

Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale

CAPES EXTERNE D'ANGLAIS CAFEP EXTERNE D'ANGLAIS

SESSION 2007

ÉPREUVE EN LANGUE ÉTRANGÈRE

Consigne

Dans le cadre de votre épreuve, vous procéderez :

- à la présentation, à l'étude, à la mise en relation des trois documents proposés (A, B et C, non hiérarchisés)

(en anglais)

- à l'explication des trois faits de langue soulignés dans un document et repérés dans la marge*

(en français)

- à la restitution du document sonore que le jury vous proposera

(en français)

III. CHILD MARRIAGE

Much as I wish that I had not to write this chapter, I know that I shall have to swallow many such bitter draughts in the course of this narrative. And I cannot do otherwise, if I claim to be a worshipper of Truth. It is my painful duty to have to record here my marriage at the age of thirteen. As I see the youngsters of the same age about me who are under my care, and think of my own marriage, I am inclined to pity myself and to congratulate them on having escaped my lot. I can see no moral argument in support of such a preposterously early marriage.

Let the reader make no mistake. I was married, not betrothed. For in Kathiawad[†] there are two distinct rites—betrothal and marriage. Betrothal is a preliminary promise on the part of the parents of the boy and the girl to join them in marriage, and it is not inviolable. The death of the boy entails no widowhood on the girl. It is an agreement purely between the parents, and the children have no concern with it. Often they are not even informed of it. It appears that I was betrothed thrice, though without my knowledge. I was told that two girls chosen for me had died in turn, and therefore I infer that I was betrothed three times. I have a faint recollection, however, that the third betrothal took place in my seventh year. But I do not recollect having been informed about it. In the present chapter I am talking about my marriage, of which I have the clearest recollection.

It will be remembered that we were three brothers. The first was already married. The elders decided to marry my second brother, who was two or three years my senior, a cousin, possibly a year older, and me, all at the same time. In doing so there was no thought of our welfare, much less of our wishes. It was purely a question of their own convenience and economy.

Marriage among Hindus is no simple matter. The parents of the bride and the bridegroom often bring themselves to ruin over it. They waste their substance, they waste their time. Months are taken up over the preparations—in making clothes and ornaments and in preparing budgets for dinners. Each tries to outdo the other in the number and variety of courses to be prepared. Women, whether they have a voice or no, sing themselves hoarse, even get ill, and disturb the peace of their neighbours. These in their turn quietly put up with all the turmoil and bustle, all the dirt and filth, representing the remains of the feasts, because they know that a time will come when they also will be behaving in the same manner.

[†] Kathiawad: province in the State of Gujarat

It would be better, thought my elders, to have all this bother over at one and the same time. Less expense and greater *éclat*. For money could be freely spent if it had only to be spent once instead of thrice. My father and my uncle were both old, and we were the last children they had to marry. It is likely that they wanted to have the last best time of their lives. In view of all these considerations, a triple wedding was decided upon, and as I have said before, months were taken up in preparation for it.

It was only through these preparations that we got warning of the coming event. I do not think it meant to me anything more than the prospect of good clothes to wear, drum beating, marriage processions, rich dinners, and a strange girl to play with. The carnal desire came later. I propose to draw a curtain over my shame, except for a few details worth recording. To these I shall come later. But even they have little to do with the central idea I have kept before me in writing this story.

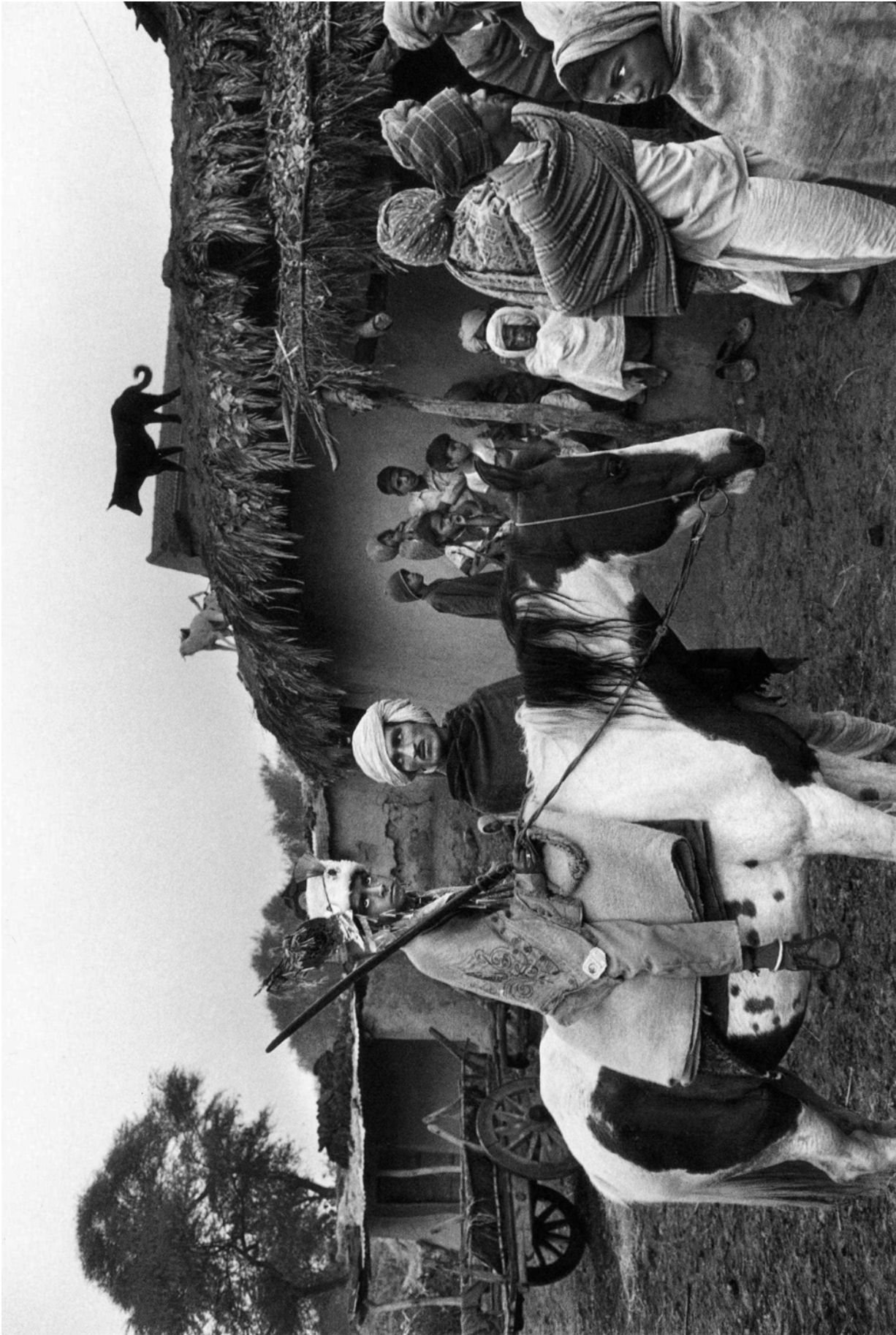
So my brother and I were both taken to Porbandar from Rajkot. There are some amusing details of the preliminaries to the final drama—e.g., smearing our bodies all over with turmeric paste—but I must omit them.

My father was a Diwan[†], but nevertheless a servant, and all the more so because he was in favour with the Thakore[†] Saheb. The latter would not let him go until the last moment. And when he did so, he ordered for my father special stage coaches, reducing the journey by two days. But the fates had willed otherwise. Porbandar is a hundred and twenty miles from Rajkot—a cart journey of five days. My father did the distance in three, but the coach toppled over in the third stage, and he sustained severe injuries. He arrived bandaged all over. Both his and our interest in the coming event was half destroyed, but the ceremony had to be gone through. For how could the marriage dates be changed? However, I forgot my grief over my father's injuries in the childish amusement of the wedding.

My father put on a brave face in spite of his injuries, and took full part in the wedding. As I think of it, I can even today call before my mind's eye the place where he sat as he went through the different details of the ceremony. Little did I dream then that one day I should severely criticize my father for having married me as a child. Everything on that day seemed to me right and proper and pleasing. There was also my own eagerness to get married. And as everything that my father did then struck me as beyond reproach, the recollection of those things is fresh in my memory.

[†] Diwan: a chief treasury official

[†] Thakore (Thakur): a chief or noble



Swapan Parekh, *Kamal arriving with the baraat* (wedding procession from the bridegroom's village), 1990 [Kamal and his bride-to-be are both seven years old and will meet for the first time at the ceremony] *L'esprit de l'Inde. Cinquante ans d'indépendance: 1947-1997*, Editions du Seuil, 1997, P. 155 (Traduit de l'anglais par W.O.Desmond, *India: A Celebration of Independence, 1947-1997*, Aperture Foundation Inc. 1997)

I think one reason why I never married was the weddings I saw as a child. I'll never forget Bimmie's, who was only sixteen and still in the tenth standard of the convent Kiran and I, much younger than her, attended. On our way to her wedding that September night with our parents our car got wedged in the winding motorcade of the bridegroom's party because of our late start. We were moving with suffocating slowness, halting every few minutes, parallel with the hired band in red uniforms with braid and trimmings, and on its other side men carrying gas lanterns slung from poles on their shoulders. Trees stepped into the spotlight and retreated into darkness as we passed, and percussion instruments shone in the theatrical daylight of acetylene flares. If I had put my hand out I could have touched the blown-out cheek of a trumpeter. I could see the sweat beading his face and the stain of hair oil at the rim of his cap. His trumpet brayed in monotonous spasms above the discord of cymbal and drum further up the road, all the tuneless dissonance imprisoned in hot bright fluorescence. Volleys of errant notes broke loose and splintered the outer air, colliding and crashing in a confusion of noise so deafening, I had to cover my ears. It was a relief when we managed to manoeuvre out of the motorcade and find our way down another road to the bride's house.

"What a racket! They *will* overdo things," my mother complained as we drove through the gates into the overdone rainbow lighting of the garden. "Punjabis have no taste."

Kiran and I followed her into the room where the bride waited, looking like a tent. I couldn't see her face under the crimson and gold sari pulled so low over her forehead, but in any case my eyes were riveted to the backs of her hands cobwebbed with fine gold chains, a regular cat's cradle of them attached to the rings on her fingers. A busybody relative drew Bimmie's sari aside from her face to show my mother tiers of gold chains below the red and green stones flashing at her throat. I did not identify anything so red, so green and so big as rubies and emeralds, and asked the busybody if that's what those whacking great stones were, and she said "Isn't she the clever one" to my furious mother.

"Sonali, behave yourself!" But I was hypnotized by Bimmie's nose ring, the sandalpaste dots on her face, eyes downcast, and those manacled hands resting submissively in her red silk lap. This was never Bimmie. "Hey, Bimmie!" I hissed. She looked up and it was her in the tent and the chains and the dots, nobody else. Walls welled up in me, erupting like claps of thunder into the room. "You'll get a good thrashing when I get you home, Sonali, I don't know what's come over you." The busybody bustled up, "Your turn will come, little darling, never worry," while other busybodies fussed around Bimmie, tilting her head, fiddling with her bangles and chains, stroking her cheek, praising her sweet, docile nature, which made it clear they knew nothing about Bimmie and had captured and tented her by mistake. My wailing protest did nothing to keep Bimmie's future at bay. I could hear it approaching to trumpet and drums through the frightful noise I was making. A trumpet blast announced its arrival and everyone tumbled out excitedly to the front steps to receive it, though a few stayed behind to take Bimmie out, walking as slowly as if she'd grown old, her head hanging and her sari pulled down over her face. Bimmie! My heart felt like a stone.

"Kiran's wedding won't be like that, will it, will it?" I harried my mother on the way home.

"Certainly not, we're not Punjabis. Nor will yours."

"What are we?"

"You know perfectly well what we are, don't ask silly questions."

The home was my mother's and my mother's culture prevailed in it, so we were Kashmiris, and Kashmiriness is the more powerful for inhabiting a territory of the imagination.

Nayantara SAHGAL, *Rich Like Us*, London, 1985.

HarperCollins Publishers, India, 1999, Pp. 53-55