

Marriage is, after all, made in heaven

As the old generation makes way for the new, and the rules change, inter-racial marriages see an upward swing. Even parents play affable hosts, as the new generation gets attuned with their American independence and individuality. **SUJATA SRINIVASAN** writes...

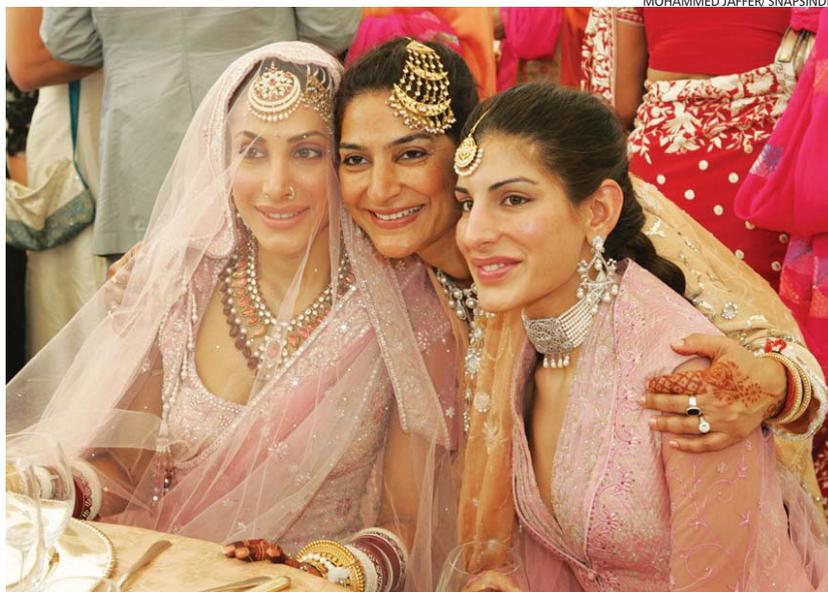
KIND of heart, keen of mind and sharp of wit, he flitted out of the pages of a romance novel and into her life. His parents had called her aunt who had called her parents to discuss an alliance. Or, if you prefer, she strolled boldly into his world and asked for his hand in matrimony. Or perhaps, it was vice-versa. Regardless of how they came together, they did so in hopes of a life-long friendship and romance.

They ride off happily into the sunset, Bollywood style, believing that their love for each other will conquer all challenges that life would throw at them. For first generation Indian women in the US, who had cross-cultural marriages, these challenges are considerable. According to a doctoral thesis by Monica Thiagarajan of Western Michigan University this November, first generation Indian women in the US, who marry outside their culture, encounter geographical dislocation, reactions from the larger South-Asian community and concerns surrounding language and raising a child in a cross-cultural atmosphere.

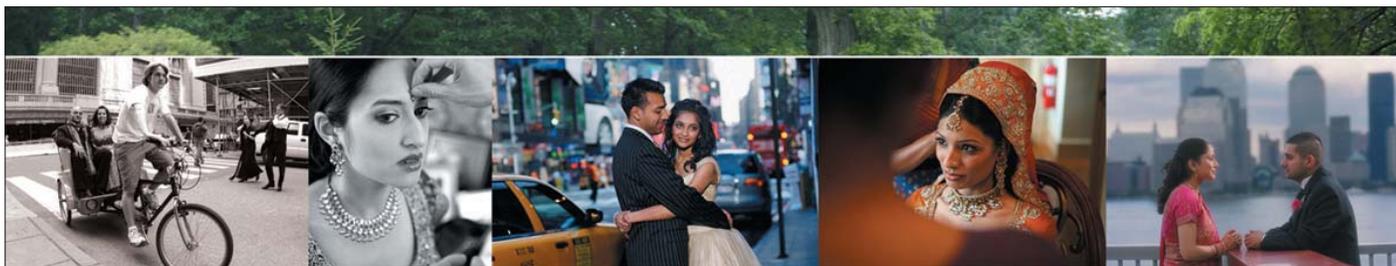
However, things are different for the second and third generation Indian Americans who marry outside their culture, or even race. According to the US Census Bureau, and the Bureau's American Community survey, there were 754,855 married Asian White couples as of 2005, up from 49,110 in 1960. During this period, the Asian population in the US surged from 902,000 to 12,879,000. Dr. Michael Rosenfeld, a sociologist at Stanford University, acknowledged that population increase is a primary factor in the increased number of inter-racial marriages. But he pointed out that even after one factored in the population increase, the rise in inter-cultural and inter-racial marriages are not merely due to an increase in the number of immigrants, but due to education and economic development.

"It's a society-wide phenomenon that inter-racial marriages in the US are on the increase. Why? Because the balance of power between adult children and their parents is different

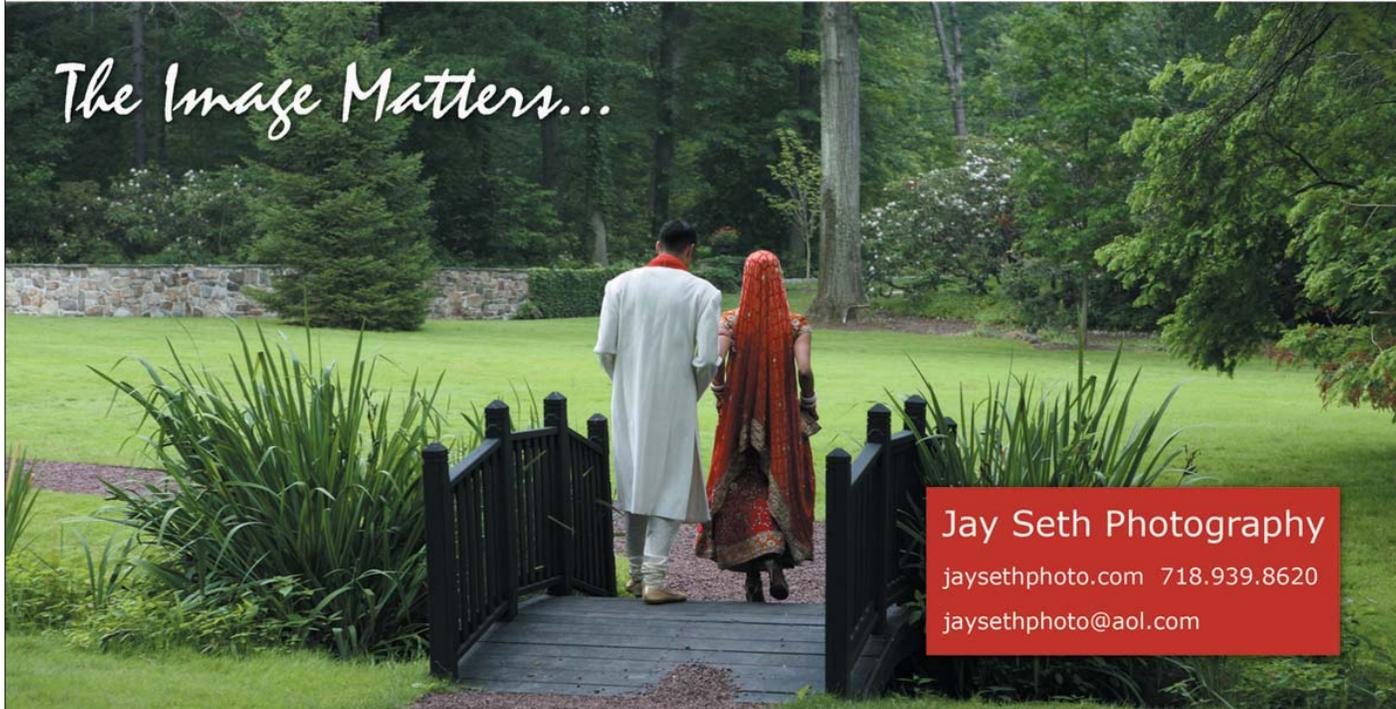
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Elegant living offered by Home America Furniture Company:

Based in East New Brunswick, NJ, Home America is a Furniture distributor company that claims to offer elegant living environment at competitive prices.

The company opened its warehouse to public in November 2007 with a definite marketing strategy of allowing customers to buy directly from the outlet at discounted prices. The company stocked thousands of furniture items to suit homes of different sizes.

According to information provided by the company, its furniture items so vivid in color and designs that they would match a variety of wall and flooring colors and designs.

In the recent past the company offered its products for clearance sale during the Labor Day weekend. Members of the public who visited the warehouse were delighted to see a wide range of beds, mattresses, sofa sets and a number of complimentary items offered with certain major purchases.

The company expected to achieve new heights in sales during the current holiday season.

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from what it used to be," Rosenfeld said, when asked to comment on the growing trend of inter-racial marriages in the Indian American community. "Young adults in their twenties are more likely to be living away from their parents when they meet their potential mate. Thus, parents have less opportunity to object. Because children are educated and feel they can support themselves, they choose love over family if they have to make a choice." He further added that more and more parents choose to hold their peace and not voice their objections, so as not to lose their child.

In his book *The Age of Independence*, Rosenfeld argues that the independence of young adults from their parents, which is an important phenomenon in the US, leads to an increase in inter-racial marriages. It's because independent young adults do not have to consider the wishes of their parents in the same way as was customary in the past.

There is a legal element, too, that has contributed to inter-racial marriages over the years. The wheels of law turned in the right direction in 1967 when the US Supreme Court upheld human rights and romance in one sweeping, landmark ruling in the *Loving vs Virginia* case, where it overturned a Virginia statute that banned marriage between whites and non-whites.

Asians, in particular, who have a long history of close-knit ties with their families, make efforts to hold on to these relationships even when they make choices in favor of love. Dr Bandana Purkayastha, a sociologist at the University of Connecticut and author of book *Negotiating Ethnicity: South Asian Americans Traverse a Transnational World*, wrote: "Overall, the experiences of the South Asian Americans in their transnational family fields show that both institution³/₄family and state³/₄remain important for understanding contemporary ethnicity in a globalized world."

When asked to comment on the growing trend of inter-cultural marriages, she said, "It was clear that more Indians and other South Asian Americans were going in for more pan-ethnic weddings. That is, they would be okay marrying an Indian instead of looking

specifically for, for instance, a Maithili Brahmin spouse with Bihari roots." However, during the course of her research, she said, she found a small proportion of weddings that parents arranged with people from the same caste/ village in India that maintained the ethnic specificities.

Eventually, though, immigrants tend to embrace the most prized of all American virtues -- independence. Dr David Popenoe, professor of sociology, emeritus, and co-director of The National Marriage Project at Rutgers University, said, "Immigrants to the US gradually adapt to our values, which are more individualistic and secular compared to their home countries. However, they do bring something of their own cultural background. For example, the most family-oriented group of people is Asians who have the highest marriage rate and the lowest divorce rate in America."

He pointed out that overall, the general decline in the number of marriages in the US was due to an increase in the number of co-habitations both before marriage and after divorce. According to the US Census Bureau and The National Marriage Project, in 2006, 56.3 percent of men and 53 percent of women in the US were married, down from 69.3 percent and 65.9 percent respectively in 1960.

Given that no two individuals, Indian Americans included, are alike, the inferences depend on which set of data one looks at. While research reveals that greater assimilation of the immigrant Indian community into mainstream American life has resulted in more inter-racial marriages, research also shows that an increase in the Indian population in the US has resulted in more people marrying within their community. "With the rapidly growing Indian-born population in the US, the opportunity to find a spouse within the community has increased, so the percentage of in-marriage has increased. I suspect that the rate of out-marriage for second and third generation Indians is much higher and growing over time," said Rosenfeld, who pointed out that according to the US Census Bureau and

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American Community Survey, 55 percent of Indian-American men in 1970 were married to Indian women, compared to 87 percent in 2005. Meanwhile, 66 percent of India-American women were married to Indian men in 1970, compared to 91 percent in 2005.

Wedding planners also report an increase in the number of Indian weddings they help arrange. Shobha Shastry, founder and owner of Massachusetts-based Alankar Event and Wedding Planners, said she provides services for 80 to 85 weddings for Indian American, Hindu and Muslim men and women each year. "More and more Indian people from the younger generation want to get married," she said.

Shastry has observed significant changes in the nearly 10 years that she has been in business. "Back in 1998/1999, we saw a lot of Indians marrying Indians. As the years have gone by, Indian men are marrying American women and vice versa. In the last two to three years, parents have left most of the wedding planning to their kids. However, around 70 percent of the parents still pay for the wedding," she pointed out, adding that while their children preferred a small gathering of guests, parents wanted to invite all their friends and relatives.

After planning one's wedding, the next thing to do, of course, is to live happily ever after.

Steps in San Antonio, Texas-based Jon Anderson, regional director of Family Dynamics Institute, a Christian-based marriage guidance organization whose eight-week marriage enrichment course is designed

for couples planning on getting married. "One of the foundations of what we teach is commitment, and that translates very well to the Indian community in America because the element of commitment to marriage is higher in Indian culture than in US culture," he said, adding that participants of the course consisted of Indian Americans as well. "Our curriculum is based on universal concepts," he observed.

Mary and Devendra Gothi of Orange, California, who have been married for 12 years, conduct the Institute's sessions in that region. "The class gives each person an understanding of their partner's needs and how to meet them. People don't know when they get married that they need to 'intentionalize' taking care of each other. So learning this provides a strong foundation for their marriage. The importance of honest, open communication is emphasized and exercised each week," said Devendra, originally from Mumbai, India. "We teach couples how to protect their marriage by giving them a chance to learn about each other and practice what they have learned," added Mary.

Devendra, 56, a chemical engineer, is the director of quality control for Avery Dennison Office Products, while Mary, 52, is a clinical psychotherapist and consultant with Arbonne International. "I have more than 20 years of experience working in other countries, with people from many different cultural backgrounds. I always encourage focus on the good in each other and celebrating the differences. This especially applies to couples," said Mary. "Since Deven and I are from very different backgrounds, American/ Indian,



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Christian/ Hindu, engineer/ psychotherapist, we have had to choose to see the good in each other's backgrounds. Because I have so completely embraced his culture, from the food to the clothing, his family says that I am

more Indian than he is and they love me for loving them so much."

Despite our differences, perhaps deep down, we are more alike than we realize. As they say, it's a small world after all.

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