

IMAGES AND LIVELIHOODS: CONSTRUCTING THE BENGALI MARRIAGE RITUALS AND PRACTICES IN INDIA

BASHABI GUPTA

DEPT OF GEOGRAPHY, MIRANDA HOUSE, UNIVERSITY OF DELHI

Abstract

The dialectics of the marriage spaces in the Bengali society is increasing creating fuzzy areas of modernity and tradition; both coexisting in the same shared space. Along with what remain steadfast in all times is the idea of the 'origin' that is where the family hails from, a sense which has gathered most important space amongst the Hindus after the partition of India in 1947. This sense of belonging to particular spaces associated with East Bengal (Modern day Bangladesh) or West Bengal (Encompassing the Indian state of West Bengal) is integral to definition of the origin. The origin space is thus the determinant of the rules and regulations of the marriage rituals within the broad parameters of the Bengali Hindu marriage rituals. This is capped by the understanding of being Bengali, a distinct social, economic and political identity that somewhere merges into one when it comes to showcasing the origin and its associated culture as visible in the marriage practices. The Bengali marriage may not form an acknowledged pattern of acceptance and negotiation of norms such as the village exogamy or even upward social mobilities for the family. Slowly there is also acknowledgement of the influences of the other communities marriage rituals, mostly as exemplified in the Hindi and the other language films and television shows that are viewed eagerly in Bengali Homes. The family space within Bengali marriage rituals and practices is slowly becoming redefined. What was earlier traditional and norm is no longer so. In this modernity is being defined variably by opening up of new economic spaces that provide opportunities but are in the informal sector. This paper looks at how these images are created and projected as being 'original' and 'perfectly Bengali' and process of their consumption by the Bengali society. Significance of culture, ritual and practices as defined by the origin of the family and kinship identities in marriage practices is explored herein. The paper also focuses on the new livelihoods that are thus created and takes into account the newly emergent economic spaces that have opened up. The nature of these livelihoods need to be understood as being gendered, ephemeral, informal and simultaneously perhaps progressing towards corporatisation.

Keywords: Emergent Economic Spaces, Being Bengali, Marriage Rituals, Family and Kinship Spaces, Informal livelihoods.

Introduction

In eastern India it is a common understanding that Bengal is a modern place. The concept of Bengal as a leading society of modern intellectuals that began the renaissance in India in the 18th and 19th century is well documented in Indian history. In the common understanding of everyday lives amongst the different communities who live in eastern India, Bengali societal modernity has been understood in three ways: one that women in Bengali society are better educated than their peers in other communities; two that this paves the way for them to work outside the home or

that they have access to some means of earning which is different from the household income generated only by the males and third, that marriage in Bengali society is also modern. What makes the Bengali marriage modern in eyes of the other communities is that it seems that the rules which bind them are found not to be applicable to the Bengali society. Within the middle class Bengali society modernity in marriages is seen in the changes brought about in the rituals and practices associated with marriages. This paper aims at constructing the rituals and practices associated with the Bengali marriage prevalent

in the society now through the lens of newly emergent livelihoods and creation of images. This paper is divided into four parts Section A outlines the methodology followed in the study, Section B deals with understanding of Bengali lineages, Section C focuses on the four newly emergent livelihoods that depend on marriage ceremonies and Section D looks at the creation of images influencing marriage practices.

Section A: Methodological Note

This research is based primarily on qualitative techniques. Bengali lineages are understood in this paper through the anthropological genealogical approach along with snowball sampling techniques. The main sources of such data are found in the *Kula Patrika*, *Kulaji* or *Kula Karika* (clan order books) of the higher castes. These books or rather scrolls also show the clan ranks of the different castes. The lower castes are then added further down the hierarchy with reference to their region and location. It is to be noted that the construction of the genealogical tree as per Western conceptions of kinship (River 1910, 1911, Barnes 1967, Barnard and Good 1984, Schneider 1984, Bouquet 1983, 1994) is difficult here as these genealogies are not just private property but rather they are common property resources of the entire community. Every family within the caste group is located within these genealogies. These are oral in nature. Indigenous constructions of being related are differentiated from kinship taxonomies and various regional alliances conducted as the sites of belonging within the Bengali society in this study. The narrations are done at the time of the marriage ceremonies by priests or the middleman matchmaker called the *Ghotok*. To record this oral history for Brahmins, Baidya and

Kayasthas (higher castes in Bengali society) purposive open ended interviews were held. I was not able to locate any *Ghotok* who could narrate the genealogies of any of the scheduled castes in Bengal. In total 6 *Ghotoks* were interviewed and Two more who specialised in marriage alliances of the intermediate castes refused to be interviewed.

Snowball sampling has been used as the respondents form a visible yet invisible part of the population forming a part of the 'link tracing methodologies' and thus situating 'hidden populations' (Spren, 1992). The concept of the marriage seemed to inspire one and all to say something yet all the sample respondents from the matchmaking middlemen to the people with marriage dependent livelihoods had to be traced and located. Usage of snowball techniques allowed moving from one informant to the other denoting movement through a mass of population until the one purposive respondent could be identified. This is a sampling method that does not utilise probability of occurrence as a selection criteria for the sample and helps in focusing on the intrinsic knowledge held within key informants who may otherwise not be a part of the study at all.

Structured interviews were held with the respondents whose livelihoods were found to be either primarily influenced or dependent on marriage ceremonies. Four livelihoods were then identified which were located within the neighbourhoods: designers cum boutique owners, beauticians who provided services at the customer's homes, *tatto* or trousseau decorators and designers and constructors of flower ornaments and decorations. 20 interviews were conducted.

Livelihood Category	Men	Women	Total
1. Designers/Boutique Owner	0	5	5
2. Beautician	0	5	5
3. Tatto Decorator	2	3	5
4. Flower Ornament Designer/Maker	4	1	5
Total	6	14	20

Image building was studied by focusing on the media and its interaction with the population. For this a wider sample of 100 people in different parts of Kolkata were interviewed, in which 50 respondents were men, women (25 each) who were stay at homes and 50 were

working men and women (35 women and 15 men) who spent at least 8-10 hours of the day outside the home for earning purposes. A wide variety of professionals were interviewed: doctors, teachers, computer engineers, bank managers, clerks, accountants, government

officials, clerks and corporate sector workers. This sample suggested that though Bollywood and Hollywood films influence fashion and behaviour Bengali films are most preferred. It is of significance that it was the Television serials that are beamed thrice daily (one new and two repeat episodes every day) and Telefilms that have the most influence upon the society. In accordance, three Television serials with the high TRP ratings and were mentioned as the respondents' favourites were analysed. These are: Goendaginni (The Detective Wife), Jol Nupur (Water Anklets), Bojhena Se Bojhena (He/She just does not understand), Tumi Asbe Bole (Because of your arrival).

Print media also was found to be influential as marriage related advertisements formed supplements to most widely circulated newspapers and magazines. The most read newspapers in this regard are Ananda Bazar Patrika (sunday special marriage supplement), The Telegraph (monday special marriage shopping supplement), Sananda and Sukhi Grihokon (happy homes) (monthly magazines with special supplements on marriage saris, dresses, jewellery, fashion tips, names of boutiques etc.

All interviews and fieldwork were carried out within the city of Kolkata and its sub-urban area in the period between 10 June and 18 July 2016. Names of all the respondents have been changed in this paper.

Section B: Understanding Of Bengali Lineages And Its Relation To The Marriage Rituals

In Bengal the understanding of the caste and clan structures genealogical data. One speciality of this is the fact that the geographical place is an important part of the genealogical location. The significance of the place is important as clans are demarcated on the basis of their location. For example, literal translation of the word *Rarh* in Bengali means dry and rough. Brahmins and Kayasthas (two of highest castes) are known as *Uttar Rarhi* (Northern Dryland) or *Dakshin Rarhi* (Southern Dryland). The subdivisions of each caste in various regions is also different as is their ranking. In Bengal the place and the space matters. Ibbetson's (1881) concepts of isogamy and hypergamy that form a basis for understanding caste clan and rank alliances in marriage laws in India does not fit the structure and concept of the Bengali marriage

patterns though it was adopted by Wise and Risley (1891) in creating the clan ranks in Bengal. Inden (1967) conceptualises the Bengali marriage clan rank relationship as a cultural concept where even the categories are based on cultural normative prevailing in the society.

The corporate genealogical records available in the Kulajis and Kula patrikas are divided into three sections. The first section looks at how the clans were formed, the second section focuses on the clan codes and the last section talks about the 'truth' regarding the births, marriages and deaths in the clan. Here the clan code deals with the gifts to be made in which *Kanyadan* (gifting of the girl) and *grahana* (accepting the daughter gift) in marriage forms an essential part of *dan*. Marriage norm and rules are also set out here. Village exogamy in marriage is not the norm in Bengal as prevalent amongst other Hindu castes in India. Here the caste is also territorial. Though caste preferences and prejudices exists yet the region or territory of the origin of that particular family in which ever caste is much more significant in Bengal. The caste/ clan ranks can also change as per the territory of origin. There is thus emphasis on the place of origin in Bengali society. Particular customs are attached with particular places originating families which may not be there for the same caste families originating in a different place and space. Territorial definition is significant here. In many cases inter caste marriages are preferred between families from the same territory or region. On a macro level, Bengali society is divided into two larger spaces of origin East Bengal pertaining the areas that form Bangladesh and West Bengal, parts of Bengal that have remained within the Indian territory at the time of partition in 1947. For example, the bride after marriage never leaves her natal home ceremonially to go to her matrimonial home for the first time before sunset amongst families with East Bengal origin whereas the ceremonial daughter *bidai* for families from West Bengal is always between sunrise to sunset and never after sunset.

The territory became important in Bengali society in the middle ages when under the Islamic rulers many new areas were settled. This was the process of spread of the different castes and opening up of services sector in administrative positions to people mainly from

the higher castes. Even then the caste hierarchy and rank in political life is not matched in Bengal. The Kshatriya and Brahmin castes maintain their attestation to in migration from the other regions. The lower castes provided the expansion of agriculture particularly the rice cultivation expansion also follow the same rules of territoriality as found in the higher castes. Thus Bengali lineages, castes and clans have an impact on the marriage rituals, preferences, customs which then all follow the territorial norms.

Section C: Newly Emergent Livelihoods That Depend On Marriage Ceremonies

Four livelihoods as mentioned in the methodological note were selected. These livelihoods were chosen on the basis of their being located entirely being dependent on the marriage ceremonies to exist or were influenced to a great extent by marriage rituals and practices. These four livelihoods are

1. Designers/Boutique Owners who provide exclusive or designer garments and saris
2. Beauticians who helped dress and put on makeup and face paint specific to the Bengali community.
3. *Tatto* or trousseau decorators
4. Designers and constructors of flower ornaments and decorations.

These livelihoods are also characterised by their being completely in the informal sector and as such they are not categorised anywhere as business men/women. Most of them began their business with loans from with the family. In case such people are married women, their start-up money came from their father or the natal family as support for the daughter in the matrimonial home. They all are home based activities in that either their services are located within their own homes or they go to the homes of their customers as per the demand of the customer who may also choose to be capricious such as sometimes they themselves come to the service providers home and at other times they ask the services to be home delivered. This also indicates that there is extensive catering to the customer's preferences of space and availability. Social capital is an integral part of these livelihoods as they only work through referrals. Thus they provide customised services to the brides, bride grooms and their families. Keeping these generalisations in mind four in-depth

interviews representing each livelihood are discussed here.

1. Mou is a boutique owner aged about 35 years. Her boutique consists of two almirahs and a few packets arranged neatly along one wall in the front room/ sitting room/front parlour (*bosar ghor*) in her parents' home (baper bari or father's house) who live a few doors away from her matrimonial home (sosur bari or father-in law's house). She got married when she 20 to the boy she loved who lived in the same neighbourhood. She also ascribes her ability to do this work of 'sourcing saris' and providing them to 'discerning customers' to both her parents and mother in law who appreciated her choices in the saris she herself wore and gifted to other family members. Moreover, her parents provided the initial capital investment to her and her mother in law took care of the household when she had to be out of the home for her business. Her husband was initially neutral then he supported her.

In the early days she would cart her merchandise to the different branches of two banks where she knew some lady who would get her an entry. The first contact was important as through her Mou has slowly built up a steady clientele. A mainstay of her business is providing exclusive saris and kurtas in both silks and cotton along with credit facilities to the ladies. In case of the customer asking for credit she then negotiates an every month payment mode or quarterly month payment mode. After she established a loyal client base she moved on to the marriage shopping market.

Mou likes doing wedding related work of finding saris and other garments for the family who employs her to help in the trousseau shopping requirements. The process begins with a list being provided to her detailing the number, type, price range and kinship status of the people for by commissioning person. Even the type of material to be procured is provided that is cotton or *Tant*, pure silks and saris or dresses, salwar kameez and lehenga for women and dhoti kurta, sherwani or hand worked shirts for men. Usually, the commissioning person is one with whom she has a relationship history (meaning she has conducted business with her prior to the wedding commission and knows or understands preferences or has been introduced to her through a very trusted source) and can trust to pay for the goods

delivered. The negotiation of payment is dependent upon the approximate total money involved in the procurement and the time taken for delivery and the convenience of the customer in making payments through the EMI process. Thereafter Mou procures the garments and saris as per the given list home delivers as per the customer's convenience. She provides two alternative choices for every unit of order. The customer is free to choose from the entire stock and then can return those that are not liked. Usually the delivery is on a Friday or Saturday as the relatives and the trousseau shopping group can meet on the Sunday and take decisions. The leftover stock is returned either on Monday evening or Tuesday.

Mou wants more of wedding related work. Earlier, this space was nonexistent as only families indulged in trousseau shopping. This work helps her in two ways: one she can also clear her stock as wedding requirements include a large number of saris and other garments and two she gets a larger profit margin during these transactions as the total sum spent is larger than an individual shopping event. She promises exclusivity of designs and reasonable prices that is lower than those prevailing in the market along with double credit facilities. In effect she showcases a one stop shopping experience at the customer's preferred time and space. She also caters to what is said in common parlance as the Bengali look saris and garments or saris and garments that showcase Bengali culture. For every ritual of the marriage the sari and other garment specifications have to be kept in mind for example a yellow low cost cotton sari for the *Gaye Holud* (turmeric ceremony) in the bride's natal home and a Jamdani for the Bhat Kapor (a ceremony where the husband publicly acknowledges that he is responsible for taking care of his wife). She understands that this is her livelihood and that to sustain it she needs to keep up the quality of service at a reasonable price. She also mentions that this kind of service is generally demanded by the working women. Her client base is primarily the Bengali middle class where both spouses are working outside the home. She can also make out the origin of the family (i.e. East or West Bengal) from the choices and requirements of the families. She gets almost 15-16 wedding related orders in a year.

2. Soma is a beautician who provides all beauty treatments and bridal makeup and face paint in the same neighbourhood as Mou. She began training after she had her first miscarriage and wanted an occupation other than that of a housewife. Though she was married her father provided the money for her training which she has since repaid. When she began her work she did beauty treatments and then progressed on to bridal makeup and face paint. She now has different packages to offer brides and brides maids and other relatives who engage her services at different prices depending on the service requirements. She only works through referrals and personal introductions. She uses good quality beauty products such as those from Shahnaz Hussein, Lakme Salon Range and MAC to name a few for her treatments along with homemade prescriptions. She usually does not work on credit but can provide services on credit if she feels that is what is needed. She can also arbitrarily bring the prices down if she feels that the bride is unable to afford her normal prices. She does this work because she likes earning her own living and also likes dressing up a bride. According to her, bridal dressing requirements have changed over the years. She says that in the natal home that is on during the wedding ceremony the demand is for a "typically Bangali/Bengali" look with fine crafted face paint. On that evening the Benarasi sari is worn according to the traditional Bengali manner accentuated by real gold jewellery. In her opinion usually Bengali brides wear gold on their wedding day and during the customs and the religious ceremony. Even the jewellery seems to have a Bengali look. Soma described the Bengali bridal look as having light makeup with accentuation on the eye makeup, a red bindi and facepaint of sandalwood paste. However on the day of the reception or the *Bou Bhat* (the feast of the bride) the make-up demand is of a modern look.

Soma also says that all beauticians also do the hair styling of the bride and assorted bridal party members. A similar pattern is followed wherein the wedding ceremony requirements are those of traditional hair styling with elaborate buns and filigree hair jewellery and on the reception day the bridal hairdo is much more modern. Here she is also asked to create various hairdos as shown in the television serials emulating the look of a particular

character. This is discussed in advance with the client. Over the years, Some has also built up her own portfolio and can display that providing more choices for the bride and assorted members of the bridal party. She echoes Mou when she says that earlier bridal makeup wasn't in the purview of the outside beautician and that this is a recent phenomena encouraged by the Television serials and movies. She also agrees with Mou that the choices and preferences in makeup, face paint and hair style of the bride and the bridal party is enough of an indicator of the origins of the family engaging her services.

3. Choton is a *Tatto* or trousseau designer and decorator. He is the only earning member in his family of 7 people. The process of engaging his services are similar to those of engaging the boutique owner and the beautician. He charges for each *dala* (decorating base or platform) that he has to prepare. He incorporates locally sourced natural resources as decorating implements. He also does not harm the garments and uses needle and thread rather than pins in his working. He is as proficient in making the traditional peacocks, boats, the bride and groom dolls and the modern work with glitter and paint on the *dalas*. He also employs 6 other people with whom he works as a team. He informs them of the requirements of the number of *dalas*, the type of decoration, the pricing of each *dala* and the dates on which the work is scheduled. The process of selecting the people for *Tatto* decoration begins early on in the marriage considerations of both the bride's and the groom's family. This is because the *tatto* or the trousseau comprise the gifts that are being exchanged by both the families and represents each individual families' taste and household culture. The *tatto* is always escorted to the destination household and exhibited there for all people to see. *Tatto* comprises not only saris and other garments for the various family members but also includes specially prepared trays of *dalas* of sweets, fruits, vegetable, dry fruits, cereals and a huge big freshly caught uncooked fish. Usually the *tatto* from the groom's family is taken to the bride's family by the groom's sister or brother accompanied by an elder person on the morning of the wedding before the *gaye holud* ceremony (turmeric and sandalwood paste that the bride has to smear over her skin before she takes bath on her wedding day). This *tatto*

gives the bride's family of an idea of what gifts they are bestowing on the bride. The *tatto* from the bride's family is gifted on day of *bou bhat* (Bride feast). The *tattoshow* cases the origin of the families'.

4. Shampa is a designer and constructor of flower ornaments and decorations without which no Bengali marriage ceremony is complete. On the day of the marriage during the religious and cultural ceremonies both the bride and the groom traditionally wear the *rajanigandha gorer mala* (Four flowers of *Rajanigandha* plant woven as one unit and each unit is then sewn together to form a garland). After the marriage and the *bou bhat* ceremonies are over comes the *phul sojja* (the bed of flowers) where the bride wears all ornaments from bangles, anklets, necklace, earrings, *maangtika*, *mukut*, the *khopa phul* and the garland all made of real flowers. The entire bridal bower is decorated with flowers. In Bengali marriage rituals this is the conclusion of the marriage practices. This is supposed to be the first night that the bride spends with her husband. Shampa has been in this business for the last 10 yrs. She herself is good with making the wire frames on which the flowers are then stitched on in various shapes, and colours and formulations to create the imagery of actual ornaments to be worn by the bride. She buys her flowers as per the order placed by the bride's family, makes the ornaments and then delivers them. Her father is a whole seller of flowers and she learnt from him. Today she is one of his most valued customers. She also designs and decorates the entire area where the religious ceremonies concerning the marriage is to be held as well as the other reception room. Usually, the flower decoration bill is quite high as mostly fresh flowers are used.

What is common to all these livelihoods is the understanding that all of them have emerged from spaces earlier occupied by family members rather than outsourcing them to professionals who require payment for the service provided. As the concept of the family space has evolved and changed in the Bengali middle class households so have emerged new spaces of economic activities. The trousseau shopping was earlier conducted by close female members of the family and family friends accompanied by two male members at the maximum who served as the bankers to the shopping expeditions. Family and friends who

were invited to be a part of the shopping experience saw it as a mark of closeness, immense regard for the person and an honour. Now the invitation is still there for the final choice but it is the boutique owner who is making the initial choice and finalising the choices from where the final selections were made. Moreover, the availability of credit facilities also mean that the payments can be made at a comfortable pace. Similarly, the bride was dressed and the make-up and face paint applied by very close family or friends of the bride. Now that space has been acceded outsiders. Tatto decoration was the territory of the younger brothers and sisters, cousins and friends along with close family members who would plan for the event days even months in advance. These were also the dominions of the female members primarily. Now they say that they do not have the time, effort and energy to spare that would be employed in these activities. They like the convenience being provided to them. In most of the cases, these services are requisitioned by working women who would rather spend the time spent with family and friends in a more congenial atmosphere. Is it that this changing space with all the associated characteristics are then signs of modernity within the Bengali society? Or is it the churning of the remnants of the traditional joint family spaces that still survive within the family memories that are felt to enacted every time there is a special event like marriage in the family. It is significant that these changed spaces were also spaces of female camaraderie, negotiation, manipulation and access to different resources available with the close group which are now shrivelling up. The closing of such spaces also shows how conceptions of family togetherness and family work is changing. The people practising these newly emergent livelihoods in the newly emergent economic spaces are not simple by products of a changed space, rather they are embedded in a network of spaces and people from designers, printers, weavers, whole sellers of different products to the customers. That they have identified that such a space can exist and create niches for themselves is also an achievement in themselves. It is also important to note here that most people involved in such activities are women.

Section D: Creation Of Images Influencing Marriage Practices

Marriages in Bengal may be constructed through a plethora of images thrown up with specificities that are then branded as 'being Bengali'. These image creations are made possible by a wide variety of livelihoods that have come up during the 1990s which have been discussed above. The functioning of these livelihoods is also made possible by the increasing incursion of different forms of media creating and beaming images of the being the perfect Bengali marriage. The Bengali marriage is now not only an expression of being Bengali, rather it also showcases the impact of other communities cultural values and modes by appropriating them within its own rituals and practices. It was found in the survey that more than films, the middle class Bengali households are influenced by the television serials which are usually beamed thrice every day one a new episode the other two reruns at different times of the day. an analysis of some of the characters in the serials is given here to show how the concept of 'being Bengali' is an integral part of understanding of the marriage image.

Television Serials: Everyday Half Hour Shows repeated Thrice

1. Serial: Goenda Ginni (The detective wife)
Character: Paroma

Paroma is the protagonist of the popular Bengali soap opera Goenda Ginni. She lives a dual life of a housewife and a detective. The show has weekly short stories of cases which Paroma solves. The story is high on woman power which seeks to inspire women from all walks of life to explore their inner talents and turn them into their strengths. Apart from her awe inspiring character she is also famous for her fashion. The silk and cotton *tant* saris with gorgeous prints are widely sought after by Bengali women. The vibrant colours with simple patterns of chevron and floral have become very attractive. The saris are perfect for a Bengali housewife (the role which she portrays). The show was a success as soon as it hit the small screen with its latest TRP showing a whopping 4210 (June-July 2016). She is the quintessential housewife but with a difference, an idea that has resonated well with the viewers. Thus her fashion has become some of the most wanted in the marriage shopping list.

2. Serial: Goenda Ginni (The detective wife)
Character: Nandini

Nandini is the sister-in-law of the protagonist Paroma. She is shown as the unpopular, arrogant antagonist. She is jealous of her sister-in-law's success and popularity in her family and society. She makes it very clear that she does not approve of Paroma's dual life. Fans may hate her character but they love her saris. She is always shown wearing a wide range of designer chiffon sarees which fans of this popular serial love. The borders of these saris have exquisite zari work and people prefer to wear them at marriages or parties. Her heavily decorated sarees with bold jewellery help portray her role as a materialistic woman only bothered about herself in contrast to the main character Paroma's simple saris which show her as putting her family before money.

Here the dressing of a character in particular fabrics is also significant as it is usually considered that Cottons, *Tant* (locally woven) and pure silk saris are what Bengali women wear rather than chiffons or georgette fabrics. These were supposed to be the chosen fabrics of the other non Bengali communities in Kolkata. This liking of a negative character's fashion also shows that the characterisation does not matter, the fashion matters. Nandini here also showcases how the understanding of what is possible to wear in the Bengali household during marriages is changing under the impact of other communities' choices.

3. Serial: Tumi Ashbe Bole (Because you will come) Character: Nandini

The of Tumi Ashbe Bole revolves around Nandini, a widow who marries her college senior for the sake of her child. She soon discovers that her new husband's step mother is an evil lady and is determined to protect her husband from her clutches. Through the years Nandini's saris became desirable in Bengali households. Women love to wear her chiffon saris with delicately worked borders and beautiful silk saris. Though her character has nothing to do with the saris she wears, the 'simplicity and elegance' of her saris appeal to Bengali women and these become a favourite especially during marriages and festivals. This serial has a TRP of 3347 and has been famous more for the saris which are in high demand than the plot itself.

4. Serial: Jol Nupur (Water Anklet) Character: Mrinalini

The story shows the unconventional love story of Kajju, an Odissi dancer from Orissa and Neel, a city based man from an influential family. Mrinalini in this soap opera plays a minor part of the neighbour of Neel's family when they stayed in the village. She stood by the side of the family and helped them in crisis and later marries Chhoton, the third son of the family. Discrepancies creep in even in her married life, when it is revealed that she was a widow and this was her second marriage. But her husband stands by her during this time. Though her character may not be that significant her saris are very popular. She is usually seen in jamdanis and silks which are widely sought after. Her jamdanis are loved by women of all age and people buy them especially for the morning ceremonies and rituals during the marriage. These saris are also a must have as wedding *tattos*. This serial has a TRP of 3279.

5. Serial: Bojhena Se Bojhena (He/She just does not understand) Character: Pakhi

Pakhi is a simple and traditional girl from north Bengal deeply rooted in family values. She believes in strength of love, relationships, and faith in god. On the other hand, Aranya is a rich, arrogant and suave business tycoon with no belief in love or God. The drama focuses how Pakhi and Aranya get married and how they fight circumstances to live happily ever after. Pakhi's tie and dye cotton saris and designer silk and chiffon saris are very popular with Bengali women. Unlike most characters, her saris appeal to the relatively younger Bengali women. The humbleness and innocence of her character is brought out in her light colour saris. From baby pink to soothing shades of green her saris are widely used for day wear. Accompanied with light jewellery they are perfect for office wear or even small gatherings and outdoor work and form an essential part of the trousseau. The young Bengali women embraced Pakhi's fashion and dressing wholeheartedly. This show has a TRP of 2788.

Why these serials are important as images that stay on is because the central plot of the stories revolve around marriage and marriage relationships. As Neeta says "How media, influences the marriage image is seen in the serial portrayals. Bengali soap operas shows

form a very important reference on how Bengali brides nowadays want to look like on their wedding night. I remember this scene in 'Bojhena se Bojhena' where Pakhi and Aranya the shows lead characters get married. Pakhi was wearing a red benarasi with golden zaari works with gold jewelry. She had this beautiful chandan work on her forehead with a big bindi. She had light make up on with heavy kohled eyes. A mukut on her head with her hair tied in a bun and her golden veil adorning it. She had alta on her hands and feet and looked like the perfect Bengali bride". This was a scene shown almost a year ago in this serial yet the memories of even the minute details are clear in the respondent's mind. This images shown by the media create this image for brides to look perfect on their wedding nights. Various saris like *jamdani tant* and pure silks shown in these serials are opted for must haves in the trousseaus. Not only brides but other women are also inspired by serial saris to wear to their relatives or friends weddings. Similar words are echoed by Sutapa when she opines "I think media influences our culture a lot. Bengali soap operas have become a part of everyday life of bengali household and our choice of dressing are thus affected by it. Wedding is like an integral part of the plot of these soap operas. Marriages shown in these are traditionally very rigid and so modern brides nowadays also opt for the traditional rituals and dressing style. I like this idea. Whether its the wedding in a rich household like Nandini's and Rahul's in Tumi Aashbe Bole or a simple village wedding in IshtiKutum the essence, the spirit and the rituals remain the same which brides and grooms like to imitate. I think this reinforcement of authentic Bengali culture is a nice thing for the society." The image created in the serials is reinforced by the print medial especially the magazines like Sananda (Happy women) and Sukhi Grihokon (Happy/Fulfilled Home corner) where every issue has a section for the focus on Boutiques and their saris and how they should be an integral part of the trousseau. Daily newspapers like the Ananda Bazar Patrika in Bengali and The Telegraph in English publish a weekly shopping guide for different services available and required during the marriage. Thus media is powerful in creating marriage images in Bengali society subtly inducing changes that are then validated by the market demand.

Conclusion

Marriages are an important event in a person's life in Bengal. They are bound by different rituals and confirm to certain practices that though broadly following the traditional Hindu marriage rules but they also have certain exceptions. The Bengali marriage may not form an acknowledged pattern of acceptance and negotiation of norms such as the village exogamy or even upward social mobilities for the family. Rather it is influenced by integral understandings of what is the 'origin' of the cultural, social and economic standing of the family or the participants. Marriages in Bengal may be constructed through a plethora of images thrown up with specificities that are then branded as 'being Bengali'. These image creations are made possible by a wide variety of livelihoods that have come up during the 1990s. Earlier most of these livelihoods were within the domain of the family members. The functioning of these livelihoods is also made possible by the increasing incursion of different forms of media creating and beaming images of the being the perfect Bengali marriage. The Bengali marriage is now not only an expression of being Bengali, rather it also showcases the impact of other communities cultural values and modes by appropriating them within its own rituals and practices.

The newly emergent economic spaces that opened up, as the family spaces started shifting, is also an acknowledgement of how the social spaces are extending and contracting. In the past some rituals were an expression of defining the primary family circle wherein others are now making their own entry. What remains interesting is that the spaces of family and kinship relations are not shrinking but shifting as some forms of interaction are changing. The actors or people functioning within the newly emergent economic spaces are some where being incorporated within the basic family spaces but at a distance. They are both the insider and outsider within those intimate family networks. As more influences from the images beamed by television and film media are incorporated into the marriage rituals, more such inherently dualistic and essential spaces are being created in the Bengali society.

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