marry somebody, great. I think that's wonderful, that's wonderful. What else do you want? I mean, you know each other, you like each other, you like each other's interests, you fall in love, you marry, wonderful. I don't think it's on the rise, very far – I mean, sorry, very few and far in between. Love marriages are taking place. Like internet, I find some people start browsing and they find somebody who have the same interest. They see each other on Skype, they like each other. I have seen such marriages, very few, such marriages happening. Great. But very few, I wish that would happen more where they actually know each other and get married. You can't, for the rest, you can't talk about the rest of their lives because if something happens later 15 or 30 years later and they breakup, that's, I mean, beyond anybody's, you know that's destiny but if you love somebody and get married, wonderful. But very few are happening.”

On Chettiar millennials and following their culture nowadays, Roja responds by saying:

“We are an ethnic group. We have a lot of culture. We have a very rich culture behind us. I think children should recognize that and appreciate that and try to take it up, take it way beyond for generations to come. That's why I believe marrying within the community because we have a fantastic culture but I don't know how many people live by that anymore. The way my parents lived, I have got great respect for the culture and I know how my grandparents lived. I've got great respect

for the culture. But now with all this nuclear family system and all that, I think we've come away a lot and then still want to go back when it comes to marriage of our children. In India they preserved that culture and it's all about 'daan dharmam', building temples and preserving the religion, spirituality and art and so many other things came along with it. But now we are no more in that surrounding anymore. We've all come away from India and we're all in nuclear family systems. So, we are all forgetting that rich culture. Marrying within doesn't mean, oh I'm a Chettiar you are a Chettiar we marry. That's not it. There is a lot of rich culture, how generous they were. Thiruvalluvar (an ancient poet) has talked about many aspects of what it is to be a good person. Thiruvalluvar has talked so much about it. A lot of Chettiars live by that I feel in the past. But now it is all about financial well being. So, we don't care for each other even in the way that we cared for each other in the past. I know some poor families, Chettiar families here who are not getting any support from the rich. And when I started an education fund, there were people to crush it and throw it away rather than help because they say, we are giving community, we are not a receiving community. But there are people out there who are poor, Chettiar people who are poor. So, where has your culture gone? We are a very generous community; we are a very generous ethnic group. So, we should think of all those and live like that. In India we are categorized as a forward community because we are affluent, we are rich. So, they don't give us jobs, they don't give us places in the university because we are a forward community. But being forward does not mean money, being forward does not mean affluence and being financially wealthy. It's far more than that. I think being forward in your

thinking, that is what matters. If at all your child falls in love with somebody else from another community, you can advise her. You can say, look this is what you are going to lose out if you marry outside, this is what you're going to lose out. But if she is head over heels in love with that person, you stop her and you get her married off to another person, do you think she's going to be happy? After all what do you want for your child? Happiness. In that sense, a lot of us still need to move forward. And I think when you're living in a country like this, you've got to be very cognizant of what the other Tamils are doing in this country and not just "Gundu Chetti Kulle Kuthire Otta Mudiyaide" (It is a proverb Tamilnadu saying it is unnecessary interference)."

In the later parts of our conversation, there was a lot of Tamil that was spoken by Roja and so including that in this thesis is quite difficult and unnecessary as well, I feel, for the aim of this thesis. One important thing about culture and children in the Chettiar community that she discussed is that the upbringing of the child matters, and that it is very important for them to grow into individuals by virtue of parents and family who readily and willingly accept as well as embrace the idea of traditional arrange marriage. She says that how they influence and culturally adapt their child to the surroundings of any environment while being cognizant of everything else around them is vital in their children being favorable towards arranged marriage regardless of how open, modern, or culturally assimilated their children may be with regards to their friends, for example, from other communities.

## Chapter 4: Case Studies of Recent Arranged Marriages in the Chettiar Community

### 4.1 Case Study 1

This is a story of a Malaysian bachelor who is 28 years old and a woman he was going to marry who was 24 years old. This arrangement between a Malaysian bachelor and an Indian bachelorette did not work out because although the two families were rich and wealthy, the boy's side demanded for extensive dowry. The girl's family agreed to every demand without any hesitation and trust that the boy's family would take care of their daughter well. They gave a BMW car, a semi-detached house, a Patek Philippe watch, 100 pounds of jewelry comprising gold, silver, gems, etc., and a cash deposit of \$20,000 USD. Through all these talks with a mediator/matchmaker between the two sides, the boy didn't seem to like the girl since the beginning but he was coerced into the marriage because it is a good proposal (for familial image reasons, social standing of family in the community, etc.). Since he disagreed with the marriage from the beginning, it is not certain as to whether the boy did this on purpose or not but he told the girl upfront that she needs rhinoplasty. Not only this, when the boy's mother was bringing the girl to the engagement in the car, she noticed and inquired about some heat blotches on her back (visible with a saree) in an interrogative way. The boy also mentioned reasons such as her height, her facial structure and beauty and her appearance. Many people believe that the boy did this on purpose because he was not happy with the girl (nobody knows the true reason why, however). Anyway, all of these negative remarks and disgusting comments combined made the girl very uncomfortable and she told her parents everything. Once they knew about all this, they decided to call off the wedding because they knew she wouldn't be happy with this marriage. So the

marriage was called off after a lavish engagement in India. Now both parties are happily married to the spouses of their choice (all from wealthy – same socioeconomic backgrounds).

#### 4.2 Case Study 2

Although this story is about two mates from India, it is somewhat relatable to the current situation in Malaysia as well, because as I have mentioned before, the behavior and culture of Chettiars in India and Malaysia are very much similar in many ways, although there are some notable differences.

This arrangement also lasted until after the engagement but not the wedding. The boy is from India and the girl as well. They are both from the same socioeconomic background in that they are both of upper-middle class families. The boy is a reserved and shy type but the girl is a dominating and extroverted type. This is known through community gossip, as with many other things. The strength of gossip amongst not just womenfolk, but also menfolk in the Chettiar community (many Indian communities too, actually. So it is not exclusive to the Chettiars) is strong and most of the times very negative and belittling. Gossip and rumour spreads like wildfire in the Chettiar community. Since both mates were living in different states, they conversed through technological means instead of meeting in person. Through their initial conversations via phone calls, Skype, etc., the boy could already sense that he did not feel comfortable with her and that she is definitely not his type. She always spoke about her life, her plans, her career goals and everything was about her but she never once inquired about him during their conversations. The boy kept quiet about this for the fear of his parents getting upset after so much planning was done. One day, the girl's mother invited her future son-in-law to their house for breakfast. During that

meet, she explicitly and directly told the boy that he has to reduce weight before the wedding (note, that he was not fat per se, but rather slightly on the average body type) and that he cannot have more than two idlis (a steamed rice dish) that morning at their home. The boy felt so embarrassed by this that he had had it and told his parents everything about what he feels, etc. Many more such events of which I am not so sure about (as you can see, no matter how much gossip and rumour I know to write this case study, there is always so much more out there!) led to the boy telling his parents to call off the wedding. The boy's side realized that the daughter is so domineering and instructive because in her home the mother is of that type and the father is the quiet one. This points out how the girl is because it speaks to the necessary demeanor of the girl: not pushy, not telling her husband what to do, dominating, a bit subservient, but also modern. The groom's side did not want this arrangement to proceed. Now, the two parties are happily married to other proposals that came through. The boy got married to a girl from New Zealand and now they both live in India.

## Chapter 5: Millennial Chettiars and Arranged Marriage in Malaysia

In this chapter, I will highlight various quotes from the interviews with the millennials about their perspectives towards arranged marriage in this era. From these direct quotes, I will analyze them and we will understand what they mean to the individual and within the Chettiar society at large. This chapter is meant to uncover and voice out the ideas and thought processes of these millennials, who in many cases, have no other avenues to do so. There are many themes that arise throughout these conversations with the millennials and many of them are reoccurring. Some themes that we will see through the following direct quotes include, marital pressure, societal standards, importance of an education, personality traits, and desired characteristics in a mate.

Dharshini, a female millennial aged 25, practices as a dentist. Her parents are currently looking for a groom for her. The search is ongoing but she is yet to find the “right man”. She talks about the topic of arranged marriage being a sensitive topic for her and about the process of finding the “right man”:

“I feel as it’s a sensitive topic because most of us are trying to succumb to what our parents have in their minds. So, if we try to put our ideas in the open, most of them have something else in mind. It’s either we satisfy ourselves or our own needs or theirs. That’s why it’s a sensitive topic... They started looking for someone suitable for me when I was just 23 but however I still haven’t found the one person who – that one suitable person for myself. So, no, I am not engaged or very much less married.”

When asked about dating, she says it is very common and that it is possible only if the two mates are from agreeable temples (this is a part of the matchmaking process within the Chettiar community – every family belongs to one of nine temples in India and so the individuals must be from marriageable temples, meaning temples that do not have a sister-brother relationship. This was done as to avoid incest and child deformity):

“Common, dating during high school or college is not very common unless people actually know which temple they are from. In this case you can't really go out to a guy and say, “Hey which temple are you from? Can I date you?” So, that kind of thing cannot happen. So, it's not very common. But however, if they do find the right person who is also a Chettiar then they will be allowed to date but that also depends on their parents. There are many acceptable activities like going to the movies with a group definitely because that will just make it less obvious if they are going to be doing it in groups. It's more trying to get to know people, so, yeah, I don't see why not...I was most definitely allowed to date but it's just that I never really found someone who could match up to my level, so, yeah...My parents are pretty open minded but since I've never really dated anyone, I think that even if someone were to say something to them, they wouldn't really take it to heart because there are always people talking but that really falls back on the person again. Then again we need to think about whether we are living our lives for ourselves or we're living it for them. So, my parents are not the sort of people who would take everything into consideration. In fact, they would come to me and they'd ask me what happened.”

Talking about gossiping and dating, she says:

“People naturally think that words travel faster but that’s where they are wrong. Words travel a lot slower than being in a big city like Kuala Lumpur where words travel actually a lot faster. So, if I really wanted to date someone and hide it, I can do it – I have a higher chance of making it success in Johor than I can do it in Kuala Lumpur...It’s very natural for someone to actually make up a small [Inaudible 10:21] rumor about a person. If it’s not really official and not out there then they just have a tendency to hook up small stories about, ‘Oh how this guy is actually dating this girl and how she is from this family and she is from that family’, but none of it is true or most of it can be true. But we will never know because like I said, it’s just rumor. People come to know by word of mouth, usually it’s always word of mouth...No, it’s not really happened to me before and my parents, even if this had happened, a situation like this had happened, my parents would probably be like, ‘don’t bother’. And I don’t think that it will actually affect, something this small wouldn’t affect any arranged marriages because these people [Inaudible 11:23] of people who are getting married now, they don’t make a blind decision.”

On being asked about what she thinks of or looks for in a good mate, Dharshini says:

“When I think about a good mate, I usually think about someone who’s financially independent. [Inaudible 11:43] be able to love me for who I am actually. And accept me for who I am. I think this is basically what every parent think as well. Obviously they have a lot more on their checklist than we do because they want someone who is good for us, someone who loves us, someone who takes care of us. And for us

it's mainly if he can support or be the pillar of support for whatever that we want to do is more than enough...What I think and my parents think are pretty much similar. So, it's a basic understanding we don't really discuss much about it."

Her criteria for a marriage partner is as follows and she calls it a "shopping list":

"The criteria for a good marriage partner, I definitely wouldn't want someone who is shorter than me, who is more than me. But then again, that's all through – how do you say it, more on the physical side of it. But when I think about it mentally, I actually want someone who is adventurous, knows how to think themselves, judge situations and if anything at all, if any problems arise, knows how to discuss the problems and solve it more than giving up in the situation. Yeah, that sort of a person. But in terms of height and weight or skin color, not very particular because perfection is basically what a person on his own thinks about the world...Well it's more like creating a shopping list. So, you will write down every single thing that you want and then you check it out, as in you tick it. Once you get it, you tick it. So, this is basically, what you are asking me, is skin color really something that I look at. Personally, no. I don't look at skin color. But there are people who actually do look at skin color and they are very particular. It's then again their preference. They must have a reason and I can't really say it's right or wrong because you never know their side of the story, what they want."

A very important question or issue raised by Dharshini and also her main concern about this whole process of arranged marriage and finding the right spouse:

“My only concern is that people generally have a tendency to surprise you. So, even after going through every single thing, the person’s profile, asking them a million questions, meeting them for coffee day after day, what if we missed one or two things that are really important? And we’re already married. So, now the question just becomes, how are we going to accept it because this is not something that we’re prepared for and this is how they’ve actually surprised us. So, we’ve got to be prepared for it now. My only concern is that, will I be able to accept the person that I am going to marry as who he is as a whole without wanting to change him unless he himself wants to change for the better. That’s my only concern.”

On why arranged marriages do not work, Dharshini says:

“The reason why sometimes arranged marriages don’t work out is, parents can be a little forceful when making a decision. Being very persistent about who the person gets married to. And children have a tendency, okay, I don’t want to hurt my parents. So, I don’t want them to suffer the consequences. Therefore I shall listen to whatever they are saying and get married to who they like. So, it’s like listening to a – it’s like a forced decision. Similar example of a forced decision would be, what I said earlier, short span of time. A person usually can't make a decision in a short span of time because to get to really know the person, it will take a lot of time. It’s not only the strengths you want to know about, you also want to know the flaws. So, it will definitely take time. That’s two main reasons why an arranged marriage usually does not work. But sometimes even in love marriage it does not work because it’s different when you’re not living under the same roof and it’s different

when you are living under the same roof because then responsibilities are shared equally and they are not really – before they live under the same roof, they don't really know how the other person is through and through, I mean, thoroughly. But when they do live under the same roof that's when all the surprises come into play.”

I also asked a question about why Chettiars bank on traditional arranged marriage as the primary way of union when the Chettiar community is praised as a very progressive and forward thinking community. About this, Dharshini says:

“We're definitely a progressive, forward thinking community but that is the current generation. There is a gap. I wouldn't say, I wouldn't agree completely to the statement nor would I completely disregard it. Reason is because there is a huge generation gap between the generation now and the way the generation before us actually thinks. We are definitely, the current youth, we are definitely progressive and forward thinking because we want to change. We are not going to force our children to marry within the community but most of us also know the consequences of doing so. Do we still bank on traditional methods or form of arranged marriages? Some of us do but we don't follow it so strictly because these kind of rules and these traditions and arranged marriages are all brought about by humans. Cultures always change. Humans created cultures, I'm pretty sure they can create it again. That is basically my answer.”

Her family is very open with her having a love marriage even outside the community. There will be no repercussions and she will lead a normal, happy life as with anyone who would have had an

arranged marriage. However, not all Chettiar parents think this way. In fact, most do not approve of marriage outside the community or love marriages. On the topic as a whole, Dharshini concluded her interview by saying:

“Arranged marriages up to a certain point they are definitely a good thing. It keeps a person in check. So, I wouldn’t really say, it shouldn’t be abolished but at the same time, why not take a person’s perspective into consideration. Just because it isn’t abolished doesn’t necessarily mean that we don’t have to listen to what people have to say.”

Now let’s look at another millennial, Shyan, who is 25 and a male. He is an auditor for a small company. This is what he thinks of expectations of a marriage for a boy and how he deals with the topic of arranged marriage in his home:

“From what I’ve observed, expectations from marriage are that of course the boy must be good-looking, well-educated, and with a 5-figure salary. I think from what I’ve been observing, of course the boy shouldn’t be bald as that’s the only thing I’ve been noticing for quite some time. Yes, of course it is a very sensitive topic right now...Yes, in my home when it comes to this topic about love marriage or arranged marriage, it’s very sensitive. When it comes to arranged marriage, yes of course. I tend to avoid any conversation relating to that topic...If I wouldn’t say anything at home, I think my parents would start looking for a girl when I turned 24. I was studying then, anyway. But still if they were given a choice, I think they would call me (inaudible 08:46) when I turned 24-25 itself. Well, they do respect all my commitments, etc. and I respect that about them so the ideal age is when my kid is 29 or 30 but if I were given an option, if I were married at the age of 31, I

would say yes because I didn't know what's going to happen and I have to live my life as well (giggles). I'm not saying anything bad but of course I have to live my life as well. I have many goals to achieve.”

Besides this, he recounts an experience:

“I think I should share my experience with you. Apart from my family, my uncle's son is the oldest in the family so he's 27 right now. He's been arguing to postpone his marriage because of the financial commitments and he's work-committed. Marriage is a whole other thing and there are two lives involved in it. So to accommodate everyone and... At my home, I've argued a lot with my parents about this. I think the most suitable age looking at the current era is 29 or 30. I don't think it's old. You can always get married when you're settled because marriage is one of the... You can even get married at 35. It depends on the person's choice and perspective. But it's not that old.”

Boomi is a female millennial who is 22 years of age (the youngest I interviewed) and has just finished her undergraduate degree in mechanical engineering. She is the second of three children.

About dating, she says:

“In Malaysia, I would say that the chances are really low. It never happened to me or to my parents before. As regards boys, I think they would be okay as long as I tell them who I am going out with; honestly and openly. A single boy and not a group; they will be more than okay. That is because I tell my parents about my friends and even they know about their beings as well. Not as a friend but what they

do and how is their family background and stuff like that. Other than that; going out late nights is a no. They have curfews and the main reason is not that you will engage in some kind of activities they don't like but more to...there is more to it. As a daughter; I know that my parents are more concerned about my safety and they feel...(disturbance)...Urban cities like Mega cities; yes! there is a strong correlation about where you grew up...Some kind of freedom about where you can go out and hang out with friends and all that. In India, the same thing won't happen because they are more traditional I would say. In cases where you are from some other village; they are more conservative. If you happen to go to Chennai in Tamilnadu. In India; it is one of the mega cities. They will be more open. So cities do matter actually. Because you are going to school in that city. You are with the peers which have the same amount of freedom, so your parents think it is not wrong. So I guess like old people...like overall...if everyone is doing it like overall...they didn't find it that wrong...For me and myself, I don't believe all this unless I have seen it. (disturbance). If they are really smart, they won't show it. If they are open about it; either they are very confident or...(disturbance)...I don't think I have any specific thing to say, because I am not the one deciding. The parents pick certain criteria for me. I think the next question is so I will answer during the next question. So I don't think I have any idea about this.”

About gossip and talk within the Chettiar community, Boomi says:

“Your existence is already known. You could face more problems by hanging with them. if you are with your friends; you cannot be rude and run away and talk behind

that. You are already friends by hanging out...So I don't want to raise more issues or problems and at the same time I don't really enjoy hanging out in the community because I feel like eyes keep watching me and judging me. The judgmental eyes are always there. Certain groups of people are judgmental. I can feel that personally but I don't know. I cannot judge them. They are, of course-nice people, but I don't like that you have to be consciously aware that you are good you know? You cannot be yourself and that kind of thing constrains me so I don't want to be a part of it and I don't want to get like...My mom sometimes says that, "If you get involved, you will get a bad name" or something. I just laugh. Sometimes it turns out to be true though. I don't want to be part of it. It really hurts them. I know that person and if they start talking about it. I hear in my own ears; then I wonder how can they talk these things? Someday if this were to happen to you and your name was spoken of; it would be especially hurtful for your parents. I don't want to put myself in that situation in the first place and so I don't hang out with them."

Boomi talked about arranged marriage being an "understood thing". She puts it as:

"They talked about marriage a little. They expect me to get into an arranged marriage but they never ever said it to my face that, "You have to get an arranged marriage". It is an understood thing. The way I was brought up was like that. Everyone in my family was like that. You should understand. By the way they talk, you should get hints here and there. Will it involve anyone? Of course. Most likely it will be relatives. I won't say very close relatives. Someone like you get to know like from this family or that. They will liaise you with the other family. If you like

it; you will carry forward and if you don't; then just cut it off at that...My parents want me to get married before 25 because after 25, you are quite old for the market. Actually long back, it was quite earlier. It is like 25 right now. For me, 25, even later would be nicer. If they think it is right, I guess it should be right. I have no reason to say no and no reason to say yes. So I feel it is right at that time. If I am ready for it, I would say yes. If I don't think I am ready for it; I would say no...If I don't like an arranged marriage, then the day the marriage is being arranged; then I would say that I don't like it. But I cannot completely say no without a reason. They will ask a reason and I don't have a reason to say no to it right now. If I have a strong reason like I cannot do this; I will tell them. Right now, at this age, or in few years time, I still have no reason, then I have to follow them. Because I believe that if you have to do anything you have to have a reason and if you still have no reason then they must be right. I don't find anything wrong in arranged marriage. I have more time. I still have no reason because my parents have done it and lot of people have done it. So there are high chances it may work out. I have to think more about it actually.”

Arranged marriage versus love marriage and what she knows, has heard or seen:

“Friends or acquaintance who had no arrangement, I have known. I have known few. Most of them had an arranged marriage. It did work out. They seem happy on facebook and instagram. They are happy. Within a year or something; I cannot tell. They have to live for at least a few years to get to know each other and in the same house of course. now people are scattered because of their work and stuff. They are

living far apart. So they have to live together and get to know. That is because right now; they are getting to know each other. Otherwise it will show in a year's time. Then only I can say like...will it work out or not. It is too early to decide in my group of course. Arranged marriages which did not work: Yes I know a few arranged marriages which did not work because they come up with silly reasons like the man already had someone he liked or the woman is already in a relationship with someone. Of course if she was in a relationship with someone; she would have told her parents and those are rumors and they are not true. Personally, no one actually told me why it did not work out. Mostly it was because of rumors that they end up in divorce. Then the groom's side: the husband's side would go after the wife's side and the wife's side will go against the husband's side and they will come up with all the reasons to put down the other side so they are winning. They would blame mental issues which they didn't know about. That is pretty crazy to tell someone right? Some real reasons are like mostly difference of opinions which didn't work out. They didn't get along or they didn't like each other or they just got married because of their parents or something like that.”

I asked Boomi if it is easier for men or women to marry outside the community and she replied by saying:

“I think it is equally hard for a guy and a girl but within the family; for a girl to step out; is harder. But as a whole, the community for a girl marrying outside; they will talk the same crap thing and if a guy marries out; they will say the same thing. “He is a guy”; of course they won't say that. Once you are out, you are out. Within the

family; they will try to oppress your feelings. Make you think you are doing wrong to girl. They think guys cannot be tamed and go our way. So they think that girls are easy to convince, you know.”

About the Chettiar community being progressive, this is what Boomi has to say:

“Okay we are a progressive and forward thinking community. Of course we are. Why do you think we still bank on traditional methods? It is very simple. Of course we believe that we have to progress and we want to think forward but we want to do it as a community and not an individual. How do you do that? You get married within the community. Have more kids. Reproduce like hundreds of Chettiar kids and make them marry hundreds of Chettiar kids and make it huge and huge where you are moving forward as a group and not as an individual. That is your main idea. Of course they can create so many new stuffs for being creative or innovative but they want to be together. They want to be well respected in their community as well as outside. They want to do it. Move outside and do it but they don’t want to do it alone. They want that to happen. So that is why they are thinking like that. The only way to keep them together is like marrying within the community. That’s all.”

As it can be seen, the millennials have varied responses towards the idea of arranged marriage. An analysis and discussion of the responses of millennials is not really useful as their responses already have the required reasoning and also it is possible to understand what they mean and where they are coming from based on all the information and analysis done throughout the thesis about arranged marriage.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

In essence, most Chettiar millennials are agreeable to the idea of arranged marriage. They understand the importance and significance of marrying within, although this means having to give up a few things. The value attached with heritage, lineage and the rich Chettiar culture, evokes a sense of passion and pride amongst youth, convincing them that arranged marriage is the way. They all seem happy and content about this idea and embrace it with open arms. Only one or two of them were leaning towards a “no” for an arranged marriage, and they had their own reasons. All millennials enjoyed discussing this topic and were jovial about it. They all felt a sense of relief and openness after the interview with me. I in turn learned a lot through this thesis – ethnographic methods, interviewing skills, about arranged marriage in-depth, and many, many other things. The millennials and I learned from each other and I thoroughly enjoyed conducting, writing, and presenting this research to a broad audience.

## Chapter 7: Future Work

There is so much that can be done in this topic and with the amount of data I have collected. This thesis barely even scrapes the surface of what is a very heavy, broad and convoluted topic. However, it is a very interesting topic and one that must be further researched. This research has its boundaries in terms of demographics, age, location, etc., but if this same topic can be researched on a different locality or demographic. Hence, as it can be seen, there is so much potential for not just this one topic or theme, but rather the myriad of topics – not just marriage – that are pertinent to the Chettiar community that can be researched. The Chettiar culture is one of its kind in the world and is regularly featured in many news sites and travel magazines as a unique heritage and culture. Tourism in Chettinad is booming and the identity of the Chettiars stretch across the seas. The Chettiar culture and its people are an anthropologist's haven. Potential research topics are abundant and there are lots of efforts needed to maintain the Chettiar culture, especially their palatial homes that were built more than 150 years ago. I urge Chettiar millennials to take a strong interest in their culture and to champion conservation efforts and do their part in valuing, recognizing, appreciating and loving their identity. I also encourage anthropologists, both young and old to take a peek into the Chettiar culture as you will be mesmerized and to possibly conduct research in one of the needed areas. There is so much to uncover, learn and expose through modern research to fully value the beauty of the Chettiar culture and heritage.



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## Appendix: Interview Questions for Millennials

1. Tell me your name, age, where you live now and where you grew up.
2. What are you doing now? Tell me a little about your educational background. What is the highest degree you have?
3. Do you live with your parents? Who else is living in the household?
4. What do you think are the expectations for marriage in our community? Do you think it is a sensitive topic?
5. What is the typical age at which parents begin to look for a partner for their daughter or son?
6. Is there something that happens? Why do they do it then?
7. When you think about Chettiar millennials that you know, what percentage do you think have an arranged marriage? How does this vary by where they live (India, Singapore, Malaysia)?
8. Thinking about other Chettiars you know, how common is dating during high school or college? If young people are not allowed to date, what kind of social activities do they engage in, if at all? Are there acceptable activities, like going to the movies with a group, etc.?
9. How does this vary among those Chettiars who grow up in urban megacities, like Kuala Lumpur?
10. What do people say about a girl (or a boy) who is seen with a boy? How do people come to know?
11. When you think about a good mate, what do you think about? Is this what your parents think?

12. What are your “criteria” for a good marriage partner? Are there some aspects of a person that you could not overlook (e.g., height – too short, too tall; weight – too fat, too thin; skin color – too dark; academic qualifications; personality type; family history, etc.)
13. What are the plusses you look for in your future spouse?
14. Is the location of workplace of your future spouse important in making your decision?
15. Would this affect your chances of furthering your studies?
16. Are you making any preparations now for being on the marriage market (dieting or watching what you eat; skin bleaching or other treatments; etc.)
17. How actively are you involved in arranging your marriage? Or do you let your parents do all the work?
18. How active are you involved in the community?
19. Do feel like you have to learn how to cook before marriage? Is that a quality people look for? How about going to the gym and getting in shape? Does it help with the process?
20. Have your parents or others talked to you about getting married? Do they expect to arrange your marriage for you? Will anyone else be involved (professional matchmaker; grandparents; aunts/uncles)?
21. How do you feel about having an arranged marriage? If you didn’t agree with it, would you be able to tell your parents your thoughts?
22. Concerns about marriage?
23. Do you think the factors of arranged marriage that are already in place like clan temple, temple division, native village, etc. make arranged marriage harder? Why?
24. How happy are you with this type of arrangement? (1 – 10 scale)
25. How likely are you to have an arranged marriage? (1 – 10 scale)

26. Do you have any friends or acquaintances who did not have an arranged marriage? How did it work out? Can you tell me a story of an arranged marriage that did not work out/one that did work out?
27. What do you think are the main reasons why this type of arrangement does not work?
28. In India, now many young people are having love marriages, or some form of arranged love marriage. Why do you think your community continues to uphold arranged marriage as the way to marry, rather than some more “modern” form of marriage?
29. We are progressive, forward-thinking community. But why do you think we still bank on traditional methods/forms of arranged marriage?
30. Do you think Chettiars in India are changing their attitudes toward arranged marriage and allowing love marriages?
31. If yes, do you think the Chettiars in Malaysia should too or have they been allowing them already?
32. Do you think your parents will allow you to meet with your future bride/bridegroom before the wedding? If yes, under what context (skyping, email, in-person meet)?
33. How long are/will you be allowed to meet this person before marriage?
34. How do you feel about that?
35. How many people have you seen so far? Or if you haven't, how many do you think you would see or what is your take on it?
36. What is in the profile of a spouse that is exchanged? Is it his/her horoscope, astrology, biodata, etc.?
37. How would you rank the following based on the attributes of a person and family – Economics, personality, education, status, class, any other special thing.

38. What is exchanged at the time of marriage?
39. What are the expectations for the girl's side to give to the boy? What does the boy give to the girl?
40. How is this changing?
41. How do the arrangements for a marriage occur?
42. If a person does have an arranged marriage, what do the elders in the community say? What do other millennials say? How does this change across the diaspora? What would you say?
43. How would your family feel if you had a love marriage within the community? How about outside the community?
44. Do you think you would prefer an arranged marriage or love marriage within the community?
45. Do you think people are still expecting dowry or do you think the trend is slowly dying?
46. Lastly, would you like an arranged marriage or are you undecided?

THE END