CHAPTER 7

Marriage: From Woman as Object to a Decision-Maker

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW

Over the 47-year period of this analysis marked changes in Totagadde Havik marriages took place. One’s view of oneself as an object or a decision-maker is just as important as the roles others assign. In the four family narratives the perspective of both husband and wife changed through the years from a patrifocal lens to a companionate lens. Theoretically the husband and household head remained the decision-maker. In actuality, much variation existed, with some wives remaining passive while others formed a partnership with their husbands.

Through the years as wives became more assertive, their marriages became more companionate—a fact that submissive wives had difficulty comprehending. The self-assured college graduate bride replaced the petrified child bride. Recently married couples are often less than five years apart in age, similar to 30 years ago when the difference varied from two to twenty years with a mean of five years. Forty-seven years ago, the difference between spouses ranged from five to thirty years with a mean of twelve years (Ullrich 1987: 618–619). I have organized this chapter into marriage arrangements, marital life, and divorce, as women transition over the years from object to partner and decision-maker in their marriages.
Section 2: Marriage Arrangements

Kinship Categories Define Marital Eligibility

Every Havik is related to every other Havik in true genealogical or at least fictive fashion. Just as I became my host’s younger sister and, in another family, a man’s oldest daughter, fictive flexibility allows acceptance into the Havik caste. Totagadde residents told me about one Havik wife, formerly a Christian, who by following Havik social customs, cuisine, and raising her children as Haviks has been fully integrated into the society.

Haviks belong to one of two categories: affines (neNTaru) or consanguines (da:ya:dru) (Clark-Decès 2014; Hanchett 1988). Affines are potential or actual relatives by marriage (neNTaru). Consanguines (da:ya:dru) are blood relatives descended from a common heir. If someone belongs to both categories, convenience dictates the choice of kinship category (Personal communication, Edward B. Harper).

The bridal pair generally are from different clans (go:tras). Haviks have seven go:tras, each descended from a different heir. However, if the relationship is a distant one without known kinship ties for seven generations (tele), then marriage within the same go:tra is acceptable. Haviks practice caste endogamy and go:tra exogamy. An adopted boy has the go:tra of his biological and adoptive parents, as do his children. A woman changes her go:tra to that of her husband upon marriage.

Marriages between people of different go:tras in the same village were at a premium as fathers wanted their married daughters nearby. Tension existed between Totagadde families of different go:tras when one party refused to consider marriage negotiations. A woman married within her natal village was a daughter of the village, well known, and with friends. If given to a man in a different village where she had neither childhood friends nor kin, the bride had a more difficult adjustment. Moreover, her mother-in-law had greater control over her. Hence fathers preferred, if possible, to give daughters to a man of the same village. One woman described this as follows:

In the past if the mother-in-law always kept her daughter-in-law occupied, the daughter-in-law did not have an opportunity to form friendships with other village women. This occurred frequently. For example, if I always had to work, you would stop visiting me. If I have to work occasionally, you will not stop visiting. (Field Notes)
In the 1980s, a couple from the same go:tra (known as sago:tra) had an arranged/love marriage. For the purposes of the marriage ceremony, a relative from a different go:tra adopted the bride. Totagadde women explained to me how another sago:tra couple happened to marry. The relatives who suggested the marriage were unaware that the two families were of the same go:tra (sago:tra) until after the marriage arrangements were well under way. Although friends and relatives might not have known an individual’s go:tra, the go:tra and horoscope are among the first queries made in arranging a marriage. Hence this scenario was highly unlikely, but provided an acceptable explanation for marriage within the same go:tra (sago:tra), an indication that other qualities had become more important than the couple’s go:tra affiliation.

The Ideal Marriage

Marriages between a mother’s brother’s daughter and a father’s sister’s son were the Havik ideal. Whenever possible, fathers arranged such marriages. Theoretically, the groom had no say in the choice of his bride, but three generations ago when an older brother was uninterested in marriage to his matrilateral cross cousin, his younger brother married her.\(^3\) As the younger brother was the oldest son of a second marriage, he was a classificatory cross cousin without an actual blood tie. Hence, the concern over genetic risk was non-existent.

Over the past two generations, individuals have expressed concerns that the close genetic ties in matrilateral cross-cousin marriages might predispose children to genetic abnormalities. When some individuals such as Lili and her son expressed concern about the close relationship and disinterest in marrying matrilateral cross cousins, this created family tension. Lili’s brother’s wife’s thinks Lili should have insisted on the marriage. But both Lili and her son had expressed concern about the relationship between congenital defects\(^4\) and the close genetic ties shared by cross cousins. Some 2011 Haviks strongly opposed matrilateral cross-cousin marriage because of the risk of congenital defects.

Haviks have no tradition of dowry, at least not in the sense of the bride’s family paying large sums to the groom at the time of marriage. The mother’s brother receives a payment of four rupees when his sister’s son marries someone other than his daughter. In the wedding ceremony the mother’s brother carries the bride to her groom, a part of the marriage ceremony precipitating laughter at the contrast between child brides of the past and current adult brides.
Age of Marriage

Early marriage served to confine a woman whom the society regarded as forever childlike. Pre-pubertal marriages emphasized a wife’s immaturity. Women, who married as young as five, were plunged into adulthood in expectations of dress, namely wearing a sari, and respectful behavior. The priest’s wife described with amusement a five-year-old bride who had to be told to wear clothes on the way to her bath. A few older Totagadde women, some of whom were still alive in 2011, married at age 8, 10, 12, and 13. The latter ages were close to puberty, so arranging their marriages had become an urgent matter.

Women who married before puberty consummated their marriages after puberty. Sreenivas (2008: 71–72) presents the rationale for pre-pubertal and early consummation of marriage, as well as an opposing view which Hindu Nationalists presented.

according to Hindu sastras (scriptures) girls must be married before puberty and consummation must take place soon after the first menstruation. If consummation were delayed…then the pinda or ancestral offerings made by the sons of such marriages would be impure… (Sreenivas 2008: 71–72)

Nationalists argued that child marriage was nowhere sanctioned in the Hindu sastras, and that post-puberty marriages represented a return to “traditional” Hindu marriage practices. (Sreenivas 2008: 77)

Before menarche, the bride divided her time between her maternal and her husband’s home. Upon menarche, a ritual inducted her into her monthly periods of untouchability. On the day of her return to ritual purity family members celebrated the event with religious acknowledgment (a:rati), special food, and gifts of clothing. The washerwoman received the clothing the girl was wearing at the time of menarche. The presentation occurred on the feast day welcoming the girl back into the household from her period of untouchability. Following menarche, a priest determined an auspicious time for the marriage consummation ceremony, guaranteed to coincide with the bride’s most fertile time.5

By the 1960s, the penance for post-puberty marriages in the form of a special fire offering (ho:ma) had become an integral part of the Havik marriage ceremony. Gone was the idea of abandoning a blindfolded daughter in the forest should she reach puberty before marriage. The residents of Totagadde had begun to forget that their religion dictated early marriage for their daughters. Although men explained to me that pre-
pubertal marriages were meant to prevent Muslims from kidnapping their daughters (Ullrich 1987), the fact that a fire offering (ho:ma) to atone for marrying a daughter after puberty had become part of the ceremony suggests pre-pubertal marriages were an integral part of Havik marriage ritual. Women who married around puberty complained that their marriages ended their education and their carefree life. They became subject to their husbands and mothers-in-law. At that time a girl’s marriage was more important than her education (Fuller and Narasimhan 2014: 26, 92; Seymour 2015: 4).

Over time, correlating with educational level there has been a steady increase in the age of marriage. The 1978 Child Marriage Restraint Act, which increased the age for women’s marriage to 18, had little impact on Totagadde marriage practices. Women married according to the arrangements their parents made or later according to their own choice after completing a college degree. Awareness of the law, however, was known, as the in-laws and parents of girls married below the age of 18 reported the bride’s age as 18. When other cultural factors, not legal, argued for an older age of marriage, then girls married at an older age.

The Perspective of Three Women Married before Puberty

I present three cases of women married before puberty. In 1921, in a matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, a nine-year-old girl married her 19-year-old father’s sister’s son. In 1987, this 75-year-old illiterate woman reported she was not consulted about her marriage, but had no difficulty adjusting to marriage. Until menarche, she alternated visits between her husband’s and her parents’ home. From experience with her 13 children, she described the extent of changes in marital arrangements—from pre-puberty marriages to an intercaste marriage. In discussing her children’s marriages, she reported that the men sought her opinion, particularly for those daughters married before menarche. By the 1980s, she believed that women needed a college degree, Hindi, English, and should work before their marriages. While her oldest daughters married before puberty, her youngest daughters earned a PUC (pre-university certificate) and one son graduated from college, became a banker, and married a banker of another caste. She held the opinion that women who married later were more mature and had minds of their own. Such women were more secure and not easily intimidated.

A second woman, married at age eight, provided a strikingly different perspective. In her seventies, she reflected on her marriage with the following
proverb about a bride’s response to criticism. “One can endure a beating, but it is difficult to endure words” (wand hoDta hwaDidru taDikaLLakku, ma:tu taDakambu kaSTa). This is the reverse of the American saying, “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” The husband’s scolding, his criticism, angry outbursts, and even the lack of affection were effective in intimidating this young bride. She described her parents’ deaths on the same day as good preparation for her marriage, which occurred later the same year. When I asked about her depression at marriage, she included her difficulty adjusting to her husband’s demands. Her sisters-in-law helped her, as her mother-in-law had died before her marriage. For the duration of her husband’s life, she never mentioned the pain she felt when he criticized her. After his death, she said:

His criticism would have been justified if he had taught me what he wanted. However, he would say, ‘You didn’t learn anything in your parents’ household. Didn’t they teach you anything?’ When I was married, I was afraid to talk with my husband. I was shy. I did not know how to talk with a man and I did not know how to talk and act with a husband. Now (in the 1980’s) girls are more secure. They are not frightened of marriage. This is a happy period. Women used to have to work all of the time. There was brass to polish. If the silver or brass, which my husband used for meditation (sandya:wandana), were not polished to his satisfaction, he shouted his dissatisfaction with me as he threw the vessels in the back yard. He got angry when the work was not done to his satisfaction. Women were not worth much then. (Field Notes)

This woman described her husband’s brothers as much harsher than her husband. Although she kept her own counsel, the unexpressed humiliation she felt at the time of her marriage seemed just as fresh more than 60 years later as on the day of her marriage. She denied that her husband beat her, but reported that other wives suffered physical abuse, the fear of humiliation, and the realization they could never please their husbands. As she aged, she helped the daughters-in-law in her joint family cope with difficult in-laws, but the failure of husbands to listen to their wives remained a source of sorrow. She even listed the inequality between men and women, her father’s (but didn’t mention her mother’s), her husband’s, and her children’s deaths, and poor relationships with mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law as precipitants for depression (be:ja:ra). A further bitter lesson in women’s invisibility occurred when her younger sister had a difficult pregnancy. Her brother-in-law disregarded or perhaps
never even heard her insistence that he seek medical attention for her sister. As a result of receiving no medical attention, her sister died. This further indicated to her that women were of little value.

A third case presents a different perspective on pre-pubertal marriage. Among those who had been married before puberty, most had no say about whom they would marry. However, as a 73-year-old woman she commented to me in 2011, “What did I know as a ten year old?” Yet she remembered that her father had explained to her why he thought this particular man would be a good husband for her and asked her opinion. She gave her assent. Having a say evidently made a difference. She knew her father’s rationale. She has had a happy marriage with a husband who considers her needs. Perhaps as a result, she has close relationships with many people and is flexible in dealing with her children and her grandchildren, one of whom, a granddaughter, is married and works as a software engineer in the United States. She even instructed her younger granddaughters to express their choices. When they complained that nobody served them seconds at a feast, she ascertained that they had not requested seconds. She advised them to ask, as otherwise the servers had no way of knowing what they wanted.

In the 1970s, her 16-year-old daughter had just graduated from high school when a wealthy suitor came unannounced and uninvited to consider her as his bride. She hid upstairs while her father informed the suitor that she had gone to visit relatives and made no effort to arrange a meeting with his daughter. Some elders in the village disapproved of her father’s allowing his daughter to make this decision. They knew the suitor had a reputation as a philanderer but believed his philandering would cease upon marriage. Their belief was that marriage into a wealthy family would be ample compensation for the groom’s bad habits. The girl’s father and his cohorts responded that a girl immediately upon graduation from high school was too young to marry. The increased respect fathers had for their daughters’ wishes with regard to when and whom to marry suggests a closer father–daughter relationship developed as girls received more education and married later.

In 1992, she pondered the difference in age and education among her children at marriage. Her older daughters had married below the legal age limit. Much of the legislation dealing with marriage has been ahead of public opinion (Ramusack 1981: 212). This woman was apparently ignorant of the law. Her youngest daughter finished her college education after her marriage to a professor. Both daughters-in-law had college
degrees before marriage. Her encouragement of her older daughter-in-law to earn her master’s degree took the form of caring for her grandchildren while the daughter-in-law studied.

Not only had pre-pubertal marriage ceased but also, by the 1990’s, many women thought that a girl should be older than 20 at marriage. Some thought 18 was too young for a girl’s marriage. An older unmarried sister, perhaps forgetting that her oldest sister had married at 18, told me that her 18-year-old youngest sister was too young for marriage. One woman volunteered that she had married at age 22—within her stated ideal range. Later, she confessed to being 26 when she married. In one family, the oldest daughter married at 16, the next daughter at 20, and the last two at 22. The oldest women to marry were in their thirties.

Havik women in the 1990s reported the ideal age range for a woman’s marriage as being between 18 and 21, 20 and 25, and 25 and 30. In practice, the earliest age for women to marry in the period between 1977 and 1992 was 17; the latest is 33, with one woman choosing a profession over marriage. The 17-year-old would have preferred to continue her education, but her father pressured her to marry. Perhaps the gossip of older women about her early marriage led her father to permit her younger sister to complete college before her marriage. The progression in age at marriage and educational levels among siblings is especially noticeable. However, Totagadde Haviks expressed surprise when fathers actually found grooms for their 33-year-old daughters, an age considered old even for men. The mother of one man who married at 33 considered her daughter-in-law old at 28, but conceded that the five-year difference in their ages was ideal. Consequently, the marriage was “just right.”

**Whose Decision? Marital Decisions Change from the Parents to the Couple**

In the 1960s, rumblings of change included a couple who exchanged garlands in the temple, an act amounting to a marriage before the temple god. When one suitor went to view a potential bride, she gave him a seashell inscribed with “remember me.” Totagadde women discussed the girl’s expressing her opinion with amazement. They married within the month. A third suitor rejected a Totagadde woman after viewing her. His refusal to marry his father’s choice aroused fury among the elders. Such anger at the young man and the surprise over a potential bride’s expressing an opinion suggest these were unexpected behaviors. Paternal authority over
sons with regard to marriage arrangements was in the process of diminishing, while the couple expressing their opinion was on the increase.

Traditionally the oldest male in the family (yejma:nru) assumed responsibility for his younger brothers’ children’s marriages. Although the fathers participated in the decisions, the yejma:nru made the arrangements and paid for the weddings. Finding an appropriate groom was the responsibility of male relatives—the girl’s father, his brothers, her mother’s brothers (maternal uncles), the boy’s father, and respected village elders. The mother’s brother had an especially important role in finding his niece a husband.

Horoscopes were predictors of a compatible marriage. For many, the horoscope had a crucial role in determining when and whom a person married. For example, one woman’s horoscope revealed that her mother-in-law would die soon after her marriage. So her father found a suitor whose mother was deceased. In 1966, Vijaya refused to state an opinion about a suitor to avoid conflict with her father’s decision, as he would lose face (marya:de) if he changed his mind after giving his word. In a culture with an emphasis on joint families, the ideal bride was someone pliable and subservient to her husband and mother-in-law whom she first met at her marriage.

The idea that parents know their children better than their children know themselves served as a rationale for arranged marriages. The parents investigated the suitor’s reputation, his family’s reputation, and his family’s economic status along with horoscopes and photographs. In 1965, one grandmother commented that her grandson’s bride was lazy. This she attributed to insufficient investigation of the girl before the wedding. The potential livelihood of the suitor was an important consideration for parents who wished financial comfort for their daughters. This vetting preceded the couple’s meeting and continues to occur with the exception of couples who initiate the proceedings and of love marriages. In 1992, an arranged marriage meant the couple had their parents’ blessing and the support of family members. But first, the couple gave their consent to the marriage.

*Introduction of the Dowry*

In the 1970s, some educated men with a profession felt entitled to a dowry. What was different about this time? Haviks had never had a dowry prior to this period. Perhaps their awareness of the dowry system in castes outside of Totagadde allowed young, educated men to believe they deserved a
dowry. The education differential was certainly a factor. In earlier generations, men as well as women had few opportunities for an education. Generally men of prior generations had a primary school education at most. Now that men attended college and even studied in other countries, they preferred wives with some education. These factors trumped caste endogamy. At this time, marriages with members of other Brahmin groups counted as intermarriages. As a result of such intermarriages, there was a surplus of Havik women in Totagadde. Fathers had to search further for grooms. The financial incentive of a dowry added to a girl’s qualifications. If everybody paid dowries, this would have become an acknowledged part of the marriage arrangements and the stigma would disappear. But women from wealthy families, well-educated women, beautiful women, and women with no brothers found grooms without the need for dowries.

A father indignantly refused a college instructor’s request for 3000 rupees. Initially the dowry served as compensation for marrying a poorly educated or dark-complexioned woman. A sense of shame accompanied this request for money, as brides’ fathers often willingly helped their sons-in-law financially. Dowry requests were secret not only because requesting a dowry was illegal but also because fathers believed their cherished daughters were so special that their marriages required no dowry. In cases in which a dowry was not requested (and probably in cases where a dowry had been given), fathers boasted that they had not given a dowry (Ullrich 1987). One brother who had requested no dowry regarded himself as superior to his brother who received a dowry.

During this generation, when there was a surplus of women in Totagadde, the dowry helped to guarantee their marriages. The dowry escalated to 20,000 and even 60,000 rupees. In succeeding generations, it has become increasingly rare and some report it has ceased to exist.

A Broken Engagement

One young lady, Gauri, had graduated from high school and was taking typing lessons. Her father and uncle combed the area for a suitable groom. Venkappa had a recently widowed friend whom he recommended to Gauri’s father. When the horoscopes were compared, there was a match. Then Venkappa, Gauri’s father, and the widower met with other kinsmen to view Gauri. Gauri, with her father’s approval, gave her consent to marry the widower. Prior to this, all had regarded 18-year-old Gauri as doomed to spinsterhood. When the Totagadde youths learned that Gauri
had agreed to marry an older widower with several children, they were aghast. Consequently, they actively searched for a more suitable groom and found an employed college-educated man. When he offered to marry Gauri, she considered her options—to marry an older man with children or to marry a young man who promised travel. She chose the latter. This was the first time a Totagadde Havik woman had broken her engagement.

All agreed that she had chosen the more appropriate groom. However, Venkappa and the men his age were furious that Gauri’s father had allowed her to break the engagement. Venkappa believed this dismissal of his suggestion decreased his prestige. Did this mean the elders equated power with self-respect? In 1978, the elders endorsed the patrifocal family ideal, while the youth showed flexibility and gave priority to a girl’s marital happiness.

Prior to this, all the young men had been welcome visitors in Venkappa’s home. This stopped with the broken engagement. Venkappa expressed his anger by withholding his hospitality. He complained that Gauri’s father let the women in his household make the decisions and blamed Gauri’s father for allowing her to break the engagement. He further declared Gauri’s history of asthma made her a poor marriage prospect. This incident marked another change in women’s freedom to choose their marital partners.

Gauri’s experience played a pivotal role in the changes in marriage patterns. Initially she was helpless to object to an inappropriate marriage. Undoubtedly, she would have adjusted to marriage with the widower. But when the young men of Totagadde presented her with an alternative, she chose the better prospect. If they had deemed the original suitor appropriate, they would have never looked for a replacement. No one criticized Gauri for her decision. Her father was the object of criticism. However, he happened to agree that the replacement groom was more suitable. Gauri’s story is another example of the erosion of elder power. In 1992, the elders would tell me, “There was never an engagement. What are you talking about? They never solemnized the engagement in front of the gods.”

What makes Gauri’s story applicable to this book was the opportunity to change her mind after she had agreed to a marriage, an option which the young Totagadde men made possible. Women as exemplified by this comment believed they had a choice. The following quote from my 1974 Field Notes is an observation of a 41-year-old Havik woman who married a widower when she was 11:
Now that women have a choice, they would choose not to marry men who had children by a previous marriage because of the potential conflict among the children from the two marriages. The children from the first marriage would give the second wife trouble.

**Marriage: Individual and Parental Choices**

In a father’s search for a marital match, identifying likely candidates, the first step, is not always an easy task. That’s why matchmaking has met the computer. Gita has used the computer to discover potentially congenial couples in order to provide the information to the girl’s parents, who proceed with the vetting (Photo 7.1). Fathers seek grooms with similar economic standing to their own, or with resources comparable to those of their other daughters’ husbands. If an older sister has married a wealthy software engineer, the parents will seek a wealthy software engineer for their younger daughter. Only after finding an appropriate suitor do the

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**Photo 7.1** Computer-generated marriage search found this MBA educated woman’s husband
parents discuss the suitor with their daughter. The daughter will then have the final say as to whether he is acceptable.

When a likely match has been found, the father’s relatives provide the suitor’s side with a horoscope and a photograph. Whether either side believes in horoscopes is irrelevant. The horoscope and picture serve as an introduction. The suitor’s family then decides whether to continue negotiations. By 2011, the initial meeting between the couple occurred in secret, often at a relative’s home. The couple had the opportunity to speak privately. All those gathered thought this a good match, with one important exception—the girl. When she gave an adamant no, all sorrowfully accepted her decision. Her father and uncles continued their search.

Now that assertiveness is acceptable behavior in unmarried women, what happens upon marriage? Lili’s youngest granddaughter graduated first in her college class. She had chosen a women’s college away from home. Upon graduation she obtained a position in an information technology company that impressed even her harshest critics, female relatives who had believed her graduation from a girls’ college would limit her career options. A position at such a well-known company justified her parents’ faith in their daughter. At work she became acquainted with eligible men and settled on a Havik civil engineer. At 23, she married a man four years her senior, and has continued to work after her marriage. Her mother indicated that now brides want grooms no more than four years older than they. Today is very different from the time when she married with a ten-year age difference and before she finished college.

Unlike this mother, some members of older generations fear that the achievements of this generation’s young women will limit their marriage opportunities. Their worries appear unsubstantiated. A woman at the top of her law school class became engaged to a well-regarded software engineer within a month of her graduation. Other women married within a couple of years of starting employment. Parents—often mothers and fathers—disagree as to whether their daughters should seek employment before marriage.

Women have sought to marry professional men employed in urban areas, and some women who have obtained jobs in cities now have higher incomes than their husbands. Joint families in urban areas are rare, but occasionally in-laws are there to care for their grandchildren while their children work, freeing the mothers to pursue their own careers. Working mothers whose parents or in-laws are unavailable may hire someone to care for their children. Even mothers who have chosen homemaking as
their career value the additional help of relatives or a hired nanny. Used to the presence of kinfolk and servants, some wives actually fear the solitude of the nuclear family while valuing their authority as women in charge of their own households. This may be self-protective, as nuclear families have a higher suicide rate than joint families (Mayer 2011: 171).

One result of women’s professional aspirations is that men in farming communities have difficulty finding brides. Few Havik girls wish to marry farmers. Thirty-year-old educated men with landholdings have found themselves single. Their kinship network counted for little if they resided in a Totagadde joint family. This shortage of women has resulted in opportunities for widows and divorcees to remarry. Unable to find brides in their own castes, some Brahmin men have even found brides in the high-ranking agricultural Vokkaliga caste. In these cases appropriate Brahmin relatives adopted the bride for the marriage ceremony—a transition for a bride leaving a lower caste and entering a higher caste. In the 1980s, if the bride and groom belonged to the same clan (sago:tra), a bride’s relative belonging to another go:tra adopted the bride so that the bride and groom were of different go:tras. Now there is no longer any need to adopt a bride from the same go:tra, but there is a need if the bride is of a different caste.

Love Marriages

None of this applies to love marriages. Some young women, after insisting that they will marry their father’s choice, have eloped. Others persuade their parents and grandparents to honor their choice (Photos 7.2 and 7.3). In this case, the elders respect their daughter or granddaughter’s choice and provide the wedding—even if the bride or bridegroom is of another caste.

Women now have more opportunities to meet potential spouses, and fathers are more attentive to their daughters’ wishes. The later age of marriage for daughters has facilitated a closer father–daughter relationship. Fathers and daughters talk more and have a better idea of each other’s priorities. In college, daughters form friendship groups that extend beyond caste and include men and women. Sometimes classmates act as matchmakers within or beyond the same caste. Parental relief is palpable when a girl who has been dating a Christian or a Muslim marries a Havik. When women have married Christians, their families usually adjusted. My data on Haviks dating Muslims is limited to Havik women who have married Havik men.
Photo 7.2 College plus love marriage

Photo 7.3 Two women: Representing love and arranged marriages
Although women may choose their partners, fathers have continued to take responsibility for their daughters’ marriages. A father still feels financially responsible even if his daughter is gainfully employed and has no desire to marry.

The couple might first have approached their parents to arrange a marriage. This would allow parents to deny the marriage was a “love marriage.” But if a father refused to consider his daughter’s request or her chosen’s request to give his daughter to him in marriage, she sometimes eloped.

In one case the groom was of the appropriate caste, had land, was a teacher, and the community respected his parents. However, the daughter had three unmarried older sisters. When her father said no to the groom’s request, she was not about to lose the opportunity for a marriage of her choice. She eloped when her father was away. When the groom came to get her, bringing his mother’s brother and his uncle’s wife to accompany them, her older brother refused his blessing. She left with the clothes on her back. The next day her future in-laws bought her wedding outfit and the couple was married in a temple. Totagadde villagers supported her decision and visited her after the wedding. They feared she might be doomed to life as a spinster in her brother’s household if she had waited. Her suitor would certainly have chosen someone else rather than wait for the years it might take to arrange her older sisters’ marriages. She never saw her father again, but reconciled with her mother and siblings after his death.

When children eloped, their parents initially ceased communication with them. Some never resumed a relationship with their children, but so many reconciled that by 1992 parents believed a reconciliation inevitable. Better to accept her choice, inappropriate as it might seem, than to have the ill feelings resulting from a break. After a thorough discussion to determine their child’s wishes, parents usually consented to arrange a marriage despite reservations.

Occasionally parents, as a means of terminating an inappropriate romantic entanglement, took their daughter out of college. In one case, a mother, presumably with her husband’s consent, kept her daughter from college to prevent a romantic relationship. Better to prevent her education than to risk compromising her reputation. After the daughter’s marriage, the son-in-law trusted his wife enough to allow her to travel home alone when he was unable to accompany her. Her independence and capability impressed many people.
One love marriage surprised me, because on a prior visit the bride, a college student, had told me in no uncertain terms that she planned to marry the person her father chose for her. Then she eloped with her patrilateral cross cousin who insisted on a civil marriage, to the dismay of his parents. In this particular case, the groom rebelled against a religious marriage. “A registered marriage is not right,” his mother said, “but what can one do? Who will listen to what we say (ná:v he:Lid hange ya:r ke:Lta)?” She insisted that her son give his wife the traditional marriage necklace.

There are also different interpretations of the term “love marriage.” When I asked a neighbor about a love marriage, I received a defensive response: “Her marriage is not a registered marriage. She chose her own husband, but her parents gave her a proper wedding.” She thinks of a love marriage as one without parental approval. My understanding is different. I think of love marriages as those in which the couple choose one another rather than the father locating the groom.

An uncle wanted to marry his oldest sister’s daughter. This is unacceptable according to Havik beliefs. But what was a family to do when their child was determined and of age? The mother/grandmother was vocal about her discomfort with such a marriage. However, persistent persuasion finally resulted in parental/grandparental approval. Once this marriage occurred, Totagadde society accepted the couple. The bride continued to call her husband’s parents “grandmother” and “grandfather.”

The many changes in marriage since the 1960s have required increasing parental adjustment. Through the 1990s, some parents vigorously denied that their daughters had love marriages. Unmarried daughters, when asked what they wanted, generally indicated that they would respect their father’s decisions—that is, until they met someone they wished to marry. Then, some discussed their choice with their parents and let the parents arrange the marriage. This was the couple’s way of acknowledging a father’s authority and so served to maintain his self-respect (marya:de).

College education and special training have made it possible for women to specialize in a particular job. The first woman to study architecture completed her education at a time when women did not go away for work. The daughter’s employment depended on her father’s permission. Fortunately, she found a job in the nearby town, so she could commute from home. A single woman with a job commuting from home was another first for Totagadde. Her father searched and searched and searched for the ideal husband for his professional daughter, to no avail. He distributed her
horoscope. He contacted his numerous kinsmen. All diligently looked for a groom. Then with professional success and a heavy workload, she took an apartment in the nearby town where a businessman assisted her with any electronic challenges or apartment maintenance. She grew to rely on him and they became friends. He came to her father asking for her hand in marriage. The bride’s father told the story this way: after an exhaustive search, the ideal groom found him, so he could arrange his daughter’s wedding. The groom, who had his own successful business in town, was from a highly respected semi-joint family. Two Totagadde women had been given in marriage to this family and it had provided two brides for Totagadde. The father never described this as a love marriage. His explanation that the ideal groom just found his daughter, illustrated his ambivalence about the couple initiating their own marriage. His younger brother simply stated, “My brother’s daughter had a love marriage.”

Devi supported her grandchildren’s arranging their own marriages and even their long engagements. Two sisters had suitors, but there was a problem. The family believed the sisters needed to marry in order—older sister first. The older sister’s fiancé had educational commitments while the younger sister’s fiancé wanted an immediate marriage. So both sisters waited. During their engagement, they lived with Devi while finishing their schooling.

Marrying without paternal permission had become common enough that fathers believed they should accept a daughter’s choice. Invariably father and daughter reconciled, but bitter memories remained—forgiven but not forgotten. Therefore, consultation was a preferable approach. Some daughters found more prosperous and educated spouses than their fathers would have found. If a daughter chose a poorly educated man or a farmer, her father offered to locate a more appropriate, wealthier groom. If his daughter insisted, unhappy though he might be, the wise father accepted his daughter’s choice.

**SECTION 3: THE MOTHER-IN-LAW–DAUGHTER-IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP**

Havik women characterized the mother-in-law relationship as one of potential antagonism. Some mothers-in-law prevented their son from sending his wife to visit her parents. The mother-in-law required a lot of work, and even manufactured reasons for her son to beat his wife. Isolated
daughters-in-law with little time to socialize and to establish their own friends in their new village were predisposed to depression.

Lalita’s sister-in-law, who lived in the ancestral house with her mother-in-law, told me that she is slow. She is not clever like her mother-in-law. Afraid of her mother-in-law, when she was first married, she also feared her sister-in-law because both were critical of her mistakes. She believed that the women of the household expected her to be more accomplished.

When one 2011 mother-in-law became too demanding, her son arranged a transfer to another city, giving him a reason to leave the joint family. As a result, the relationship between the generations improved. Such a semi-joint family with geographical distance is one formula for maintaining close family ties while achieving independence. Totagadde mothers-in-law are well aware of such dynamics. To maintain a close relationship with their sons, they are careful to avoid criticizing their sons’ wives. With increased mobility parents and in-laws may find themselves alone in their old age or placed in nursing homes. Better to hold one’s tongue and cooperate with one’s daughters-in-law.

Daughters-in-law express their opinions with voices of their own. Among their expectations is that of a companionate relationship with their husbands. Although no woman of any age longs for the passivity of the past or pre-pubertal marriages, some older women are ambivalent. They remember their fear and depression at marriage. But they also want respect and adoration from their daughters-in-law. Their hope to mentor their daughters-in-law may go unrealized. Some uneducated brides enter marriage with passivity, but as they learn skills they gain confidence and even take over control over the household. Formal education and the development of skills no longer end with marriage.

Another outcome of the change in women’s options, opportunities, and maturity is that the traditionally close mother-son relationship often changes at marriage. In effect, sons now give priority to their wives over their mothers. They may ignore their parents’ needs if they conflict with their wife’s wishes. Women enter marriage with the expectation that they will take charge of a household. Most mothers-in-law are wise enough to support their daughters-in-law’s views. Respecting their daughters and daughters-in-law’s vocal presence in turn results in mutual respect and reciprocity between the generations. An alliance with their daughters-in-law is essential for continued association with their sons and grandchildren.
Section 4: The Marital Relationship

For young wives, the shift at marriage from being the center of affection to unknown expectations frequently led to depression. During the first year of marriage, the newlyweds were obliged to spend every festival at the bride’s mother’s home. With festivals occurring almost monthly and with brides usually given to a family within walking distance, frequent visits were possible. The youth explained to me the importance of this custom for a bride’s adjustment to marriage. “A daughter wants her mother at times like this.” The obligatory visits to a wife’s family ended after a year with the end of the newlywed status. Then control shifted to the patriarchy, so a wife’s visits to her maternal home depended upon her husband’s sending her for visits.

Older generations believed that a woman lost her independence upon marriage. They said things such as, “A wife must obey her husband. If he wants her to stay at home, she should. If he wants her to work, she should have a job. If he wants his brothers and sisters to stay with him to attend college, she should do the cleaning and housekeeping.”

Not all young women today choose to work outside the home. When two brothers and their wives live in an extended household, nothing can sour a relationship between the wives faster than the employed wife’s expectation that the stay-at-home wife will do all the cooking and housework. Moreover, if one brother wants his wife to work and the other has urged his wife to stay at home against her wishes, the at-home wife may divert her resentment to her sister-in-law to avoid conflict with her husband.

Section 5: Marriage and Education

The women I interviewed held various opinions as to the amount of education a woman needed. The priest’s wife, thrilled to have an educated daughter-in-law, indicated that if a woman had the ability, she could study as far as she wanted—she could even become a doctor. But she regarded those who failed their high school examinations as unemployable. They should stay at home for a year or two and then marry. “One needs an education or a husband. One needs one or the other,” said Lili in response to my question about whether women had the choice to remain single. Sharda’s sons insisted their sister, whose librarian’s salary was insufficient to support herself, marry. Lalita’s two younger daughters chose careers
before marriage which they then continued after marriage. Her oldest daughter had had no such option.

Although mothers believed that self-sufficient daughters could choose to marry or remain single, only one Totagadde woman remained single. Some women chose to work after marriage. One woman, a model for her cousins, had insufficient education for a conventional job, so she opened her own beauty parlor. This enterprise had her husband’s support, but not her father’s. He felt that unless she had an occupation which reflected well on her husband’s status, she should remain a homemaker. If this had been the 1960s, her father would have been able to veto her professional venture. By 1992, the couple made such decisions on their own.

For women married before 1964, marriage and menarche occurred in that order, so that menarche represented a woman’s physical maturity and readiness to consummate her marriage. In this sense, her biology was her destiny. Now that the order has been reversed, menarche, at the girl’s request, has become a non-event. Biology is no longer her sole destiny. After marriage, while wives still may choose to obey their husbands, they have the self-confidence of maturity, which enables them to demonstrate more initiative and control over their lives.

**Section 6: Divorce Comes to Totagadde**

In the Totagadde area divorce and remarriage occurred before widow remarriage. While some divorcees have chosen to remain single, others have remarried. Women as well as men now seek divorces. Attitudes toward marriage have changed, so that the only reason for a woman to endure an abusive marriage is her inability to support herself and her children. The last reported physically abused Totagadde woman returned to her parental home for two years during which she tried to develop a catering business. But a seventh grade education was insufficient for a career. She returned to her husband after two years. Her family lacked the resources to maintain her and her child and she lacked the education and skills to provide for herself and her child. Upon her return, older women commented on the wisdom of returning because of her maternal family’s poverty. In contrast, divorced women from prosperous families have found their parental homes supportive. Moreover, they were able to develop their own careers.
Women take infidelity seriously. When one wealthy husband was unfaithful, his wife obtained a divorce. He tried to save his marriage by mediation with a panchayat, but his wife refused. Their college-age children stayed with him while she returned to her parental home. His Totagadde sister was so upset at her brother’s infidelity that she ceased to include him in family events such as the welcoming of a new grandchild into her household.

About 25 years ago, when a husband from the Totagadde area divorced his wife, divorce was truly rare. The educated husband entertained guests according to their customs. His wife was an orthodox villager, a vegetarian. Associating with people who ate meat and drank alcohol was intolerable to her. He wanted a wife to accompany him when he entertained colleagues in restaurants. Their lifestyles were irreconcilable.

What reason could he give for wanting a divorce? He sued claiming that she was not a woman. Since young children at that time went around naked, the basis for the divorce was dubious. However, the expectation in Totagadde was that the husband would bribe the physician if the defense called for a physical examination. The divorce was granted. A married women her age and living in the same urban area opined that she may have rejected her husband because he failed to treat her with consideration. Her implication was that he had been sexually demanding and aggressive or demanding in a way that frightened or repulsed his wife. The divorced wife thrived; she became a banker, and then had a love marriage. The last I heard, she was happily married with two children. To this day, all in Totagadde insist that this woman, the former husband and their respective families are honorable people.

When men and women marry at a later age, they have more time to develop their expectations. One bride eagerly entered into her marriage. Her husband had a career that involved a lot of traveling. Since they lived in a non-Kannada-speaking Indian state, she was lonely when he was away. So much for her romantic dreams. When they visited her parents for the obligatory festivals during the first year of marriage, she expressed her sadness, depression, and desire for a divorce. Before 1994, no other woman had so publicly indicated her disillusionment at marriage. Her parents listened to her. Some neighbors were puzzled, as she had agreed to the marriage. Older male villagers called her a demoness for her outspoken distress. Her husband obtained another job which required less travel and they moved to a Kannada-speaking area. Her ability to express her distress and her husband’s and parents’ attention may have saved her marriage and
were crucial for her adjustment as a wife. Currently she is happily married, enjoying her husband’s companionship, and delighted with her talented children.

Education, mobility, and careers have provided women with options. Some think that a loveless marriage merits a divorce. A divorcee can manage on her own, or remarry with community approval. But what is to become of a widow who has devoted her life to her husband? If remarriage is now accepted among those who have divorced, why discriminate against widows?

NOTES

1. Another definition of go:tra is “a herd of cattle.” People need to marry outside their herd. (Kittel 1991: 570).

2. A grandson, that is, the third generation (tele), has the option of keeping two go:tras. Adopted girls also have two go:tras until their marriage into a third go:tra. In the past, families without sons frequently adopted boys from relatives with many sons. By 2011, some childless families had adopted girls, an indication of daughters’ rise in Havik culture and less emphasis on the requisite son for ritual purposes.

3. Clark-Decès (2014: 139) discusses a similar phenomenon in which older siblings gave younger siblings the opportunity to marry their matrilateral cross cousins. Her account seems to represent a recent phenomenon.

4. The only Havik genetic/environmental congenital malformation I have recorded is a cleft palate in the current generation. The parents were in the classificatory uncle–niece (mother’s younger brother–elder sister’s daughter, in this case—MMys married to MeSdd) category. The girl’s parents were enthusiastic about this marriage, even though Haviks usually avoid uncle–niece marriages. One other couple of this same generation insisted on an uncle–niece (mother’s younger brother–elder sister’s daughter) marriage in spite of strong parental opposition. The children of this uncle–niece marriage manifested no congenital abnormalities.

5. Ramusack (1981: 201–203) discusses the difficulty of enforcing the 1891 amendment to the Indian Penal Code which raised the age of consummation to 12. The 1928 “Age-of-Consent Committee
report advised that 42% of the Indian female population married before 15, and that evidence indicated that consummation occurred with little regard for physical age or maturity of the female.” (202)

6. A non-Brahmin woman in the 1980s rushed to contradict her new daughter-in-law, who had given me her age as 15. The mother-in-law explained that her daughter-in-law didn’t know her own age and gave the legal age as her daughter-in-law’s age.

7. This kinship relationship is not an approved category for Haviks.

8. A civil ceremony, known as a registered marriage, may be an alternative or an addition to a religious ceremony. In 1992, registered marriages were becoming increasingly common among those who married someone working outside of India.

9. Some Totagadde daughters and granddaughters who reside in India or abroad are comfortable serving alcohol and non-vegetarian meals. Whether their Totagadde relatives realize this is unknown to me, as neither they nor I have discussed this. Some Totagadde residents express revulsion at their belief that I am non-vegetarian. While many keep strictly vegetarian homes, some may make accommodations when dining out in foreign countries.

REFERENCES CITED


