

[When It Is Too Late to Say, "No"](#)

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## When It Is Too Late to Say, "No"

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Hindu families are being threatened. Case in point: Ramesh is a 25-year-old boy from Bangalore, India, studying engineering in the U.S. While at the university, he fell in love with an American student and will soon marry her. The mother and father were torn apart by their only son's decision to marry an "outsider." To them it was the unravelling of centuries of continuity, a break in the stream of tradition, a social calamity. Their friends would not understand. Their life would surely change. Their grandchildren would "be different," in color, in caste, in culture. Furthermore, the new wife came from another faith, and the couple planned to "raise our children in both faiths and allow them to make their own choices as young adults." To the strict caste parents, this was not a welcome sign of interfaith harmony. Rather, it was a warning signal ringing to mourn a break in their lineage, a potential loss of their grandchildren to another religion, another country, another culture.

There are tens of thousands of Rameshes and their Western female counterparts of European origin in the world today. The Hindu diaspora has brought with it the very real threat that many families may not persist, that in one or two generations all that Ramesh's grandfather knew and hoped to pass on would have been discarded and in its place would be other values, other beliefs, other ideals and histories. This is a serious concern of tens of thousands of families, especially those living in the West or in urban India. The Hindu community in Texas reports that 80% of its young women are marrying outside of the Indian tradition, outside of Hinduism.

Shanti was raised in America as an American, and her parents were from India. They used to go there when she was young, but not anymore. Shanti is not comfortable leaving her American friends to go to a place where she no longer fits in. At the same time, she feels bad for her father and mother and does not want to

hurt them. One day Shanti said: "Father, I have met someone, and he is wonderful. We are going to get married." Father responded, "You are? Just like that? Married? How long have you been seeing this boy?" Shanti answered, "Well, I have been meaning to tell you, it has been over a year." The father said, "We had always agreed that you would marry an Indian boy of good breeding, from a proper family." "But, Daddy, we love each other," Shanti cried and ran off to her room. She could be heard weeping softly. Her father sat in a dejected mood. His life was shattered. He knew only too well what was to come!

There are many sides to every problem, and ever so many answers to every question. But sometimes it is too late to say no. Yes, sometimes Hindu families are finding out the hard way that it is too late to say no. There is nothing in the rule books of the faith that prohibits falling in love. And if a marriage is not arranged soon enough - well, who is to blame? They say love is blind. It is also said that compatible arranged marriages often don't begin with love, but that it grows and grows as the years go by.

The Western atheistic goal is personal fulfillment, while the Eastern religious ideal is fulfillment of duty - duty to one's parents, one's society and one's country, which includes tradition. But when the children of Eastern families are raised up with Western values, personal fulfillment overrides duty, passion overrides society, personal freedom overrides tradition and sometimes even country.

Sometimes it is too late to say no to the Shantis and Rameshes who are driven by youthful emotions, know little about their religion and are impelled to live in a land where sex is a symbol of prowess, independence and esteem. Of course, Shanti and Ramesh did not want to hurt their parents, but they both did so nonetheless. Their parents are hurting and so are relatives and friends. These moms and dads will continue to hurt until they realize that they, without realizing it, relinquished their parental authority, and now it is simply too late to say no.

Shanti did marry her friend, but not without a lot of trouble, almost too much for her to bear. First, mother threatened suicide. Her brother started a fast, though it ended at breakfast the next day. Dad all but ordered her out of the house, but stopped short because he really did love her. Slowly, the parents adjusted, a quiet marriage took place, and with the first child came a softening of feelings. Unlike Ramesh, Shanti's husband was not of any religion. Because of this, he took great pride in attending the namakarana, name-giving sacrament, for his first child. It

was a boy!

Her grandparents came from India, and his from Iowa, and all oo'd and awe'd over the beautiful child. Yes, the resulting family was different than all had expected, but as one insightful youth told his parents. "If you didn't want me to become an American, why did you bring me to the States?"

There are 32,000 Indian national university students in the U.S. today. There are all from wealthy families and know little about their religion, even though their parents may know quite a lot. This is what happened to Shanti and Ramesh. They know more about rock and roll, modern art and pop superstars than most Westerners, because they are struggling to fit in. Their parents don't mix with their friends' parents. They are alone in an unknown world charting their own course. When situations peak, it is for the elders to get their heads together and accept when "It's too late to say no." Then it is their turn to adjust to the inevitable reality of cross-national marriages.

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