Personal Ethnography

**Rushil Umaretiya**

This is a semi-verbatim of an interview conductedon Nov. 11th, 2023 between Rushil Umaretiya and participant. The interview discusses topics of arranged marriage and cultural difference in the United States and Gujarat, India. The interview was conducted in a mix of English and Gujarati and is translated for best accuracy over three recordings.

[START OF RECORDING ONE]

I: Your name?

P: My name is XXXXXXXXXX.

I: How old are you?

P: I am 23 years old.

I: So, you can answer most questions in Gujarati, I’ll translate.

P: OK.

I: Can you tell me about who you are, your education, and upbringing.

P: My name is XXXXX, I live in Rajkot, I went to two primary schools and college here at a technical institute, and got my degree under Labubhai Trivedi . Now, I’m working on expanding my father’s business.

I: And your degree, what did you get it in?

P: My focus was on mechanical engineering, and I’m a mechanical engineer.

I: Can you talk about your work and your Dad’s business?

P: We manufacture die molds here in Rajkot, and do aluminum casting. Fitting work, die work, etc. [continues talking specifics about the manufacturing business].

I: Wow, you guys do so much now. I remember back when the factory first opened, and now you guys have really expanded. Can you tell me more about growing up in Rajkot? You’re the older brother, would you say that your parents were strict growing up, or?

P: [INTERVIEWEE PAUSES FOR EXTENDED PERIOD] We’ll repeat this question later.

I: How would you describe your relationship with your parents and everyone in the household?

P: Okay, my relationship with my parents is very good. Sometimes my father will get angry or brash, but at the end of the day, he shows me the right way.

I: And your father, he can get really angry.

P: Yes, he does, but at the end, he really does give me a good sense of direction.

I: Yeah, my dad is the same. How do you think your parents changed the way you thought about marriage?

P: Things here are definitely getting changed, before it was such that if I wanted to go out and do something reckless, I had the freedom to do so. But now my ‘life-partner’ has arrived and she’s perfect, so I don’t do that stuff anymore. Mom and Dad are there, but nowadays they really don’t ask specifics, because they trust me with my partner. Now I have this partner that I ought to care for and keep safe.

I: And your younger brother, his parents were the same, they wouldn’t really question him and he was free. Would you say that you had more freedom than him?

P: Yes, I definitely have more freedom than him.

I: And so with regards to finding your ‘life-partner’ and marriage, was this always your plan.

P: Well, see in India, love marriage hasn’t really found much success. Out of ten love marriages, we would expect two of them to be successful. And so there is no culture or concept for love marriage, it’s not something we believe in.

I: Hm, well it seems if you do ‘love marriage’ there’s a very high rate of divorce. Does it seem to you that the status quo might change over the next five to ten years? Do you think ‘love marriage’ has the opportunity to be more successful in India?

[END OF RECORDING ONE]

[START OF RECORDING TWO]

I: Hello? Can you hear me?

P: Yes.

I: Okay, so does it seem to you like the culture has the opportunity to change.

P: There’s a chance, but it will definitely take about five to ten years.

I: So your whole life, you’ve believed that arranged marriage is the best option.

P: That’s right, especially according to Gujarat [state in India]’s culture, that’s how it is.

I: Um, well when you were in school, did you ever date at all?

P: I have never had any girlfriend before, except my fiancee.

I: Except your fiancee? Haha. Did you ever have any interest? I know your younger brother definitely dated around, would you say you ever had any interest?

P: Interest was there, and then it wasn’t. It would come and go, but there was never really any hardcore interest such that I wanted to date a girl or get in a relationship with one.

I: Um, do you think if you had a hardcore interest and brought a girl home and told your parents that you loved a girl, do you think your parents would have approved?

P: No. Never.

I: Well, I remember when your younger sister got caught up with a guy a few months ago…

P: She was in a relationship.

I: Yeah, right. Well I remember your parents really getting mad. How did you feel about the whole ordeal? Do you think you should’ve sided with her?

P: Well, the thing is, I always told her that she could tell me anything. She could always tell me that it was such, or I liked such boy. I would’ve loved to help her make our parents understand and like this guy. But she ended up even hiding the whole thing to me.

I: Oh wow, she was hiding it from you too. I mean that’s crazy. It’s totally different here, people here are dating someone new every week. That’s how it is.

P: It’s upside down there.

I: Does it seem that way to you?

P: Yes.

I: Well, I mean our divorce rate here is really not bad, only two out of ten couples will tend to get divorced.

[END OF RECORDING TWO]

[START OF RECORDING THREE]

I: Okay I think it’s recording, what were we talking about. Oh yeah, divorce rates here are low, only about 20% of people get divorced.

P: Here is the opposite, we only have a 20% success rate.

I: Well to me, it seems upside down here.

[RECORDING DISTORTED]

I: So, when it comes to your marriage, talk about how you met your fiancee?

P: It’s an arranged marriage, so your Dad actually gave me a suggestion that he had a friend who had a daughter that might be a good match, we know her family and they’re very sweet. And then we met and really liked each other, and now it’s finally happening.

I: How long was that entire process?

P: Around ten to twelve days.

I: So even a week prior you hadn’t ever even heard her name?

P: No, never. No name, never seen her; it happened such that, there was one mutual that both families knew, and I had went to this mutual family member’s house many times, but not once ever seen Princy.

I: Oh wow, that’s crazy. So even off the record, you had never even heard of her before you met with your families.

P: Never.

I: How much do you think your opinion played in the final decision to marry?

P: No, the decision was completely up to me and my fiancee, such that we chose each other. The vision was such that nobody from either family pushed us to marry each other. We had no reason like “we’re marrying each other for our family.” We didn’t have any reason like that. If there was a reason, it would be something like “they are ill-natured,” then I would not want to marry.

I: Ah, okay. So nobody pushed you…

P: Yes. Never.

I: And, was Princy your first choice? How long were you looking before you found her?

P: No, actually. Yes, it was my time to look for girls and my fiancee’s time to look for guys. But understand that there was an atmosphere where all the guys in my circle’s were getting married and same for her. But, it ended up happening early. It wasn’t that I looked at four or five different girls and Princy saw four or five different guys, we were actually each others’ first choice.

I: Wow, that’s something. So you guys are both very lucky.

P: Yeah.

I: Um, well, you know, it’s been a year since you got engaged.

P: Yeah.

I: How has the relationship grown since then? How has she settled into the home?

P: Okay, in the home… Princy is the type of girl to adjust very easily, she adopted her new surroundings very quickly. It was never that “I’m in a foreign home,” she’s always lived like this is her home; living the same as my sister, mom, and I do. She lives of her own volition, of free mind.

I: That’s really good. I’m glad to hear. You hear a lot of stories of women coming home from arranged from marriage and don’t mesh well with the family. But it’s good that she’s happy there. She’s definitely coming to a good home. [Lights turned off in the interviewer’s room] Oops, the lights.

P: Light off.

I: So, the wedding is only 18 days away.

P: 16 days!

I: So the 23rd?

[INTERVIEWER AND INTERVIEWEE TRY TO FIGURE OUT WHEN WEDDING IS HAPPENING AND ADDITIONAL WEDDING DETAILS, NOT RELEVANT TO INTERVIEW]

I: So, your wedding is very close, how do you feel?

P: Wedding is very close.

I: Are you nervous?

P: Nervous, calm, happy, excited.

I: Yup, that’s all the feelings. Has it hit you yet, that you’re about to get married?

P: Yeah, the atmosphere fills.

I: Everyone must be talking about it too, it definitely gets tense. After the wedding, what expectations do you hold?

P: Hmmm. After the wedding, I expect to keep the family calm and happy. We expect the business to go abroad as well.

I: Do you plan on going and moving around to start the business?

P: After the marriage.

I: Definitely after the marriage, but I feel like your Dad would not want to expand like that, but you seem like you would…

P: Well definitely after the marriage, but I’ll go with him as he expands and then study under him.

I: Yeah, I’m doing the exact same thing with my Dad and his business, learning about how he draws up contracts and whatnot. What about the expectations you have with your relationship with your fiancee? Do you think there’s going to be a big change or not much?

P: My expectations for Princy are such, that we stay happy, no complaints, and we want to carry those same ideals for our whole life. When we get down, we need to sit down and talk it through, and we need to carry that for our whole life.

I: What else?

P: Exactly. Ultimately, happiness is the most important.

I: So you’re working at the business. What does your fiancee do?

P: She studied fashion designing.

I: And does she have an interest in starting a business after marriage.

P: She’s planning to design and sell clothes in her own botique after the wedding.

I: In Rajkot?

P: Yes, in Rajkot and online as well.

I: It’s really easy to get an online platform nowadays and sell clothing.

P: Online has a ton of opportunities.

I: For sure, there’s a huge platform there, and the price differential between Indian and American costs are huge.

P: Yeah, exactly. Online is definitely preferred as you can design and market your clothes all in the same place.

I: Nice, well, you’re here about to get married. Looking back, do you think there’s anything you would’ve done differently or changed if you could go back?

P: No, nothing like that. I just hope that everything going forward stays good.

I: Yeah that’s great, I think you both are headed in a great direction.

P: There’s no good reason, the way you said that I’d change something from the past, there’s no good reason to change the past, as I’ve found someone who truly cares about me.

I: Well that’s all you need. I guess my last question is, “what advice would you give to other people going into an arranged marriage today?”

P: Advice… You should always listen to your partner, and that’s the only thing both of you need. As long as you listen first, then react, along with if you have anger about something wrong the other person did, never ridicule them in public. Talk about it in private, as otherwise would affect the relationship adversely. Other than that, enjoy.

I: Sounds good to me. It looks like you’re going to make her very happy. I’m excited.

P: Mm.

I: Anything else you wanted to add?

P: Enough.

[END OF RECORDING THREE]