

## Redbridge Faith Forum Women's Workshop 10<sup>th</sup> August 2017

Thirty women from different backgrounds and faiths met together at the VHP Hindu Centre on Albert Road on Wednesday afternoon for a very informative and friendly workshop learning about "Weddings:- Ceremony, Customs & Tradition".

This was the first in a new series of workshops on this theme and featured Hindu, Buddhist and Baha'i speakers describing the beliefs surrounding marriage according to their faiths and the marriage ceremonies.

Future workshops will feature different faiths.

The event started with all women receiving a warm welcome and an invitation to help themselves to the delicious refreshments provided by the VHP Hindu community.



### **HINDU MARRIAGES:-**

Vinaya Sharma started the proceedings with an explanation of Hindu marriage as joining two families together in a strong bond that results in the procreation and nurturing of the future generation thus influencing social and cultural growth. It was a surprise to many that according to Manusmritie (Laws of Manu) there are 8 types of Hindu marriages:

**Brahma Vivah** – considered the best marriage of a bride and groom from good families who have completed their education. In this marriage the boys family would approach the girl's family.

**Daiva Vivah** – if a girl's family were unable to afford to fund a wedding and were having difficulty finding a groom they could approach a wealthy family to provide the groom as an act of charity.

**Arsha Vivah** – in this type of marriage the family of the groom pay a bride price to the girl's family.

**Prajapatya Vivah** : this is when a father gives his daughter as a gift as a betterment for the groom's family – this is usually only when the bride is very young.

**Gandharva Vivah** – is when a couple marry for love and without the consent of their families.

The following three types of marriages are now condemned by Hindu society.

**Asura Vivah** – in this marriage the groom is not suitable for the bride but gives as much of his wealth as he is able to her family.

**Rakshasa Vivah** – the bride is willing to marry the groom but her family do not give their consent.



Paishacha Vivah – this is a forced marriage where a bride is married against her will.

Hindu marriage ceremonies take place in the presence of fire which is an eternal element and the bride and groom take steps around the fire whilst making their seven vows (Sapta Padi). At the start of the ceremony the bride stands on her grooms right but after the vows are made she changes places to be on his left hand side closer to his heart!

When the couple get home there are games played to help her feel more comfortable these can include hiding the ring in milk and water and throwing rice before her to indicate wealth

Women then asked questions to which Vinaya answered:-

- The VHP Temple is licensed for marriages and Vinaya is the registrar.
- In general Hindus are accepting of inter-faith marriages these days.
- Forced marriages- the scriptural view is that the girl has to do her duty therefore she can have divided loyalties if a marriage is arranged against her wishes but overall the advice is to follow your own conscience. This situation can arise in the case of very wealthy business families who may pursue a match to keep wealth in the family or further develop their businesses.
- Lots of Hindu marriages are semi-arranged, families will introduce potential suitors about there is normally no compulsion.

## BAHAI MARRIAGES



Carol Khorsandyon spoke about Bahai marriages explaining that the Bahai marriage ceremony is not legally recognised in the UK therefore the religious service follows shortly on from a civil service of marriage (often on the same day.) Only one vow is compulsory which is “We will all verily abide by the will of God” and this has to be witnessed by two witnesses from the Bahai community – apart from that the couple can choose to include any music, prayers or readings they like. The witnesses sign a Bahai Certificate of Marriage which is lodged with the national Bahai Spiritual Assembly. Guests usually

clap after the vows are made. The ceremonies are therefore very personalised and can take place anywhere and anyone can officiate. Some people may choose to marry outdoors or hire a hall. Engagements tend to be short and co-habiting is not permitted.

It is essential however that all living parents freely consent to the marriage as the Bahai faith is based on unity therefore it is important that both families are united over this. Bahai believes in one God and one mankind and that poverty should be eliminated with wealth equally distributed in the world. There are no dietary restrictions in the Bahai faith but followers do not consume alcohol.

## BUDDHIST MARRIAGES

Hema spoke about Sri Lankan Buddhist marriage ceremonies and confirmed that the ceremonies do vary from country to country and even from the North and South of India. In Sri Lanka the priests do not actually perform the marriage ceremonies but will give blessings later to the newly married couple. Ceremonies are happy with guests wearing expensive jewellery, fine clothes and enjoying delicious food but do vary according to the wealth of those involved. In more simple ceremonies a plank of wood is raised and covered in white cloth and leaves for the couple to be seated on with a coconut flower placed either side which is indicative of fertility as it contains lots of seeds. Brides wear white, drums are played and sanscript stanzas are recited. The little fingers of the bride and groom are tied together and water is poured over them as a lasting witness to their union. Mantras are said



for long life for the couple and little girls recite blessings and shower the couple with flower petals. The couple exchange rings and gifts are given to the bride's parents. A coconut is broken in half symbolising their union.

Homecoming is held in the groom's home and consists of food, music, and dance to welcome the bride.

Questions were asked and Hema confirmed that Chiswick Temple is licensed for weddings in London, some other Buddhist temples are

licensed but marriages here have to be registered by a registrar. Most marriages are semi-arranged but not forced. The time of day and type of ceremonies varies greatly throughout the world and in the 29 states of India.

The completed evaluation forms confirmed that everyone attending had found the topic and workshop contents interesting and informative and are looking forward to continuing the theme by hearing from other faith speakers.

As one participant said "if you don't talk and don't share you don't know"!

Redbridge Faith Forum (RFF) is a registered charity (number 1118765) and an independent organisation whose aims are to:-

- bring together representatives of different faith communities in order to gain mutual understanding and promote social cohesion
- give Faith Communities in Redbridge a collective voice by identifying and addressing issues that affect residents.