

Diverging From The Past

“Rum... Pum... Pum!” The noise of the banging drums filled the room. On March 3, 1972, as the man who had been selected to become my husband placed a thaali around my neck, I realized that, at 18 years old, my life was about to change drastically!

Kneeling in the Kanchipuram, Indian wedding hall, surrounded by family, I was carrying out the Muthuliar religious and cultural traditions by marrying this man of the same religion, the same level on the caste system, and from the same city as me. The moment my parents told me, “We have found a man for you to marry,” I knew I had no input in the decision. I hadn’t even met the man until a few days before the wedding! Having an arranged marriage was common in India, but I never thought about what it would be like for me.

Suddenly, I was living with a man I didn't even know, but over time we discovered important shared values. We both cared deeply about our families' education. We wanted our children and grandchildren to be more successful than us, and eventually, that goal came true. Our sons and daughter all went to medical school. Then our daughter moved to America, married the man of her choice, and I assume my granddaughter will, as well. She has, unlike me, freedom to choose and marry whomever she wants. But, like me, my granddaughter also has parents who value education. They put her in great schools, fund extracurricular activities and guide her so she can reach her highest potential.

Through my story, my granddaughter realized the value of education and how it pushed our family out of poverty. Consequently, she has more freedom to make her own choices and more resources and opportunities to fulfill her dreams.

