

Choosing the Arranged One, Arranging the Chosen One
– Imagining an Indian Modernity: Reconciling Love, Marriage and
Family On and Off the Screen

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Social and Cultural Anthropology
Master's Thesis
May 2011



HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Tiedekunta/Osasto – Fakultet/Sektion – Faculty
Faculty of Social Sciences

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Department of Sociology

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Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title

Choosing the Arranged One, Arranging the Chosen One

– Imagining an Indian Modernity: Reconciling Love, Marriage and Family On and Off the Screen

Oppiaine – Läroämne – Subject

Social and Cultural Anthropology

Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level
Master's Thesis

Aika – Datum – Month and year
May 2011

Sivumäärä – Sidoantal – Number of pages
112

Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

This is a study on the changing practices of kinship in Northern India. The change in kinship arrangements, and particularly in intermarriage processes, is traced by analysing the reception of Hindi popular cinema. Films and their role and meaning in people's lives in India was the object of my research. Films also provided me with a methodology for approaching my other subject-matters: family, marriage and love. Through my discussion of cultural change, the persistence of family as a core value and locus of identity, and the movie discourses depicting this dialogue, I have looked for a possibility of compromise and reconciliation in an Indian context. As the primary form of Indian public culture, cinema has the ability to take part in discourses about Indian identity and cultural change, and alleviate the conflicts that emerge within these discourses. Hindi popular films do this, I argue, by incorporating different familiar cultural narratives in a resourceful way, thus creating something new out of the old elements. The final word, however, is the one of the spectator. The "new" must come from within the culture. The Indian modernity must be imaginable and distinctively Indian. The social imagination is not a "Wild West" where new ideas enter the void and start living a life of their own. The way the young women in Dehra Dun interpreted family dramas and romantic movies highlights the importance of family and continuity in kinship arrangements. The institution of arranged marriage has changed its appearance and gained new alternative modes such as love cum arranged marriage. It nevertheless remains arranged by the parents. In my thesis I have offered a social description of a cultural reality in which movies act as a built-in part. Movies do not work as a distinct realm, but instead intertwine with the social realities of people as a part of a continuum. The social imagination is rooted in the everyday realities of people, as are the movies, in an ontological and categorical sense. According to my research, the links between imagination and social life were not so much what Arjun Appadurai would call global and deterritorialized, but instead local and conventional.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords

Kinship
Marriage
India
Modernity
Hindi Cinema
Imagination
Reception

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Preface

During one week in the autumn of 2007, I saw two Bollywood movies in a row. Both were made by the same acclaimed director, Karan Johar. The first one, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001), was the internationally most successful Hindi film ever made. It tells the story of a family that almost falls apart because their son falls in love with the wrong girl. In the end everything turns out well, when the father finally accepts his son's love marriage and the family is reunited.

The second film, *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (*Never Say Goodbye*), now showing at the Helsinki International Film Festival, was new. In India this movie had flopped after a week of its release, whereas in America it had beat the existing record of *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, and become the highest grossing Indian film of all time. With India's leading director and the five biggest Indian movie stars, I found it strange that it hadn't done well at the box office in India, where the audience will see anything with their favorite stars in it.

Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna is a story of two non-resident Indians, Dev and Maya, living in New York, both married on their own behalf. Despite small problems everything seems fine, until Dev and Maya meet. They fall passionately in love and end up having an extramarital affair. This eventually leads to the break-up of both their marriages. Both feel ashamed and like a failure, and they go their separate ways. However, in the end, after few years have passed, they meet again and finally get each other.

Depicting inappropriate love and even extramarital affairs was nothing new in Hindi cinema. The movie left me with a preoccupying question: What was in this film that made the audience in India avoid it? Shouldn't this kind of film be a perfect example of a media product spreading new ideas and imaginative lives that, at least according to Arjun Appadurai, would be embraced by wanna-be-modern Indians?

When I left for India in the spring of 2008, there were a couple of paradoxes on my mind. I knew that the Bollywood film industry was the biggest of its kind – even bigger than Hollywood. I also knew that Indian people were crazy about films and especially fancied the romantic Hindi film stories revolving around love, romance, intermarriage and family. I had read my Appadurai (1996), and was thinking of all the possible liberating effects the radical stories of love would have on young Indians, especially women. On the other hand, I knew that arranged marriages were still a highly predominant way of getting married in India. And that arranged marriages were beneficial and practical for many reasons – at least for the young men in India.

Thinking a bit like a child, I was ready to examine the “effects” these romantic Hindi films had on young women. The simple logic went as follows: globalization intensifies some aspects already present in Indian culture, like individual choice, romantic love and materialism. Films would support this change by introducing “new”, even radical, ideas of love, individuality and modern lifestyle. And little by little, with the help of these influential media images, the Indian core institution, family, and the reproducing of the traditional kinship-system by arranged marriage, would change its appearance.

Turns out it wasn't that simple.

Introduction

My thesis is a story about Indian family. It is a study of a peculiar and subtle cultural change traced through the reception of Hindi popular cinema and its representation of family, marriage and love. In my thesis I will search for links between imagination and social life, and see how the social imagination works in practice.

The subject matters of my thesis are the kinship system in India, the Indian identity, and Hindi popular cinema and its spectators. In the spring of 2008 I

spent two and a half months in the city of Dehra Dun in Northern India. The aim of my research was to find out how the local young women felt about the representations of romantic love, love marriages and, on the other hand, traditional depictions of arranged marriages and family. How did the cinematic treatment of love, marriage and kinship relate to their own perceptions and approaches towards these themes? By analysing their interpretations of the dialogue between the individualistic romantic love and family-based arranged marriages, I sought to understand their relation to the cultural change in India. The presupposition underlying my research was the confrontation between local and global and comparably between traditionality and modernity. These juxtapositions proved to be misleading, since they were not in accordance with the ways my interviewees construed the film narratives. In my thesis I will attempt to understand *how* the movies were being watched and which parts and aspects were rejected and what was being embraced and even used.

In this study I will examine the relationship between the cinematic realities and the everyday realities of the spectators of Hindi popular cinema in North India. One of the theoretical problems underlying my thesis is the cultural role of Hindi cinema in India. What is the role and relevance of movies for young women in a changing society? Are popular movies a transformative force, as Appadurai argued, or do they merely legitimise the traditional structures of hierarchy and power? And what else is there to say about the cultural meaning of Hindi popular cinema in India? I will argue that Hindi popular films play a significant role in composing a distinctively Indian modernity by incorporating different familiar narratives in a resourceful way. The outcomes of this reconciliation, as well their reception, are discussed in chapters five and six.

I will begin my discussion by introducing my theoretical framework as well as central concepts and phenomena in chapter three. I will first look at the discourses of globalization and generate a sociopolitical background for my research. Next I will look at the kinship studies and ask: why are marriages still being arranged in India? I will consider the the primary status of family and the way the kinship relations define what it is to be an Indian.

I will also discuss Hindi cinema itself as well as the field of reception studies. The main theoretical framework for my research is provided by Mazzarella, Appadurai and Dorn, whose ideas are brought up in chapter three and applied to the data in the following chapters.

Chapter four takes a practical approach towards popular Hindi movies. It presents cinema as an essential and tangible part of everyday life and actions.

Chapters five and six both focus around a particular theme in the movies as identified by the spectators. In chapter five I will look into a theme found almost in all Bollywood movies, and usually in a big role: family. I shall approach this theme by introducing two family dramas that capture the ideal Indian family. These movies, *Hum Apke Hain Koun..!* and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, are both classics, great hits in India.

In chapter six I will look into the themes of love and intermarriage, and how these themes are depicted and discussed in Hindi cinema. I will study these themes by introducing two major love stories that most of my interviewees had seen and embraced. These are *Vivah* – an overwhelmingly romantic story of an arranged marriage, and *Jab We Met*, a story of love and friendship. Again, I will examine the reception and interpretation of these movies, and accordingly tell the story of love, marriage and family as the young Dehradunites experienced it.

Finally I will analyse the reception of *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* and seek an answer to the question: why did this movie fail in India? What was it in this film that made my interviewees embarrassed, indignant or angry even talking about it? Where do the spectators draw the line of appropriateness and right kind of Indianness? What goes over the line and why? And what is revealed in the process?

1. Fieldwork

I did my fieldwork in Northern India in a city called Dehra Dun (located approximately 200 kilometres North of Delhi). It is the capital city of the State of Uttarakhand with almost 500 000 inhabitants. I heard about this place through an American professor, Steve Derné, who had done research there on a similar subject. I was able to contact him through my supervisor Sirpa Tenhunen, and he sent me some references. He told me there were six movie theatres in Dehra Dun, located quite near to each other. He also recommended a nice hotel to stay and some contacts, like his local assistant.

On the first of January in 2008 I left for India. Dehra Dun was something of a shock for me. The noise, the traffic, pollution and crowds seemed overwhelming. Dehra Dun certainly wasn't a picturesque city – it was quite the opposite: ugly, loud and chaotic. Nevertheless, during my second day in town, I already visited my nearby theatre and did my first interviews. The first week went like this; hanging around in the theatres, and interviewing young women before and after the shows. This was quite a stressful and difficult method. The movie theatres were full of crowds and noise, and people were often busy even though they were also curious and wanted to participate. The formal interviews amounted to shallow answers, which led me nowhere in my pursuit of understanding the realities of the young women in Dehra Dun as well as their relation to cinema.

After just a week in town, I met a girl, Richa, in one of the theatres. She was enjoying her day off from school with her young cousin Abhishek. Together we watched a film and discussed it afterwards. Richa told me she was living with her mother and grandmother and they had an extra room in their house. Soon I found myself on the back of her scooter and we took off to see their place. And what a beautiful house it was! It had a big garden with roses, a white little dog in the yard, and an old grandmother who greeted me with special warmth. The next day I moved in and this was the beginning of an adventure that would shake my perception on love, family and human relations in many ways.

Since my research deals with intimate matters and personal secrets, I have done my best to fade out the identities of a few of my informants. The story of “Shina” in chapter 6.4 is authentic, but her name, place of residence and few other crucial factors have been changed to protect her reputation. Also the names of two other friends with confidential stories have been changed. By and large, however, I always told my interviewees and friends, that I was doing “a research” and would write about their lives. They saw me taking notes and allowed me to record the interviews as well as many personal conversations. Instead of feeling awkward about this, many seemed pleased about the interest I took in their lives. My friend Dipti even told me: “I am telling you things I have never told anybody. Nobody ever asked me these kind of questions, I am feeling good talking to you.”

Living in the same house (in the same room to be more precise) with “natives” has many advantages. You get to see how things actually go. My sister Richa, a beautiful and outgoing 22-year-old, and her cousins and friends were perfect “targets” for my participant observation. “Shina”, whom I met at our nearby market place at the beginning of my fieldwork, became my best friend with whom I had exciting adventures. I soon found out that the real life of a young, English-speaking Brahmin girl was something that I would have never expected. Shina and I took a secret day trip to a nearby town to meet her boyfriend. Within a few months I saw her changing her mind about the boyfriend, meeting a new crush, deciding to marry a good friend instead, and finally considering a man her mother and father were arranging for her. During various sleepovers at my sister Richa’s cousins’ place we girls watched movies, played “spin the bottle” and discussed crushes, boyfriends and future dreams far into the night. Richa’s family, relatives and friends became valuable informants and above all my friends, who opened up their lives and let me in.

Films and their role and meaning in people’s lives was the object of my research. On the other hand, films provided me with a methodology. Hindi popular cinema was an excellent way to approach all my subject matters. Almost without exceptions people loved to start a conversation on films. Soon, almost unnoticed,

we would be talking about the themes of the films on a more personal level. Often the indignance or excitement people experienced when talking about a film or a particular scene revealed a lot about their attitude towards the subject matter. At first I was perplexed to notice how unpredictably the young women interpreted the Hindi movies. But gradually I learned to listen to their stories and pay attention to the way they were being told, instead of holding on to my own presuppositions.

I was able to speak some Hindi, as I had studied the language for a year in advance at my University. The majority of my friends and interviewees spoke English, as did my family. On the few occasions when I needed translation – for example when I did interviews in a nearby village or in a school with modest income students, who didn't speak any English – I was accompanied by some local friend working as an interpreter. Knowing the basics of Hindi language was nevertheless beneficial, since I could always small talk with people, advice the rickshaw fellow, and understand the general outline of the films in the cinema (since they had no subtitles).

Being in the field was a fascinating adventure. It was like putting together a puzzle, new pieces and hints of the logic appearing each day. Before my fieldwork I found arranged marriages oppressive and out of date. When I returned home I had gained understanding: It actually made sense! I even saw the films in a whole different light. I had been living in the midst of the system (the people, that is), seeing a few dozen movies and hearing innumerable stories on courtship, crushes and love and, on the other hand, on family, responsibilities, compromise and adjustment.

The most important and highlighted love story I, however, learnt by staying with my Indian family. It was the one connecting family members. During these two and a half months my Indian mother Madhu and I lived together in a kind of symbiosis. Our relationship was one of caring, teasing, hugging, sharing and loving unconditionally. She became my mother in every sense, and through our various conversations under the same blanket I learned what she means by love,

sacrifice and dedication. Her sayings, like “Love before marriage is meaningless” opened up the idea of arranged marriage and the Indian logic of love for me better than a hundred official interviews would have ever done.

2. The data

My data is comprised of 80 interviews, 80 questionnaires, participant observation and movies, as well as articles from newspapers (*Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*) and film magazines (such as *Stardust* and *Filmfare*). Most participants in my study were 17 to 25-year-old female students of lower and upper middle class. For comparison I also interviewed non-English speakers, women of lower castes, as well as some men. The aim of these interviews was to find out how the participants felt about movies, how they interpreted themes of kinship, marriage and social change as shown in the movies, and how they saw their own relationship to these themes. I also strove to understand the context, the social reality with which these films are in constant dialogue. For this reason I also asked about dating culture, about their ideas on marriage, their values, hopes, work and family, as well as about their favourite films and actors and about going to the movies. In addition to the interview sessions I also watched movies with some of the participants at home and in the cinema. We would then discuss these films, during and after screening. The most valuable material and understanding I, however, gained by just “hanging out” with my Indian friends and taking part in their lives, conversations and interests.

As described in the previous chapter, I found the hectic interviews at the theatres arduous and fruitless. Instead I found out about the local colleges. Someone recommended that I go to MKP Girls’ College, which became my regular place of visit. The headmaster, the teachers and the students all took an interest in my research and were more than happy to participate. One teacher even arranged a two-hour-long session with 40 girls to answer my questionnaire. The readiness of people to help astonished me. The MKP Girls’ College was a conservative boarding school, so for comparison I visited another college, Graphic Era. A

meeting with the headmaster was arranged within minutes. The headmaster called a teacher and, after an hour, there was a class with 40 students ready to answer my questionnaire. The 80 answered questionnaires I got in this way were a good complement, but still I found the oral interviews, done in the form of general conversation, much more useful. By keeping the discussion fairly free, I could learn how the participants themselves talked about the subject matters and how they related to them.

I also observed my environment on a more general level, looking for connections to the films. I found that movies were a part of people's lives in many ways, in everyday life as well as in festivities. People used to listen to songs from the movies, dance to them, sing them and play them on their mobiles. Wedding celebrations, for example, featured current hit music from wedding-themed films, and all (at least the younger) guests would know the lyrics and dance moves that go with the songs, and know them by heart. Scenes and dialogue from the films were performed at get-togethers. Adolescents would play *Dumb Shiraz*, the "Guess the Movie" game. People also imitated the trends they saw on film in many ways: they would cook foods that featured in the latest hit movies, custom-make clothes based on those seen on the screen, and look to movies for inspiration for the decoration of their homes. In addition to the films themselves one could spot movie stars in ads, calendars, papers, stamps and on phone displays. Indian newspapers usually dedicated several pages for profile pieces on film stars and their interviews. There was no way of escaping the cinematic realities.

3. The Theoretical Framework: The Key Issues, Concepts, Perspectives and the Theoretical Background

"Mera joota hai japani

Yeh patloon inglisthani

Sar pe laal topi roosi

Phir bhi dil hai hindustani"

"My shoes are Japanese

These trousers are English

The red hat on my head is Russian

But even so, my heart is Indian."

These lines are from perhaps the most famous Hindi movie song of all times, Mera Joota Hai Japani. The movie is called *Shri 420* and it was made in 1955 by one of the most loved Hindi cinema directors and actors, Raj Kapoor (India's equivalent to Charlie Chaplin). The song, which became a patriotic symbol of the newly independent India, refers to an age-old discourse on globalization, which now had become a pressing question again. The external threat and fear of cultural imperialism and -homogenization, and thus losing one's own characteristics was prevailing then as it is now among many people and groups in India (for example the nationalist BJP-party).

According to Tenhunen and Säävälä (2007) nationalism is a major connective force in India. Many predicted that India as a nation-state will collapse into pieces in 1990s because of its internal diversity and external pressure. Somehow India has managed to maintain its unity (at least at some levels). The unifying forces can be traced to political, economical and religious institutions as well as to the prevalence of core kinship institutions such as the arranged marriage.

Mazzarella (2003) gives a good introduction to the globalization discourse and its history in India's political field, as well as in public culture. In the 1960s and 1970s the idea of cultural imperialism created a story of cultural homogenization, often referred simply as Americanization (Mazzarella 2003, 16). "The rise of mass consumerism" (ibid., 3) or "new consumerist ontology" (ibid., 13), starting from the mid 1980s and accelerating from the opening of Indian consumer markets to foreign brands in 1991, brought big changes in Indian public culture (Mazzarella 2003, 3, 13). Now a new communications infrastructure made it possible for marketers to conceive and address the global population as one big market (ibid., 16). This globalization of markets also required the assembly of a complex ideology of global consumerism. (ibid., 12).

Mazzarella identifies two opposed stands to processes of globalization in the 1990s: the (new) swadeshi movement and pro-globalization camp (2003). In the beginning of 20th century swadeshi was used as a successful economic strategy to remove the British Empire from power and improve economic conditions in

India by self-sufficiency (and boycotting British products for example). The term *swadeshi* re-entered national political discourse in 1997-1998, after 50 years of Indian independence, by the highly influential nationalist party BJP. Now it was to fight against economic threats to India from the so called modern economic theory of LPG that stands for Liberalization, Globalization and Privatization. (Weber 1999.)

According to *swadeshi* thinking, globalization poses a threat not only to local economy, but also to local identity, morale and culture (Mazzarella 2003, 5, 13). However, another, opposing discourse blazoned forth a different approach to globalization processes. The former head of Procter and Gamble India and a known columnist, Gurcharan Das, made a comment that crystallizes the pro-globalization camp's attitude: "Has our culture not survived the Moghuls, the British? Don't you think it will survive Coca-Cola?" (Das 1998, ref. Mazzarella 2003, 10).

By the turn of the millennium, both anthropologists and marketers had understood that "the local" and "the global" were not opposites; "global is constructed locally just as much as the local is constructed globally" (ibid., 17). The Indian advertising industry – Mazzarella's research subject – understood, that "[o]nly advertising which has an Indian soul and an international feel will work in the marketplace of tomorrow" (Arathoon 1996, ref. Mazzarella 2003, 14). The transnational brands also learnt to offer the best of both worlds: global form, local content (ibid., 277).

3.1 The Unchanging Core of a Changing Culture

India, as well as rest of the world, has faced unprecedented pace in globalization. The summer of 1991 is referred as being "the golden summer" in India; the economy was liberated from decades of restrictive regulation and it opened to international trade and global economy (Derné 2008, 15). With economical liberalization came new products and media images - it was "a rebirth of

dreams”, as Gurcharan Das, a known business guru in India has remarked (Das ref. Derné 2008, 15)

Tenhunen and Säävälä write that the economic liberalization has grown and benefited especially the fairly large middle class in India (now approximately 200-300 million people) (2007, 164). Tenhunen and Säävälä ponder if the globalization and economic liberalization have meant the westernization of the middle class. Superficially it indeed seems like it. The western products, phenomena, schooling and moving possibilities are clearly appealing to all Indians, and now available at least for part of the middle class. (Ibid., 168.) Tenhunen and Säävälä point out that “westernization is nevertheless culturally thin and is focused on small elite” (ibid., 169). Instead, the Hindu identity of middle class has strengthened and religion gained new meaning. The middle class wants to see itself as morally upright and representing right Indianness by distincting oneself from the elite by referring to it’s westernization and moral decline. (Ibid., 170-171.) Tenhunen and Säävälä yet remind that even the middle class in India is “an ambiguous and internally divided field, where there is battle on the concrete economical and social positions, symbolic prestige and its markers, as well as what is considered right Indianness” (Tenhunen and Säävälä 2007, 164).

Steve Derné has studied the effects of globalization on common Indians. He similarly discovered that at least the lives of “locally-oriented middle class” were characterized more by continuities than by changes (Derné 2008, 11).

Also Tenhunen and Säävälä argue that “Indian civilization has been able to merge new influences without giving up it’s own characteristics” (2007, 39).

Tenhunen and Säävälä call this “a distinctive modernity” (*omintakeinen modernisuus*) (ibid., 169). This means that even though the consumerist and materialist modern lifestyles are seen as positive, the western values are seen in negative light. The Indian corevalues remain and are being embraced as ever at the same time than the culture *seems* to be changing rapidly. (Ibid., 169-171.)

Here it must be noted that in India there are strong and diversiform regional

identities, which nevertheless are mostly compatible with a broader Indian identity.

I have introduced this overview on globalization discourses in Indian political and economical fields to create a background for my analysis of films as conciliators and bridge builders between different orientations and value systems. As I will later argue, same kind of discourses and approaches can be seen in Hindi films as well as in the ways of interpreting and experiencing them.

In this chapter I will continue to discuss globalization and the presupposed culture change theoretically, from an anthropological perspective. First I shall nevertheless introduce the subject-matters in question: the Indian kinship system and Hindi cinema. Next I will consider, what exactly are these shared and enduring characteristics and aspects of Indian culture and Indianness. What changes and what is being held on? The peculiar, culturally determined change is best understood by studying the Indian kinship system, and moreover, the arranged marriage that holds up the system.

3.2 Kinship in India

The following lecture is given to disobedient foster-daughter by her uncle, who raised her, after she refuses to accept the proposal of a young man, considered suitable by her foster-parents:

Uncle: "You have disappointed every expectations I had formed [of you]. I had thought you peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in these modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence. But you have now shown me that you can be wilful and perverse; that you can and will decide for yourself, without any consideration or deference for those who have surely some right to guide you, without even asking their advice. [...] The advantage or disadvantage of your family, of your parents, your brothers and sisters, never seems to have had a

moment's share in your thoughts on this occasion. How *they* might be benefited, how *they* must rejoice in such an establishment for you, is nothing to *you*. [...] And I should have been very much surprised had either of my daughters, on receiving a proposal of marriage at any time, which might carry with it only *half* the eligibility of *this*, [...] put a decided negative on it. I should have been much surprised and much hurt, by such a proceeding. I should have thought it a gross violation of duty and respect."

This stricture could well be given in a 21th century Bollywood film. The uncle, however, is Sir Thomas Bertram, giving a lecture to his niece Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*, a novel by Jane Austen (1994 [1814], 321-321). Fanny Price refuses to marry the rich, respected but rather raffish Henry Crawford, because she is actually in love with his cousin, Sir Thomas Bertram's son, Edmund. Her uncle cannot understand nor accept her "wilfulness of temper", "independence of spirit" and her lacking a sense of "duty" and "respect". In other words it is her individualistic choice and free will, which rebel against the parental authority, that make her despicable in her uncle's eyes. Fanny Price appears not only disobedient but also fully irrational to resist a man of "manners", "fortune", "estate" and "merits" (Austen 1994, 321). A perfect match that is.

Matchmaking, love and intermarriage are the main themes in every book of Jane Austen's. Novels like *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* and *Sense and Sensibility* wonderfully depict the problematics of finding a perfect match – the most important transaction and decision in a woman's life in the 19th century Britain (as maybe everywhere in every time). In Victorian Era, the idea of romantic love entered as a motivation for marriage. Nevertheless courting had many rules and restrictions – it had to be done in a proper and socially accepted manner. The introduction, for example, had to be done formally through a third party and meetings took place normally in the girl's home with her parents present. The set of options was limited, and it was not appropriate for example for a high class girl to be associated with a working class man. Many times the parents (or other relatives or family friends) would be the ones bringing in the options and encouraging the courting. At least the blessing of the parents was crucial, and as

heard from Sir Thomas Bertram, respecting guardians' wishes were considered one's duty. As described in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park* and many other novels of that time, running away, eloping, from home with one's love was a terrible scandal and brought shame on the whole family.

The relevance of this example and the interesting question here is: Why is falling in love on your own or with "a wrong" person still a problem in today's India (as it was in the early 19th century Britain)? Here I do not wish to suggest that the intermarriage practices in India would be some kind of an institutional relic. Instead, courting, finding a partner and mating are governed by social rules and regulations in every culture. In the case of India, if one is to understand the nature and role of kinship as well as the changes within the institution, one needs to ask: Why are the marriages still mainly arranged and this being even a social necessity? And why is there such a strong juxtaposition between the two types of intermarriage processes, love marriage and arranged marriage? Through my discussion of cultural change, the persistence of family as a core value and locus of identity and the movie discourses depicting this dialogue, I will look for a chance of compromise and reconciliation in an Indian context.

Arranged Marriage as the Core of the Core Institution: Family

Thomas Hylland Eriksen argues, that "romantic love has rarely been seen as an important precondition for a good marriage". Marriage is commonly perceived as a relationship between groups and is also frequently arranged by kin groups; "if the parties happen to like each other, this may be seen as a kind of bonus." (Eriksen 2001, 108.)

Tenhunen and Säävälä write that kinship- and especially marriage practices have similarities across India. This unifies the culture and society, which otherwise is diverse in customs and religions. (2007, 39.) In India marriage has traditionally been arranged by family elders. This means that (usually) the parents consider and negotiate the options best for their son or daughter. Patricia Uberoi describes the practice as follows: "Critical institution to my mind is marriage.

Whatever the other changes in Indian society, matchmaking still remains the prerogative of family elders, not of the two persons involved." (Uberoi 1993, 36.)

The kinship system and the intermarriage practises supporting the system are traditionally based on caste. According to Dumont intermarriage is a crucial point in maintaining the purity and continuity of caste. (1980 [1966].) Lina Fruzzetti (1982) has studied Bengali women and their kinship practises and rituals. She, for her part, heightens the kinship aspect – more than caste. Marriage is sacred: the duty and aim of human life. Nonetheless even kinship and marriage practices are based on hierarchical relationships; Who gives the gift of a virgin and who receives it. (Ibid.)

Siru Aura explains the institution of arranged marriage in the spirit of Claude Levi-Strauss as an alliance: "Close kin marriages strengthen bonds between affines whereas non-kin marriages create bonds between two kin" (2008, 57). But even in the latter case, the husband or wife is generally found with the help of close kin (Ibid., 57). In other words an arranged marriage re-creates the social order based on kinship and gender hierarchies.

"Love marriage", as always referred by my informants, means a Western type of marriage, in which the couple have met by themselves and made the decision of marrying without the parental approval. Aura gives a definition to love marriages in India by saying that in the cases she studied: "The parents opposed these marriages" (ibid., 65). In these cases the daughter was usually kicked out of home. In contrary to arranged marriages "[l]ove marriages confused the social order and challenged caste and kinships structures by re-negotiating gender relations [no dowry, no public weddings]" (ibid., 64). Aura describes how feelings of loss or sadness crept into the love marriages, because of missing guests – broken bonds with the natal families: "The form of their marriages manifested the fact that these marriages did not unite but rather separate the families" (ibid., 68).

According to Uberoi many anthropologists and sociologists have believed that modernisation and urbanisation automatically mean a transition from joint family to nuclear family (1993, 31) or from arranged marriage to love marriage by encouraging individualism and subverting the rules of endogamy and for example caste system (2006, 180-181). Uberoi herself sees this fear undue. Also Tenhunen and Säävälä have observed that middle class people belittle the importance of caste, even though in reality caste is an existing and central social institution also for them (2007, 167).

Love Cum Arranged Marriage – a Chance for Reconciliation

In her early work Uberoi makes a powerful statement by juxtaposing romance and marriage: "Nobody really expects that adolescent crushes and affairs of the heart will lead through courtship to marriage, despite the celebration of romance in the popular media. In fact, romance has only dubious legitimacy, and marriage, quite clearly, some other function" (1993, 2). This argument was made almost 20 years ago, and *some* change has definitely occurred since. The change, however, is not simply a straightforward transition from arranged marriage to love marriage. Kinship as an institution has remained as important as ever, but is now gaining new alternative forms (Tenhunen ja Säävälä 2007, 62). These subtle changes inside the kinship system are the subject-matter of my thesis and will be further discussed in chapter five and six.

In her later book *Freedom and Destiny* (2006) Uberoi recognises the change in kinship system, but highlights its peculiar character: "Though the match may be self-arranged, it should be of the kind that the young couple's parents would have arranged for them" (ibid., 253). So even though (in some cases) the young Indians have gained more agency and been given some of the decision making power, the cultural logic in making the best possible and proper match remains. Using this agency, however, is by no means easy, as different value systems and cultural logics clash and conflict here. Uberoi argues, that: "The institution of Indian marriage and the Indian family system are seen to be under threat from an alien value system [...] and feminist movement" (2006, 261). In my thesis I will go into this discussion by bringing in Louis Dumont's ideas of relational and

hierarchical India and the individualistic West, and then applying Christopher C. Taylor's and Joel Robbins' theories of conflicting systems and the chance of reconciliation through an intermediary, which in the case of India, I argue, are the Hindi movies (Dumont 1966, Robbins 2004, Taylor 1992). This point will be further discussed in chapter 6.5.

3.2.1 Family as the Locus of Identity

As noted before, family has been and still is the center institution in Indian society (Uberoi 1993, 36). According to Tenhunen and Säävälä the economic growth and increase in living standards have not undermined the importance of kinship and religion (2007). On the contrary, family has become the symbol and marker for Indianness, which is held by, even if other things change. According to Uberoi family values and relations compose "a moral universe": Family is as good as tradition and thus the right kind of Indianness is determined in family relations. "[F]amily is not mere unit of social structure but a cultural ideal and a focus of identity." (2006, 183.)

According to Uberoi, the crisis of identity and moral conflicts that Indian society faces today condense around the marriage choices (2006, 182). Love-marriage is a practice consistent with a modern and Western way of life, whereas arranged marriage is the core of the Indian kinship system, which in turn is the core of the whole hierarchical and holistic cultural order.

Uberoi argues that "contemporary popular cinema has emerged as an important site [...] for the articulation of Indian identity in a globalized world" (2006, 184-185). This "articulation of Indian identity" happens precisely through and in the disposal of institutions of family, courtship and marriage (ibid., 206). And it is this articulation that I will examine closely in chapters five and six by taking contemporary hit movies and their reception as examples. Before that, however, I will look into the Hindi movies and reception studies more generally and see

what film scholars and anthropologists have had to say about the meaning of movies and the role of imagination in social life.

3.3 The Hindi Cinema

India is the world's biggest movie-producing country: approximately 900 movies are being made each year. The importance and omnipresence of Hindi cinema can't be overemphasized. Lalitha Gopalan uses the term "cinophilia" to describe the relation Indian people have on films (2003). 10 million film tickets are bought each day in India (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 2004, 12). As described in chapter two, movie styles, movie stars and movie realities are present in everyday life in many ways: the music is played and danced on people's homes, parties and even on busses, the styles are being copied, the foods made in the films are being prepared at homes etc. The movie stars are everywhere: newspapers dedicate several pages on stories of them, they hang on people's walls as posters and calendars and youngsters have them on the displays of their mobile phones. The advertising on streets and unnumerable talk-shows and other tv-programs featuring movie stars make sure there is no way to escape cinematic worlds. Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel point out that Hindi cinema does not merely reflect everyday realities, but "has become *part of everyday life*" (2002, 8).

The Roots and the Style

The art of cinema is not indigenous to India in the sense Indian poetry, dance or drama are. However, it didn't take long until film was indigenized and made into a distinctively Indian art form. (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 2004, 12.) The roots of Hindi cinema can be traced to four different traditions: the two epics – the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, classical Indian theatre, the folk theatre and the Parsi theatre of the nineteenth century. Later Hollywood and Music television shaped the styles and conventions of Hindi cinema. Yet the melodramatic style and combining drama and music, for example, date back to the theatrical traditions in India. (Ibid.) Recognising epic narratives, characters and themes

such as duty, fate and unattainable love from the movies makes the stories deeper and the watching more enjoyable.

An identifiable Bollywood pattern was established during the 1940s. The recipe for a successful movie included great stars, catchy music and various dancing and singing sequences. (Dwyer and Patel 2002, 20-21.) The techniques of popular cinema are largely shaped by traditional narrative. The artistic cinema, for its part, derives from Western tradition of movie making (Hollywood), in the sense that the constructive nature of movies is hidden and an illusion of realism pursued. In contradistinction to this "invisible style" is the "self-conscious style" of Hindi popular cinema. (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 2004, 34-35.) Gokulsing and Dissanayake list the characteristics of popular cinema in India as "dramatic camera movements, extravagant use of colour, flashy editing and self-conscious use of sound" (ibid., 35). Either does the story progress in linear fashion, but "meanders, with detours and stories within stories" (ibid., 31). Gopalan calls Bollywood movie industry "a cinema of interruptions" (2003): The dancing and singing sequences as well as the interval-break in the middle of the film interrupt the storyline. Also the settings make the Hindi popular films look less real with their fantastical and ideal portrayal of urban upper class families. A reception study by Uberoi nevertheless reveals that most of the spectators considered the movie *Hum Apke Hain Koun..!*, an Indian family drama, as "believable fantasy", with recognisable emotions, cultural conflicts and social institutions and traditions (2006, 164). The notion of believable fantasy and this movie shall be further discussed in chapter five.

According to Gokulsing and Dissanayake the different genres of Hindi cinema are: mythological films, devotional films, romantic films ("Romance has always featured strongly in Indian popular cinema" [ibid., 28]), stunt films, historical films and family melodramas (2004, 25-26). In my thesis I will concentrate on romantic films and family melodramas, since they were the two genres favoured by the young women I interviewed. Gokulsing and Dissanayake determine that the characters in melodramas are by definition "easily recognisable, often stereotypical, and who incarnate the forces of good and evil" (ibid., 29).

Moreover “[e]vil is a vital ingredient because melodramas seek to establish the authority of a moral universe” (ibid., 28). This leads to the conclusion that “[i]ndian popular films are basically morality plays”: Entertainment and edification are combined in a functional way that appeals to vast masses of moviegoers (ibid., 29).

Films and Modernity

Gokulsing and Dissanayake mark that “[t]he relationship between Indian popular cinema and modernity is extremely close” (ibid., 26). First of all “Indian cinema is essentially an institution of modernity” (ibid., 39). Secondly, the relationship between modernity and traditionality has always been reflected in Indian cinema. For example the center work in the history of Hindi cinema, *Mother India* (1957) deals with this issue. Gokulsing and Dissanayake point out that “[c]inema not only reflects culture, it also shapes culture” (ibid., 11). To understand the complex phenomenon of modernity one is best to look at Hindi cinema and the ways modernity is narrated there (ibid., 13).

Gokulsing and Dissanayake remind that in the 1990s the interplay between the global and the local intensified. Accordingly the change in Indian commercial cinema in recent decades has emerged to keep with “the increasing cultural globalisation and commodification of society” (ibid., 3). According to Gokulsing and Dissanayake many contemporary hit Hindi films can be labelled as “designer films”. They concentrate on the ideology of consumption and the affluent lifestyles of “India’s Generation Now” (ibid., 115): “He is an Indian who is still rooted in the values of the land but is unapologetic about embracing the material trappings of affluence and western influence” (ibid., 115). This development in style is no wonder, because 75% of cinema goers in India today are young (ibid., 126). Gokulsing and Dissanayake summon the recent developments in Indian popular cinema as follows: music, romance and degree of realism have made a comeback. Traditional family values and cultural orthodoxy are still the dominant mantra, but with a Western appearance or touch. Gokulsing and Dissanayake analyse that the broad thematic concerns and the overall narrative grammar of Hindi mainstream cinema have “metamorphosed significantly”

(ibid., 142). Not only the movies, but the audiences have gone through a big change. And as I argue that movies act as a built-in part of everyday realities and in a close interdependency with them, it becomes self-evident that these changes go hand-in-hand.

The Contemporary Film Arena

I will shortly introduce the contemporary scene of the Hindi film industry¹ to outline who is who. The three superhits of the 1990s, *Hum Apke Hain Koun..!* (1994), *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) and *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998) were directed by the three "big men" of the industry, who still rule the arena. Sooraj Barjatya is a conservative conventionalist with his traditional portrayals of Indian family relations and rituals. His movies, *Hum Apke Hain Koun..!* and *Vivah* will be discussed in chapters five and six. Yash Chopra, a conservative reformist, is one of the most influential characters in Bollywood film industry. He is a filmmaker, screenwriter and a the founder of the biggest production house in India, Yash Raj Films. He was the producer of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, which his son, Aditya Chopra, directed. This movie was a landmark in the history of Bollywood in its depiction of non-resident Indians. It was a huge hit among the diasporic audiences (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 2004, 3). Karan Johar, a friend of Aditya's and an assistant in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* "developed the magic of this film in his *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998), itself a tribute to the Chopra family" (Dwyer 2005, 78-79). Karan Johar's films *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001) and *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (2006) will be discussed at length in chapters five and six.

The stars, however, are the most important aspect in any Bollywood film. The group of the most popular actors and actresses is rather small, and many of them are quite productive. Shah Rukh Khan, "the King of Bollywood" has made over 70 films during his career. Yet the most prominent and respected actor is without doubt Amitabh Bachchan, the "angry young man" of the 1970s. His son, Abhishek

¹ There are also strong regional film industries in India. The Hindi-language film industry, also referred as Bollywood, is by far the biggest and is located in Mumbai.

Bachchan, is one of the leading current actors. He, for his part, is married to Aishwarya Rai, the favourite actress among my interviewees. The two other leading female stars are Rani Mukherjee and Preity Zinta.

3.4 Reception Studies

Through its history and changing trends the field of film studies has laid emphasis on different aspects on films. First the research was “auteur”-oriented. In the 1950s and 1960s the main focus laid on “texts”, that is films as narrated wholes, coherent on their own terms. The next logical step was to look at the reception process. Along with reception came the important concept of *meaning*. And meaning of course always depends on the cultural context; A text can only mean something in relation to a context where it is read. In other words the process of watching was now seen to be interactive and communicative: There were the contexts (aesthetic, political, social, economic etc) of production and contexts of reception. (Bacon 2000.)

In her book *Perverse Spectators* (2000) a leading reception theorist Janet Staiger asked two fundamental questions, which had a great impact on reception studies: “[W]hat are the experiences [in addition to contexts] of cinema viewing for the audiences? And what are the meanings of those experiences”? Janet Staiger argues for a historical materialist approach to modes of reception. This approach “establishes the identities and interpretative strategies and tactics brought by spectators to the cinema” (ibid., 23). Staiger states that the aim of this kind of study is to understand how individuals interpret the world and how they use discourse to shape or reshape that world (ibid.). I agree with Staiger’s historical materialist approach in the sense that it goes beyond the tripartite division of “preferred”, “negotiated” and “oppositional” reading strategies, that used to be a fashionable way of looking into reception. Now one may ask, for example, if a spectator is reading for a plot or watching his or her favorite stars (and the fancy settings and costumes for example). (Ibid., 23-24.)

In the case of India, this audience- and context-oriented perspective, nevertheless, remains inadequate. As described above, the movies are not merely “events” (Staiger), or stories being told in certain “fantasy frame” (Žižek). Movies are everywhere, omnipresent and linked to the everyday realities of people watching them. According to Dwyer and Patel Hindi cinema “is a primary form of Indian public culture²” (2000, 9). These notions require a whole new methodology when finding out, what is actually the meaning of movies in people’s lives in India.

Staiger goes on to pose a third, and most interesting question about cinematic experiences: Which are the uses to which those experiences are put in navigating our everyday lives? (2000, 1). This question remains mainly unanswered through her otherwise insightful book. Also Gokulsing and Dissanayake, known film scholars, point out that there is very little research on the audience for Indian cinema and “virtually nothing about their behaviour during the showing of a film” (2004, 123).

Mimesis

According to Paul Ricoeur people perceive, construct and make sense of one’s life through different narratives; story is our mode of being in the world. His theory suggests that movies are important and easily recognisable, because they represent reality in a mode familiar to us. On the other hand, movies (and other narratives such as myths) have doubtless affected the way we make sense out of reality. It could be said that movies strengthen the narrative mode in us as well as answer to the need of experiencing reality in a story mode. (Ricoeur 1984.)

Henry Bacon brings an interesting addition to this by saying that a story can offer alternative representations and ways of thinking. Movies can provide us with new narratives – new ways of perceiving ourselves and our environment.

Adapting Ricoeur’s idea of mimesis, Bacon refers to fiction as *modelling of*

² “Here the term ‘public culture’ is seen to address the complex and fluid interaction that exists between the categories of high/elite and low/mass culture in India (whereas the term ‘popular culture’ implies a more rigid distinction between the two.” (Dwyer and Patel 2000, 9.)

humane experiences, rather than simulation of reality (as mimesis has usually been seen). (Bacon 2000, 184.) In this case the debate concerning fiction and fact, real and imagined becomes more rewarding. If mimesis is modelling of existential experience, social situations and subjectivity, then films become an imaginary resource and social material, that can be used in real life situations. Hence it becomes less relevant, if a representation is "fact" or "fiction" or if the boundaries between these are blurred. The critical question is, instead: How are these filmic representations being interpreted and what makes them so interesting and important for the spectators? How are the movies related to the everyday realities of the spectators? Is there, for example, space for a filmi kind of love in people's lives and where?

I will argue that films offer us tangible information as well as ontological models of how the world fundamentally is. They can refer to myths, tradition or "cultural facts". In this way, movies offer us information about the world its spectators live in, even though this information is served in the form of fiction. A film has been built of the elements of social reality, and can thus present social "facts" or values, even though the story may not be "true" explicitly. A spectator recognises people, phenomena and happenings in movies as he or she would in his/her social reality. For example, the relationships, families, values and traditions in successful Bollywood films are easily recognisable and close even though the settings and high class worlds would be somewhat distance.

In my thesis, I will examine the relationship between films and reality, and how people perceive and experience this relation. In other words, I will search for links between cinematic realities and people's everyday realities: Do these realities mix and how? What is the relation between these realities? In which ways are movies present in practical situations of people's lives? How do movies "affect" orientations, expectations, decisions and dreams? What is the "filmi"-part of people's lives, if there is one?

All these questions will contribute to the finding of "uses" (Staiger 2000) movies have in my interviewees' lives. The answer will not be a straightforward list of

impacts on individuals, but rather a social description of a cultural reality, which people share and in which movies act as a built-in part. I will argue that movies do not work as a distinct realm, but instead intertwine with social realities of people, working as a kind of continuum. This idea is apparent in Mazzarella's writings of culture and mediation and their relationship, which I shall discuss next.

3.5 Mazzarella: Close Distance

William Mazzarella argues that "culture is an effect of social processes of mediation" (2004, 360). Mazzarella sees mediation as a constitutive process and general foundation of social life: "[T]he mediated quality of culture has never been so obvious" (ibid., 347). Mazzarella broadens the concept of medium by theorizing for example the intersection between cinema and ritual performance "as an intermedium relationship rather than a primarily media-culture relationship" (ibid., 345). Medium, as a reflexive and reifying technology, "makes society imaginable and intelligible to itself in the form of external representations" (ibid., 346). Accordingly "[m]ediation' is name that we might give to the processes by which a given social dispensation (jakaminen, jakelu) produces and reproduces itself in and through a particular set of media" (ibid. 346).

Mazzarella problematizes the ontological relationship between "the local" and "the media": "[Substantialist and essentialist culture] analyses often imply that media are something that happen to or are imposed on already-constituted local worlds" (ibid. 353). Thinking like this, local would be composed of certain set of cultural values and practices to which media must then adapt, in order to find an audience and have "an impact". Mazzarella rather suggests that culture and media are coconstitutive. Social formations are not foreclosed (ibid., 348). Mediation has always been there, not separate, but playing a crucial part in constituting local worlds: "[L]ocal worlds are necessarily already the outcome of

more or less stable, more or less local, social technologies of mediation” (ibid. 353).

Mazzarella argues that many media productions for example in India have been able to withstand the pressure of Hollywood by depicting an aspirational idiom of non-American modernity. Mazzarella speaks of “close distance”, a powerful and attractive way of appealing to the commonplace but at the same time to compellingly distant. (Ibid. 355.) Close distance works as a dialectic in mediated self-understandings: personal through the impersonal, the near through the far, and the self through the other (ibid. 361). In other words, it is “a figure for the dialectic of engagement and alienation inherent in all cultural politics” (ibid. 361).

According to Mazzarella, all mediation involves a dual relation: simultaneous self-distancing and self-recognition. We sort of “let go” to see ourselves and society with new eyes; we do “social envisioning” as media make society imaginable to itself (Peters, ref. Mazzarella 2004, 357). On the other hand, mediation is an intimate matter: “It is the process by which the self recognizes itself by returning to itself, renewed and once removed” (ibid., 357).

3.6 The Role of Imagination in Social Life

Arjun Appadurai (1996) made a contribution to globalization studies by bringing in the concept of imagination to understand globalization at work. He argues there has been a shift in recent decades; Imagination has now become a collective, social tacit and thus acquired a new role and power in social life (Appadurai 1996, 31). Because of deterritorialization of persons, images, and ideas, “more persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media” (ibid., 54).

Imagination has been a topic for many scholars before, but the approach to it has been somewhat charged. The Frankfurt School and other critics of mass culture

have presupposed that “the imagination will be stunted by the forces of commoditization, industrial capitalism, and the generalized regimentation and secularization of the world” (ibid., 6). Frankfurt School presumed that the electronic media are the opium of the masses, an escape and an illusion, thus a way for the elite to manipulate and numb the large audiences by telling false stories and creating collective hallucinations. (Ibid., 7.)

To refute this, Appadurai lays out "growing evidence that the consumption of the mass media throughout the world often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and, in general, *agency*" (ibid., 7). He explains: "[W]here there is consumption there is pleasure, and where there is pleasure there is agency" (ibid., 7). So imagination has become a staging ground for action, and not only for escape.

Appadurai argues that because of different global cultural flows and new representations (mediated through mass media for example), people now have a wider set of possible lives and positions they can imagine. Appadurai gives an example of cabaret-dancers in Mumbai, who tell their story in Mira Nair’s document *India Cabaret* (1984). Main characters’ images and perceptions about cabaret-dancing and clubs come straight from Hindi films, argues Appadurai: “The characters in this ethnodrama have images and ideas of themselves that are not simply contingent outcomes of their ordinary lives, but are fabrications based on a subtle complicity with the discursive and representational conventions of Hindi cinema.” (Ibid., 62.) These women experience and act out their lives as a part of a bigger picture and define themselves within the frames of this context. They build their character by using the cinematic and social material at their disposal, and consequently are able to see themselves as dignified and decent guest workers or performing artists. (Ibid., 62-63.) According to Appadurai, different identities, realities and meanings are in flux in modern India. And this is what creates the tension between local and global, but also reproduces the culture. (Ibid., 63.)

Anthropologist Steve Darné has taken over to explore Appadurai’s thesis empirically. In Darné’s views, Appadurai might be right arguing that

globalization and globalizing media have made people around the world more conscious about possible identities and lifescritps – but so what? For “ordinary” young men in India acting out these new positions and roles offered by the mass media remains out of reach due to the institutional restraints they face. (Derné 2008.)

Derné speaks of “affluent Indians” who “now embrace cosmopolitan identity over Indianness”. But far more numerous is the “locally oriented middle class” whose identity is still rooted in Indianness. (Derné 2008, 129.) Derné takes an example of an ordinary Indian, Amit, whom he interviewed. He writes: “Amit is highly educated [...] but his limited English-language skills and lack of elite connections [...] limit his ability to hitch his dreams to the global economy and pursue a fully cosmopolitan lifestyle” (ibid., 128-129). For men like Amit “globalization appears to introduce anxieties and threats” (ibid., 206). Being unable to take part in the consumption feast shown in media, Amit and other “ordinary Indian men” clutch the traditional markers of Indian identity such as the “gender and family arrangements that subordinate women” (ibid., 129).

Partha Chatterjee has remarked how gender places women and men in different positions in relation to local and global fields. Indian men would preferably see themselves as actors in global domains. The women, on the other hand, are seen to represent traditionality and Indianness. (Chatterjee 1989.) Derné, for his part, points out that working upper middle class women can now move outside home independently which enables them to meet their future husband by themselves. A more autonomous economic position makes nuclear-family living possible instead of traditional joint-family living. Again, Derné figures it is the institutions enabling or preventing action.

What remains understudied is the subjective experience, sentiment and relationship Indian women have to cinema and its representations of romantic love, changing family arrangements and global lifestyles. For me the most interesting questions concern the way the young Indian women relate to these discourses and more importantly, how and in which situations are these

cinematic representations and discourses being used? Does feminine reading, feeling and implementation for cinematic scripts differ from a masculine one? And does the women's socioeconomic status, class or caste make a difference?

The theoretical problem underlying my thesis is: What is the cultural place of Hindi cinema in India? What is the role and relevance of movies for female spectators of a changing society? Through analyzing the reception of the most successful movies by identifying what makes them so popular, and accordingly analyzing why some representations are rejected, I will be able to draw the lines of a culture in a categorical sense: What are the traditions, myths and aspects being valued and embraced? And on the contrary, what are the elements and narratives being cropped out? I will argue that what makes a movie popular is its ability to represent Indianness in a form recognisable and tangible to the audience. A successful Hindi movie draws on characteristically Indian tradition and myths and calls on the collective imagination of Indian nation by presenting an imaginable reality the audience can identify with.

Answering my first theoretical question creates a second one: If we are to reject the deterministic idea of movies as a transformative force, then does this mean movies only cement and legitimatise the "old" structures and institutions such as arranged marriage? These questions led me to search links between cinematic realities and everyday realities, or as Appadurai suggested, links between the imagination and social life. This search yielded plenty of results, which shall be argued in the following three chapters. I will lay evidence, which suggest both Appadurai and Derrida were, in a way, wrong. Here I shall only note, that the links between the imagination and social life were not so much what Appadurai would call "global and deterritorialized" (ibid., 55) but rather local and conventional. From this standpoint I will build up and revise the analyses and theories of the role of social imagination in shaping the everyday realities and orientations of people towards it.

4. The Everyday Wear and Tear of Movies in Dehra Dun

Visiting NCC, a boarding school in Dehra Dun (sponsored by a Christian organisation) for girls from modest backgrounds, turned out to be a disaster. With my friend Hema as my interpreter, we approached the headmaster, a cordial nun, during one afternoon, asking for her permission to interview the girls. Delighted with the interest I had shown in their school, the headmaster led us to a church on the yard. She said she would bring the girls there to be interviewed, and some time later came back with two dozen teenage girls and left us in the church.

Coming back after few hours, she faced a shocking scene: six young girls dancing boldly and singing loudly on the altar, one using the altar cloth as a costume, while the rest of the crowd cheered and shouted as an audience. The girls were playing out their favorite part of the movie *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* and having a splendid time. Unfortunately, the headmaster did not appreciate the show and the girls were grounded. Before reluctantly returning to their dormitories, each of the girls gave me a kiss on the cheek, asked me for my autograph, and finally told me to take their greetings to Harry Potter if I was to meet him.

The afternoon left me perplexed. During those two and a half hours with the girls, I had learnt the most vivid stories on movies, boyfriends, dreams and movie stars, heard the girls sing a dozen songs, admired their posters and scrapbooks on film stars and seen them perform scenes from their favorite movies. But most importantly, I had witnessed craze and enthusiasm like I had never seen before.

The girls in this example were lower class Hindus, Sikhs and Christians, only 15 to 18 years old – not my usual focus group that is. Their passion for cinema, however, was shared by most of the people I met during my stay in Dehra Dun, irrespective of age, gender, class or caste. Movies were very important for my interviewees. The most popular movies among the young women I interviewed were romantic stories and family melodramas. They were watched, lived through and sung and danced along to. The stars, and their dresses, jewelry and

styles were much adored and discussed. Going to the movies or watching them at home was the favorite pastime of most of my interviewees. The movies obviously had a huge meaning for the young women, who watched them often and with enthusiasm.

Thus, I was very surprised to hear, time and time again, the same response as I asked about the meaning of movies in these young women's lives. The following conversation was repeated every time (even though I made every effort to ask the question in different, non-loaded ways):

Riikka: Do you get inspired by romantic movies?

Saakshi (20 yrs.): No! It's just for fun! It's just for enjoyment, entertainment, nothing else. Movies are not reality. It is very different, so why should we take it seriously. Movie is movie, and reality is different thing.

After the first few weeks, I was frustrated to hear the same answer over and over again: "Movies have no meaning in my life. They are only for entertainment and time-pass. Nothing else." But then it hit me – I was thinking about it all wrong, trying to make the girls confess they had adapted some radical ideas or new identities from the cinematic discourses. It was only then that I really started to listen to what *they* had to say about the films – and they sure had a lot to say: How the representations of arranged marriage had encouraged them as their own marriage was being arranged. How the representations of joint families and patriotic nationalism had made them feel proud about their culture and Indianness. How the dress design of their kurtas was adopted from their favorite star in the latest hit movie. How entertainment, big emotions, and acting them out at home while watching was a huge part of their life. "Without movies, life would be juiceless", said Dipti, a good friend of mine.

In addition, as I started to spend all of my "free-time" with my informants, who had now become friends and relatives, I was able to form a bigger picture of what was going on in the lives of these young Dehradunites. Only after this could I put cinema (both its content and the phenomenon) in an everyday context, and start understanding its cultural place. This place is discussed throughout my

thesis. The aim of this chapter is to show that the cultural role of Hindi cinema is not separate or detached, but instead omnipresent and tangible. The levels and ways in which movies “work” for the Indian audience are multiple, but the starting point for my analysis is the notion that cinema is an undistinguishable part of the everyday realities of its spectators. Cinema has mostly been studied and analysed as a separate or discursive sphere, detached from the audience, working from above, suggesting a certain kind of subject positioning as well as new ideas. My aim is to lay evidence which will give new insight on the meaning of movies in people’s lives, as well as on the cultural role of Hindi cinema in general

4.1 Genres of Hindi Cinema Defined by its Spectators

People reacted quite differently to different film genres: With different genres came different expectations. The people I interviewed often categorized movies according to how realistic they seemed. As was discussed before, at first most interviewees did not see a lot of similarities between their own lives and the worlds presented by romantic films. In contrast, many thought of films with social and political themes as “documentaries”, closer to reality both in choice and treatment of their topics. These were films that my informants found inspirational. *Taare Zameen Par*, which won the Filmfare Best Picture Award in 2008, is an example of such a film. It tells a story of a little boy with dyslexia, but with great artistic talents. Often the messages of patriotic films were also taken seriously, and people felt that these films were relevant to their own lives. For Divya, an 18-year-old student, “movies are education, like *Rang de Basanti*.” *Rang De Basanti* is a movie about five urban and carefree young Indians. Their friend, who works as an army pilot, dies in an accident due to the neglect of high government officials. They decide to stand up for justice and against corruption and thus transform into modern Indian freedom fighters. 19-year-old Choti, too, got inspired by the movie:

Riikka: Have some movies anything to do with your life?

Choti: Yes, the movie *Rang De Basanti*. It’s a gorgeous movie. I just love that movie!

Riikka: What was so good about that movie?

Choti: This film made us proud to be Indian. It made us understand what we can do for our India. Being a student, being a common man, what we can do for our India. That movie inspired us for that.

Dil Chahta Hai is a movie about three youngsters living in Mumbai, balancing between selfish and family orientations by pondering whether to marry or not, and with whom.

Riikka: What kind of inspiration did *Dil Chahta Hai* give you?

Subhish: No this movie is not actually for inspiration. It is a romantic movie. *Taare Zameen Par* is giving inspiration by saying that every individual has something in him or her. [...]

Riikka: But what kind of inspiration do romantic movies give you?

Subhish: [Laughing] No, they are only entertaining movies. I say there are two kind of movies. Other type is romantic movies that don't give us any kind of inspiration. Just for entertainment. And then there are inspiration movies like *Taare Zameen Par*.

The distinction Subhish makes was typical of my interviewees. Romantic movies and comedies were just an entertaining pastime. One of the most famous movies of Hindi cinema, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, which tells about high school life, friendship and romance, is an example of such a film. Family dramas and movies built around a moral, on the contrary, were expected to have a message:

Riikka: How would you compare *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* and *Taare Zameen Par*?

Shruti: First of all, there is no comparison. Not between those. Because I feel that the comparison is made between the films that are of same level. These are entirely of different level. The other is about entertainment, blockbuster kind of a movie. And this [Taare Zameen Par] is a moral based movie. They took out a very deep social issue in that. They gave a very good message. But there is nothing like that in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* or romantic kind of movies. They are more about entertainment.

Karisma: These movies based on real life, they share a practical thing. But movies like KKH, they have nothing practical in them. You apply logic, you find no calculation on them.

Shruti: The others are more entertainment-based and the others are more moral-based.

When asked about the meaning of romantic films, my sources would first quickly dismiss the question by stating, like Subhish, Shruti and Karisma, that romantic

films were “just for entertainment”. Most people did not really believe that the love stories found in real life were anything like those in the cinema.

However, people nonetheless watched plenty of films and often discussed them. There were a lot of times I overheard my friends mention movies and actors in their conversations. Family dramas, which portrayed arranged marriages and life in joint families, seemed to be the most popular genre among my informants. The interviewees themselves also often referred to these films as “family movies”. Some examples of family dramas are the traditional and conservative films *Aapke Hain Koun..!* and *Vivah* by the well-known director Sooraj Barjatya. I will discuss these films further in chapters five and six.

Most romantic movies, on the other hand, presented arranged marriage in a fairly negative light. They showed love as an emotion that simply takes fire, something that one has to follow (even if it will cause conflict with the family and with society). In the end the films always ended with reconciliation: the elders would be understanding and eventually give in. Before obtaining parental approval, however, the lovers in these movies would always emphasise that the parents’ will was the most important thing, and that they could never go against the heads of the family. In other words, the young couple was ready to sacrifice their own individualistic love and desire for the sake of more important values.

Prior to fieldwork I assumed, in the spirit of Appadurai, that these popular films, which were introducing such radical (global) notions of love, would have a profound effect on the expectations and hopes of young women. Soon I found out, however, that my informants interpreted these films quite differently. As I mentioned before, people found family dramas, which depicted arranged marriages, more realistic, and were hence less critical towards them. Furthermore, these were films that young women were able to watch with their families without feeling embarrassed.

On the other hand, also romantic movies depicting individualistic love were very popular. They would simply be viewed from a rather different perspective (as

well as in different company and a different kind of context – in the movie theatre). My informants picked out only those elements in the films that supported their pre-existing ideas and norms of marriage, family and love. An entire film, like *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, could (from my perspective) be about a son rising against traditional values and his father’s authority by marrying a girl from a lower caste. The main thing that the interviewees remembered about the film was, however, how the boy made a sacrifice and married a girl because her parents were dead. Another common reaction was criticising the rebellion against society and family shown in the film. In the following chapters five and six, I will closely examine two family dramas and two romantic movies, and analyse their reception.

4.2 A Practical Approach: Getting Real with the Fiction

“We can’t live our lives according to the movies!” –Choti

The young women’s approach to movies and to life in general seemed strikingly practical. Most of these 15 to 25-year-old lower or upper middle class girls had quite clear a picture of what they aimed at in life. For them, the most important thing beside family was to study hard and “become a successful person”. These ambitions could well be merged. 19-year-old Chandrakala writes: “My dream in life is to success our father’s dream to become an engineer and also my dream is to dance very well.” 60% of the 40 female students from MKP Girl’s College and Graphic Era, who participated by answering my questionnaire, stated that their dream in life was one of the following: to become “a teacher”, “an army officer”, “an engineer”, “famous” or “to serve my India”. These young women studied hard to achieve their dreams, and many wished that their marriage would be arranged only after they had first made their a career. These Puunam’s views were shared by most: “I really want to finish my studies first and settle in a job. After that I can think of marriage. But career comes first.”

The same practical approach was applied to movies. The most watched and liked movies were the ones with a message combined with a relevance to the

spectator's own life. "Pragmatic movies" (vs. "fictional movies"), movies "based on real life" or movies "showing Indian culture and traditions" (such as arranged marriage) were considered appropriate and inspirational. *Vivah* is a family movie, depicting the traditional process of an arranged marriage, from engagement to marriage. *Hum Apke Hain Koun..!* similarly depicts a joint family and all the important rituals within a family.

Riikka: What do you think of *Vivah*?

Deepika: It shows Indian culture. It's based on arranged marriage. Girl's parents meet the boy, and they both sit together and fall in love with each other. It's a totally Indian culture movie.

Riikka: What about *Hum Apke Hain Koun..!* ?

Deepika: *Hum Apke Hain Koun..!* is also very good movie. It is also based on Indian culture, how marriages happen. How they do all those traditions, Indian traditions.

Riikka: Have you seen *Vivah*?

Garima: **Aah, *Vivah*. It is very fabulous movie. It is reality. When she gets engaged to Shahid [actor Shahid Kapoor], how she reacts. In this it's very good. It's true, it's true. [...] It happens** in life also, in our society. That's why I like the movie.

Deepika and Garima, like other girls I interviewed, were thrilled to identify recognizable traditions or cultural patterns for behaviour in the movies. The most memorable details were characteristically Indian: How the heroine was wearing a kurta of an ordinary middle class woman, in the important moment of the newly-wed wife serving her husband food for the first time. Or how the Indian heroine reacts when she meets her future husband for the first time, in the company of both of their families, acting shy, but with her stomach full of butterflies. And how the couple actually falls in love with each other almost at first sight.

On the contrary, romantic movies with representations of individual love and romance are, according to Priya, "like one time see". For Komal, the most important aspects of seeing a movie were going to the cinema with friends, and the pleasure of watching and getting involved in the movie. Komal loves comedy, but finds romantic movies totally unrealistic and nonsensical:

Riikka: After seeing a film do you usually discuss it with your friends?
Komal: Yes, just for two minutes. Was it worth our money or not.
Riikka: So what kind of film is worth your money?
Komal: Comedy. Enjoyable movies.
Riikka: What about romantic movies?
Komal: I don't believe in that... bullshit and all.
Riikka: So you don't believe in real life there are same kind of love stories?
Komal: Oh my God! In Indian movie there are always two lovers. Their parents won't allow them and this and that. I don't know... It's ridiculous! I don't like all this.
Riikka: So this has nothing to do with your life?
Komal: Nothing at all. Nothing at all.

So, the movies which appealed the most were the ones the spectator could relate to. According to my interviews, if a movie was about a matter of common interest and touched the everyday lives of the audience in an enlightening way, it was likely to succeed. A movie called *Chak De! India* told a story of a girls' national hockey-team which got to compete for World Championship. This movie was a great success among my interviewees: the young women loved the way the girl protagonists united for India (since they also loved their country), loved the scene where the girls beat up a crowd of boys who had used abusive language of them (since most of them had been similarly harassed), and related to the hockey theme of the movie (since they themselves played or had played hockey). Nisha told me how *Chak De! India* inspired her to practice hockey daily. Also 15-year-old Keniya was encouraged by the movie:

Riikka: Why did you like *Chak De! India*?
Keniya: I play hockey. So I get my inspiration from these kind of movies only. I would myself like to be in this kind of situation, where all people can see me.
Riikka: So what is your dream in life?
Keniya: I want to study right now, but I want my career to be in sports itself. That's why I love sporty movies. *Chak De! India* is giving a message: If we work hard we can achieve whatever we want.

4.3 Larger-than-Life Entertainment

If we are to take the above citations literally, on the most obvious level, the story could end up here. Family dramas and "practical movies" are loved by all, having

relevance, tangible and righteous morals and messages and thus backing up the traditional value system. Romantic movies as “one time see” would simply be “left in theatre”, having no resemblance with the known social reality, no relevance and thus no deeper meaning. Gokulsing and Dissanayake explain: “The popular films [in India] are mostly romantic musicals that offer escapism and fantasy worlds to the movie goers. Entertainment is their watchword” (2004, 97). According to Gokulsing and Dissanayake, Hindi films are “collective fantasies” which “have many features in common with fairy tales” (ibid., 46). In the following chapters, I will knock down the wall between fantasy and reality by showing how a good “fairy tale” actually contains valuable social information, cultural formulations and moral dimensions, and thus recreates the world in the deepest ontological sense.

But not to get ahead of things, let us first discuss the role of entertainment in the lives of my interviewees. In the light of my study, the concept of escapism is misleading and without grounds. Entertainment, however, is not. As I have described, during the first weeks on the field, I was frustrated to hear how the “movies are only entertainment”. The dismissive tone here was nothing but my own presupposition. The meaning and importance of entertainment should not be underestimated, but instead the scholars should examine its role and relevance much more carefully. Slavoj Žižek, a Slovenian philosopher, states that: “It is not that films are taken too seriously, rather films are not taken seriously enough” (Fiennes 2006). Deepika, a 20-year-old engineering student, explains how entertainment is a crucial part of people’s lives:

Deepika: Entertainment is part of life. Without entertainment we can’t live. One day if we don’t watch tv we say, oh, we missed something, we missed something. [...] Without entertainment we can’t do any work. If we don’t watch any movie, if we don’t hear any song, it’s very boring. Some dialogs, some stories touch our heart. That’s why we like it.

Deepika goes on to list the most noteworthy things in a movie:

Deepika: If two persons talk, then their topic is about movies. We talk to each other about actors, actresses.

Riikka: So what kind of things you discuss with your friends?

Deepika: About their dresses, she is wearing this and that dress, necklace and earrings. Hairstyles... About their jewellery, about their accessories what they use.

4.3.1 The Stars and Other Tangible Aspects

The next piece is from an interview that I did during my first week in town. During the interview I felt I was not getting anything out of this 16-year-old film fan, who watched several romantic movies a week. It was only later that I discovered what it was that actually attracted Nisha in the movies.

Riikka: After seeing a film, do you talk about it with your friends?

Nisha: Yes. The movie was good, but she [the heroine] was not looking good, she was not looking hot.

Riikka: Do you talk about the plots, the themes of the movies?

Nisha: No, I don't take interest in all this.

Riikka: Do movies make you dream?

Nisha: That I have clothes like that.

This, of course, was not the whole story, and later, as I learnt to listen, even Nisha had many more stories to tell. But this particular story should nevertheless not be taken as an insignificant one. Nisha's interest in movie stars and their looks, appearance and style was shared by other young women as well. The 15 to 20-year-old girls felt that this was the age when it was "ok" for them to take interest in such things:

Riikka: So what kind of things do you discuss [about the movies]?

Sunali (18 yrs.): I am a teenager, so we quite highlight the good-looking bit, you know. So if the hero is good-looking we talk about him, and if his acting is good, we talk about that.

Aishwarya Rai, the former Miss World, was the most popular actress among the young women in Dehra Dun. The line of argument was congruent: "She is so beautiful", "Her eyes are so beautiful", "She acts well", "She is quite good-looking". Dipti elaborates her opinion:

Dipti: My favourite actress is Aishwarya Rai. She's my role model, I love everything about her! Her acting, her looks, everything. She is a successful woman in every way. She is a successful daughter, a successful wife, she has

successful career. Everything. I love her life! People know her, people know her parents: They are the parents of Aishwarya Rai. [...] She is fulfilling all her dreams and her parents' dreams.

Gokulsing and Dissanayake argue, that “[t]he stars themselves are the most important aspect of any film” (2004, 47). Actually the story is just “a peg” on which to hang the more important elements: the stars, the songs and the dances (ibid., 47). For Gokulsing and Dissanayake “[s]ong, music and dance are significant in conveying the meaning of the story and in generating the desired emotions” (ibid., 31). I would add that music and dance were something to take along and play with. Movies were certainly not “left in the theatre”, as my friend Bhavna claimed. There was much to seize – the concrete level being discussed here. There were the songs to sing, the scenes to act, the dialogues to perform, the styles for fashions, furnishings and jewelry to copy. There were the foods and dishes that could be tried at home, and the film sets where one could travel on a honeymoon, like my friend Karisma had done. Yes, there were many things of use to take home from the movies (Staiger).

4.3.2 Emotions

Jenna, a 15 year-old Finnish schoolgirl, wrote an essay about her favorite film *Juno* (USA 2007), which tells the story of a teenage girl who becomes pregnant and gives the baby up for adoption. I was privileged to read the essay while working as a substitute English teacher in her school in Espoo and got her permission to use it in my thesis to highlight a few points:

“The main effect that this film gave on me was very positive. Even everything that happened in the film wasn't cool and happy it still made me laugh. It's good that nowadays people do this kind of movies. They kind of take a problem, do a movie about it and still keep it funny. That's the thing I liked most in “*Juno*”. [...] I think *Juno* gives a lot of good emotions and that is very important. Personally I like to have this great feeling and a big smile after a good happy ending movie.”

Jenna's emphasis on emotions and positive feelings was surprisingly similar to the answers I got in India when asking about the meaning of movies in the young women's lives. Here is how Niha and Gaidri describe their relation to the movies:

Niha: I like all the movies which impress me, which make me happy. I like the theatrical movies with emotions, which are filled with emotions.

Gaidri: Sometimes if I am low, and I watch a movie, I feel that life will be good again.

For Gaidri, movies provided consolation. However, happiness, comfort and other “good emotions” were not the only emotions being sought after. Grief and romantic longing, among others, were also considered desirable emotions:

Dipa: I like emotional movies. If somebody tells me this movie is emotional, I also want to see it. Like if my friend is telling me that she was crying when she saw this movie, then I also want to see this movie.

“Sushma”, a 23 year-old receptionist (name changed), enjoys watching movies alone at home:

Sushma: I don't like talking during the movie. I like to feel.

Riikka: To feel?

Sushma: Romantic feelings. I want to see that I'm with my boyfriend.

Sushma imagines herself and her boyfriend in the romantic scenes. She dreams about romance, which she is not yet able to experience since she doesn't consider it appropriate before marriage (and which would be practically impossible since she lives with her mother, father and sister and only meets her boyfriend in public places).

This filmic voyeurism made it possible for the girls to experience even unfamiliar emotions. Sushma's favourite movie is an erotic thriller called *Murder* (2004).

This was a Hindi movie which the girls denied seeing when first asked, but later, when we were better acquainted, some confessed to having watched it and liked it. For me, this movie was a real question mark with its bold representations of “physical relations”. It tells the story of a woman, Simran, having an extramarital affair with another man because she is not getting attention from her own husband. In the end, the husband kills the other man, and Simran and her husband are reunited. Here is how Sushma describes the titillation the film provoked:

Sushma: *Murder*, you have to see it! Oh, romantic scenes. There was some physical... Even she likes the film very much. [Referring to her sister "Arpena"]

Riikka: Why do you like it so much?

Sushma: Physical relations! [Laughing] He kisses her whole body! And they are naked!

[...]

Riikka: So you enjoyed these scenes?

Sushma: Yes, I enjoyed a lot! Sex! [Laughing] Physical relations. I have seen this sex... I have seen this physical relation movie first time. So my eyes were like this [eyes bulging]! I didn't want to miss a single scene! I have seen this movie four times. [Laughing]

Even the 15 to 18-year-old girls in the NCC boarding school had seen *Murder*. It was difficult for my interpreter Hema to understand a single sentence the girls were saying about this film, since they all started shouting, laughing and whistling when we brought the movie up. It turned out the girls were excited about the "hugging and kissing scenes" in the movie. "Bahut accha hai" [It's very good], I heard them repeating. Hema further translated: "They relate to the heroine, and they feel that if they would have been at that point, they would have enjoyed more." The voyeuristic pleasure for these girls came from identifying with the heroine and feeling the pleasures and sensations she was experiencing on screen. I ask 15-year-old Jesuini if they discuss the heroes in the films. She replies: "Yes, their acting, their bodies, their actions. Basically these things only". This secret female cinematic enjoyment challenges the concept of voyeuristic pleasure as a mere sexualising male gaze (Mulvey 1999).

4.3.3 The Lessons to Be Learnt

Philosopher Ziauddin Sardar writes how, during his teen days, Dilip Kumar, the number one star in Bollywood in the fifties and sixties, was his "guide through the complex world of human emotions" (Nandy 1998, 24). As shown above, experiencing different emotions is a crucial element in enjoying a film. Films can even offer us a chance to encounter feelings we have never experienced. *Murder*, for example, taught Sushma about sex and romance: "Films teach me how to be in love, how to express my feelings", she explains.

Films also teach about the different aspects of being human, how to cope with things. I ask 23-year-old Aditi if she feels there is any connection between her life and the movies. She replies:

“We learn for example patience. You know, a person has to put up with a lot of nonsense, but in the end he wins. So you relate to that character, because you feel that in your own life you have to bear with a lot of nonsense. So one day you will get it, one day you will win, get rewarded.”

In the next two chapters I will consider the different ways in which “[f]ilms give us knowledge about our religion, family”, as Vandana put it. Films can create expectations, as they portrait the ideal state of family relations, virtuous heroes and succesful love cum arranged marriages, to give a few examples. The arranged cum love marriage, and Shahid Kapoor as the loving and caring groom in *Vivah* had impressed many:

Riikka: Would Anjali like to have an arranged marriage?

Deepika (Anjali’s cousin): She would like to have exactly the same kind of arranged marriage than in *Vivah*. Please search this kind of man for her! [All laughing]

19-year-old Gitika is a film fan and loves to discuss the movies and movie stars with her friends:

Riikka: Why are the movie stars so important for you?

Gitika: If you think about the future then somewhat we relate to it. If you are just thinking about your husband, we think that we want a husband like Shahid.

Riikka: So movies can be creating expectations?

Gitika: Yes, expectations and images. What kind of husband, what kind of family one like. Because in *Vivah* a very good family is shown there. Also in *HAAK* a very good family is there. So that’s what we like there.

4.4 Different Movies for the Theatre and Home

Going to the movies in India is the most common form of entertainment.

Gokulsing and Dissanayake briefly list the reasons Indian people go to the movies: Cinema provides family entertainment and a place for the youngsters to go out (also in a romantic way). And yet “[t]he impact of these social occasions

on the lives of people is under researched”, Gokulsing and Dissanayake write. (2004, 51.)

There were six cinema halls in Dehra Dun at the time of my fieldwork, none of which was a multiplex. Times of India published a story about the problem of not having a decent movie theatre in Dehra Dun:

“It takes a super-hit movie to get the families out of their cozy drawing rooms to watch it in one of the many cinema halls in the city. Otherwise, with rampant smoking, lewd remarks, constant hooting and non-stop chattering, watching a movie in Doon [Dehra Dun] halls can prove to be quite a harrowing experience. Hence residents prefer to wait for its CD version rather than go through the ordeal at the theatre.” (Times of India 30.1.2008.)

Indeed, this was a real problem, especially for the young women living in Dehra Dun. 54% of the 103 young women, who I interviewed about their preferences on watching films, said they’d rather watch movies at home. 34% preferred going to a cinema hall to watch a film, and 12% stated that both options were equally good. Some of the girls were not allowed to go to the theatres. But this was no reason for a family dispute:

Shivani (20 yrs.): Actually I can’t go [to cinema halls]. My parents don’t allow me. The atmosphere is not very good according to my own self and my family.

Riikka: What does it mean that the atmosphere is not good?

Shivani: Our tradition is very important for us. So if someone is saying something [in theatre], then we don’t like it. So we don’t go. When we want to see a movie, we get a cd and watch it in our home. In movies people make remarks.

Sometimes they are saying, oh, she’s so bold, she’s so sexy. That’s why we can’t go. Because my father don’t allow. And we don’t like it.

The movie theatre and home were two totally different contexts with different ways of enjoying a film, with different company and, moreover, with different films to watch. At home, with one television for the whole family, the girls would watch family dramas together with their parents. Sheetal, a 20-year-old art student, explains the difficulty of seeing a romantic film, since she doesn’t like going to the cinema halls:

Sheetal: I like family dramas, because that we can see with our family. Romantic movies we can't see with our family, so how can we see?

R: So your parents don't like romantic films?

S: No, even they like, but we feel out of place if we see a romantic film with them. They don't want to see that their children also see romantic drama.

For Hema and Bhavna, two sisters, comedy and romantic films were seen in cinema hall with friends, and family movies at home with family:

R: Do you like watching films rather at home or at theatre?

B: Depends on the company. If we are with friends, we enjoy more going to the theatre. With family we enjoy at home.

For most, the thing about seeing a film in a theatre was the comprehensiveness of the experience – sharing the experience and “fully enjoying” the film. Cinema of Attractions³ was still there for the Indian audience (as for any audience at some level). The sound, the big screen, the montage, as well as the absorbing images, impressed the moviegoers and intensified the pleasures of watching and experiencing a film. Indeed, one of the main characteristics of Hindi cinema is the direct addressing of the audience. Lalitha Gobalan, a known film scholar, has remarked how Indian popular cinema “proposes” to its viewers. This proposal is followed by “engagement”; there is no gap between the screen and the audience. The spectators live through the film, empathise with the characters, events and emotions, and demonstrate their reaction to that which is seen and heard openly. (Gopalan 2003.) Next I will consider how this “engagement” felt like to the young women in Dehra Dun.

4.5 Movies Are Not for Seeing, But for Living Through: Getting Involved

Going to the movies in India can prove to be a bewildering experience for a Western spectator used to a close-mouthed and decent conduct during a screening. To quote the article in Times of India, it includes “rampant smoking, lewd remarks, constant hooting and non-stop chattering” (Times of India

³ Cinema of Attractions is a term used to describe the early stages of cinema, when the image and the cinematic capabilities were still the main attraction.

30.1.2008). In Dehra Dun all this was called *halla* (or *halla-gulla*). In English this literally means 'noise'. Halla refers to all the shouting, remarking, whistling, laughing and trampling that takes place in the audience during the screening. The girls' approach to halla was twofold: Halla was the reason many of them could or would not go the cinema hall. On the other hand, as Hema described: "You can't enjoy a movie unless you get involved in it". Feelings become real "through our expressions, gestures only":

Riikka: Halla doesn't bother you?

Hema: We also whistle at times. If it's a comedy, we laugh or we shout. You can't enjoy a movie unless you get involved in it. It is just part of enjoyment that you scream or that you whistle. Clap and laugh. [...] We can show our feelings through our expressions, gestures only. It's all about appreciating the movie.

Bhavna: For example in *Jab We Met* - you have seen it? - there is a scene, where she abuses her lover, she uses some abusive words. So that scene was so loud that you just wish to shout and do something.

Riikka: So everybody was shouting and..?

Both: Yes!

Riikka: Girls and boys both?

Hema: Girls especially, because they don't abuse.. They don't use such abusive words. But in that movie it shows her using abusive words to take out her revenge.

Bhavna: Also when we saw this movie on cd at home, we started dancing.. All the songs.

Hema: Yeah, we can sing, we can dance when we watch it at home. This is the advantage of seeing a movie at home. That you can do whatever you feel like.

This part of an interview with two sisters, Hema (25 years old) and Bhavna (23 years old), includes many important points. Hema and Bhavna describe a scene in *Jab We Met*, where a deceived girlfriend "abuses" her lover after he leaves her, and how they felt empowered to be able to "shout and do something" during the show, when in real life this would not have been possible.

In the theatre, however, I rarely saw the girls act out. The halla took place mostly in the "lower stalls", and my friends and I would sit on the balcony whenever possible. The theatres in Dehra Dun had four different seating categories: 1. Class (20 rupees), Upper Stall (30 rupees), Dress Circle (50 rupees) and Balcony (100 rupees)⁴. Bhim Munjal, the owner of the Natraj cinema hall in Dehra Dun,

⁴ The average daily earnings in India are approximately 80 rupees.

explains: “A difference in rates will ensure that the rowdy ones keep to the lower stalls while the families can enjoy a movie in the balcony” (Times of India 30.1.2008).

Hema and Bhavna describe how at home “you can do whatever you feel like”: sing and dance for example. The most memorable film-watching experience for me was the one with my Indian grandmother and her friends. These over 70-year-old ladies were watching their favourite film *Shri 420* by Raj Kapoor (1955). They knew all the songs and most important dialogs by heart, and for my surprise, even the dance moves. During a dancing and singing sequence they would jump up from their cozy seat and start dancing and singing. The commentary was also ceaseless: they discussed the story, commented on the appearance of the actors, and recalled a friend who was related to Raj Kapoor. They were not only watching, but *living through* the film, indulging in it, and bringing in their memories, thoughts and sentiments.

Let us now go back to the confusion I described in the beginning of this chapter. Considering all the enthusiasm and involvement in cinema in India, I found it strange how (at least when first asked) nobody yielded a big role to the movies. Shivani, for example, likes romantic stories, but the realities of her own life are totally different. She tells me she doesn’t have time to think about the movies or movie stars after seeing a film: “I’m doing chapati [bread] all the time”. Moreover, Shivani states that “I don’t believe in love. I love only my mother, my father, my family”. According to her the movie ideas and ideals of romantic love can’t simply be taken or applied, since they have nothing do to with her everyday life. When I ask her why she nevertheless likes the romantic movies, she replies: “Because the songs are very beautiful”. The same, strikingly practical view on the movie representations is shared by 20-year-old Titash:

“Films are for watching and entertaining yourself, not for taking seriously or thinking about it when you go home. Hindi movies are good to watch and listen to the songs and have a good time. Then go back to your home and go back to your work.”

The main question here is this: If movies, and especially romantic Hindi movies, have "no meaning", they are "only for fun", "not to be taken seriously" and even "bullshit", then what are they? For it is obvious that they have an important cultural place, since films were everywhere: on the screen, in speech, in acts, in songs, in games, on paper, on walls, in fashions, in styles etc. In the following two chapters, I will continue to search for the links between movie realities and the everyday realities of my interviewees. I will recall *how* the movies are being watched and what it is in them that is being embraced and even "used" (Staiger). I will discuss the meaning of cinema for my interviewees, in addition to their apparent role as entertaining fairy tales, stress-busters, sources of fashion inspiration, and cultural catalogues for emotions. In the next two chapters, I will bring in a discursive dimension. By analysing the reception and the young women's approaches and sentiments towards the movie representations of romantic love, family, kinship and Indian culture, I will be able to better understand the relationship between real life and *reel* life in India. By doing this, I argue, I will be able to grasp the peculiar character of social change in India and the role movies play in shaping it.

5. Conformist Viewings of Indian Family Dramas: "It's All About Loving Your Parents"

Family dramas were the most popular genre among the young women I interviewed. The favouring of family dramas had for its part a practical explanation: these were the movies the young women could watch together with their families at home without embarrassment. Going to the movies to watch romantic films together with friends, or watching them alone at home was not always possible or considered appropriate.

You could easily claim that almost all Hindi films are somehow about family, marriage and love. Usually the plot of both family dramas and romantic movies is based upon tensions between arranged and love marriages. Perhaps the main difference is that in family dramas the main character can be said to be family. Family dramas often depict family relations as well as rituals, and lay emphasis on

the transcendent and vital nature of family. The obligatory love story takes place within a framework set by the family, and the plot revolves around the transactions that take place within the families in response to the hero and heroine falling in love (either with the already arranged partner, “the appropriate one” or with “the wrong one”). In family dramas, nevertheless, the family always comes first, and its authority is reinforced in the end.

The difference between family dramas and romantic movies was further discussed in chapters three and four. The difference between family dramas and romantic movies doesn't necessarily follow the axis conventionalist – reformist. The two family dramas discussed in this chapter, *Hum Apke Hain Koun..!* and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* get placed on the opposite ends of this axis. Both storylines conclude with conservative solutions, but the latter tries to work “new” ideas into the old traditions and relations on the way. In the following chapter I will analyse the audience's response to these new ideas of individuality, rebellion against parental authority, and fatal love as the only motive for marriage.

In this chapter I will first introduce the two family dramas in question as *I* saw them. Next I will look at these films through my informants' eyes, trying to grasp the way in which *they* saw the films. What was it these films that made them feel good? What were the parts and themes they remembered and brought up afterwards? What part didn't they understand or possibly even reject? And what was the relevance or presence of these films in their lives more generally?

Having first looked at the reception and understanding of these two films I shall then analyse the way in which these movies (and their kind) work as bridge builders, reconciliators, safety deposit box for core cultural values and built-in parts of everyday realities.

5.1 Presenting Two Family Dramas: *Hum Apke Hain Koun..!* and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*

Hum Apke Hain Koun..! (What am I to you..!)

Hum Apke Hain Koun..! (1994), or shortly *HAAK*, is the second-highest grossing film in the history of Hindi cinema. Its popularity was unprecedented in the 90s – and in 2008 it was still one of the most loved films among my interviewees. It is directed by Sooraj Barjatya, the conventionalist portrayer of Indian family and traditions. Rachel Dwyer, one the leading scholars of Hindi cinema, has remarked that the film’s depiction of family rituals, each marked with a song, takes up over two hours of the (three-and-a-half-hour long) film (Dwyer 2005, 113.). The drama and the love story happen somewhere in between, and are subordinate to the praising of Indian family and the right Indianness, that manifests in the relations and rituals within a family.

Patricia Uberoi points out that *HAAK* is a family movie in a double sense: a movie for a family audience and about family relationships. It is a clean and morally uplifting movie with a total lack of vulgarity (sexual content) and violence, the masala [spicy] elements that had become the trademark of Bollywood hit films during the 80s. Instead it launched a new trend of embracing the exuberant western-style materialism and consumerism. Film critic Subhash K. Jha summarises that in *HAAK* “[t]he Indian values are placed within a modern context” (Jha 2005, 117).

Here is an outline of the film plot: Prem and Rajesh are two brothers raised by their uncle Kailash Nath, a rich industrialist. Another relative, the boys’ maternal uncle, suggests that Rajesh marry Pooja, a daughter of his friend, Professor S. S. Chowdhury. Coincidentally Kailash knows the professor and his wife already – they were friends in college. The marriage is arranged and everyone is more than happy for the match, since now these two families are reunited. Also Pooja and Rajesh instantly take a liking to each other. Together the two families celebrate and perform all the rituals of engagement, marriage, pregnancy and childbirth. Meanwhile, Prem, the younger brother of Rajesh and Nisha, the younger sister of Pooja, become friends and eventually fall in love. Prem confides in his sister-in-law, but before Pooja has time to arrange things, she meets her death in a tragic accident. The families are broken-hearted and worry about the future of Pooja’s

now motherless son. Nisha takes care of her sister's baby, and unaware of the truth between Prem and Nisha, the family elders decide to follow an old Indian custom by arranging a marriage between the widower and his dead wife's sister. When they find out these plans, both Prem and Nisha decide to sacrifice their love for the sake of Rajesh, the baby and the whole family. With the help of Tuffy the dog and Lord Krishna the truth is revealed in the nick of time. Prem and Nisha get their families' blessing and a grand wedding is held.

HAAK: the Reception

Without exception my interviewees and friends loved the film *HAAK*. They told me it was "realistic", "based on real life", "showing Indian traditions and culture", and that "everything in this movie is very natural and good".

When talking about this movie, very few actually brought up the love story part. This movie was remembered and liked precisely because of its depiction of the perfect Indian family and its relations and rituals. The movie seemed to work as a guideline of how one should act in a family, respect one's elders and sacrifice individual desires for the sake of the more important unit, family. According to Sheetal "[t]his kind of movie gives a message for the society. Children should respect their parents".

Ambika: [In *HAAK*] they show the real family bond, ties and all, so I believe in all this. Strong family ties and caring for each other.

Deepika: *HAAK* is also a very good movie. It is based on Indian culture, how marriages happen. How they do all those traditions, Indian traditions.

Gitika: In *HAAK* a very good family is there. So that's what we like.

The main themes brought up by the spectators were the relationships within the family, the respect children have for their parents and the responsibilities between sisters and brothers. Dipa told me how she loved the part where Nisha was ready to sacrifice her own happiness for the sake of her sister. For Anjali, the thing she liked the most was "the relation of the two sisters". Sheetal remembers how the respect of the younger brother for his older brother impressed her.

Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham

Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham has been one of the big blockbusters of the 21st century. It is directed by one of the leading contemporary moviemakers, Karan Johar. I have chosen it as the second example of a family drama, since it was among the favorite movies of most of my interviewees. Karan Johar is also known to have great respect for the work of Sooraj Barjatya, the director of *HAHK*. In *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* there is an intertextual cross-reference to *HAHK* when the hero asks the heroine: “Hum Apke Hain Koun?” [What am I to you?]. Nevertheless, compared to *HAHK*, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, or *K3G*, is more controversial. Yet in *K3G* Karan Johar did not cross the line, but certainly stretched the limits of conventionality. It was not until *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, that Johar seriously questioned the family bonds as the ultimate inviolable.

K3G is a story about a father-son relationship (an important theme in Hindi cinema). It is about a family and, most of all, about family values. As the slogan of the film says: “It’s all about loving your parents”. At the same time, it represents an overwhelmingly luxurious world with castles, helicopters, private schools, ultramodern fashion and high society parties. The plot goes as follows: In the beginning a perfect, happy family is introduced. The father Yashvardhan “Yash” Raichand (Amitabh Bachchan) is a very rich and famous businessman with a loving wife, Nandini, and two sons, Rahul and Rohit. Rahul (Shah Rukh Khan) is adopted, but even his brother Rohit, who is nine years younger, doesn’t know this, since Rahul is the very soul of the family and the apple of his parents’ eye.

Yash is a man of principle who believes in age-old Indian traditions. When handing over his business to Rahul, Yash advises him: “Never take a step in your life that will bring shame on your family name or prestige”. When it comes time to think about Rahul’s marriage, Yash tells his wife: “What is the need to talk to him [Rahul]. He does not make these decisions”. So Yash chooses Naina, a daughter of his good friend, to be wedded to Rahul. Naina is thrilled, since she has been in love with Rahul, a good friend of hers, since childhood. Unfortunately Rahul has already fallen in love with another girl, Anjali, a poor, lower caste girl

he met by accident. When he confesses this, his father becomes furious: “You never thought of her background, breeding, of her status. She will never be able to understand our culture, our traditions, our rituals!”

Rahul is devastated, but consents to his father’s will. He goes to break up with Anjali, only to find out that Anjali’s father has just died, leaving his two unmarried daughters with no-one to look after them (since they are already motherless). On the spot Rahul marries Anjali. When he takes her home, his father denies him, saying Rahul is no longer his son. This is a shocking scene: Rahul crying on his knees in front of his father, Anjali screaming in panic: “Rahul, we didn’t have your father’s blessing!” The scene depicts the complete horror of a pure love marriage.

Rahul and Anjali move to England and ten years pass by. Meanwhile Yash and Nandini have led a loveless life, both grieving on their own behalf, Nandini secretly blaming Yash for the break-up of the family. Rahul’s younger brother Rohit has become a handsome young man, now finishing his studies in boarding school. He accidentally finds out the truth about his dear brother’s sudden leaving and swears to reunite his family. He goes to England and, by first plotting and then persuading his brother to go back to India, he succeeds. The father finally admits he was wrong not to accept Anjali and now gives his blessing to the couple: “Sometimes you youngsters of the house show the right path for the elders”. The overwhelming joy of the reunited family is celebrated in Rohit’s and Anjali’s little sister’s wedding.

K3G: the Reception

K3G was one the most popular movies among my interviewees. Gunjanza explains what the movie is about: “[*K3G*] tells you all about family: How family moves ahead. How people in a family relate to each other, how they react to each other. It’s all about family.” For 27-year-old Shanu the movie was essentially “a story about a mother and a son”. For 20-year-old Sheetal it was about a “father’s love for his children”.

22-year-old Richa likes *K3G* "because this movie we can watch with our family. It was a good, decent movie." Richa goes on to explain the story as she experienced it: "You know, Amitabh Bachchan [father Yash] is from a very good family and Kajol [Anjali] is not, she is very poor. She works in a sweet shop. Rani [Naina] is also from a good family, so Amitabh [Yash] wants her in his family. But Shah Rukh [Rahul] prefers love, not money."

Many of the young women I interviewed felt Shah Rukh (the actor, as they always referred to the hero) did the right thing by marrying Kajol (Anjali). Vishali tells me: "I feel that is a good part. If you are right, you should go ahead. Then after some time you can convince your parents. Right?" The fact that Rahul was played by the greatly loved Shah Rukh Khan, the number one star of India, might have generated some extra sympathy for Rahul's choice. At least if we are to take Bhabia seriously:

Riikka: Which one of them was right, the son or the father?

Bhabia: Shah Rukh obviously. Because... Because we like Shah Rukh Khan!
[Laughing]

I ask Sandia how she felt about the "love marriage" in the film. She replies: "Love cum arranged is good." This answer reveals her logic nicely. Sandia doesn't feel there is any kind of a contradiction or tension, since in the end the father gives the couple his consent. The unlawful love marriage turns into love cum arranged marriage. And love cum arranged *is* as good and morally acceptable as arranged marriage. Sandia explains that she herself would specifically like an arranged marriage, because "my family members approve that. All are happy. [...] It is whole family's responsibility, not just yours."

Deepika, a friend of mine, used to tell me stories about unsuccessful love marriages of distant relatives or friends of a friend. I felt these circulating horror stories about pure love marriages had a cautionary function. Deepika also found evidence in favour of arranged marriages in her favorite Hindi films: "In movies, when both families' parents get involved, then the marriage becomes successful.

In some movies it shows that parents don't agree with them, and then boy and girl quarrel."

Critique

Unlike *HAKK*, *K3G* got a more critical viewing. Even though most of my interviewees liked the film, its approach also provoked critique, resistance and even rejection.

I was discussing the storyline of *K3G* with my 20-year-old friend Dipti. I told her how I felt the message of the film was for parents to adjust their attitudes and make more compromises. This upset Dipti, who replied to me heatedly: "We shouldn't think parents have to adjust! I think it should be children who should adjust. Today children are not thinking their parents anymore. Only about themselves." Like Dipti, many other young Dehradunites brought out their concern for decline of traditional values and the distinctive status of family. Vandana felt this was mainly a problem concerning boys: "Girls are very good in India. They know how to respect their parents. Boys are dogs!" [Dog being a common term of abuse in India.] [Laughing]

For 23-year-old Sushma, making her parents happy is her "first priority":

Riikka: What did you think about the love story in *K3G*?

Sushma: Yeah, it's fine. But Shah Rukh should think about his parents also. I think by hurting your parents you can't be happy. There's always something in your mind: I'm not being good, I'm not happy... I'm making my wife happy, but on the other side, I'm not making my parents happy. And this is my first priority.

5.2 The Everlasting Indian Love Story: "It's All about Loving Your Parents"

As discussed in chapter 3.2, family is the core institution in Indian culture. Thus it is the very place where it is determined and felt what it means to be an Indian. And as I saw in the movies and heard from my interviewees: Indianness is about sharing family values. Karisma's description of *Baghban*, one of the most popular 21st century family dramas, illustrates the essence of Indian family values:

Karisma: I also like movie *Baghban* very much. In this movie Amitabh Bachchan has seven children. Six of his own, and one adopted. These six children didn't take care of their parents, and even tried to separate them. But Salman Khan, the adopted son, takes care of them. He says: "Whatever I am today, it is because of you". This is a reality movie. It tells what children are doing today with their parents. Everybody should learn from this movie, how to act right with your parents.

Here it is worth noting that what makes a good son is not a biological tie, but taking care of one's parents and paying them respect: "Whatever I am today, it is because of you", says the best, adopted son. Karisma's description of the plot and the message, as she understood it, is in accordance with the depiction of the family in *HAAK* and *K3G*. In *K3G* the favorite son, Rahul, was also adopted. In *HAAK* the guardian of the two brothers was actually their uncle. What was highlighted in the all three films is that a family is made up and maintained in practice through fulfilling one's duties as a daughter, son, sister, brother, mother, father, grandmother, *bhabhi* (sister-in-law), *caca* (uncle) and various other kinship roles. For example: The right kind of son is obedient, respectful, dutiful and caring. The right kind of daughter-in-law is adaptable, good at making compromises, open-hearted, simple and willing to serve. The right kind of father is a moral example and authority, but at the same time he is righteous, understanding and always thinking of what is best for his children. In general it could be said it is the right kind of conduct towards others that defines a person in India: respect, taking care of each other and of one's own duties, as well as sacrificing for the greater good are the essential features of an ideal Indian family as well as of the right kind of Indianness.

Without Parents' Blessing a Marriage Can't Be Successful

The issue of romantic love, marriage and family, and putting these together seems to obsess Hindi cinema, or at least contemporary film makers. The 30-something Bollywood films of the 1990s and the 2000s I've seen all deal in one way or another with the right of the individual to fall in love. The big dilemma, as shown in the films, is how to conjoin this individual love and desire with the traditional values and norms of the family as the foremost unit of one's identity

and duty. Trying to fit together these two conflicting aspirations and perceptions of oneself is not a new dilemma. In Hindu mythology there are several stories which deal with the same paradox. For example, in the famous love story between goddess Sati and god Shiva, Sati devotes herself to Shiva and marries him against her father's will. She eventually kills herself because her father doesn't accept nor respect his son-in-law. She is later reborn as goddess Parvati, to a more understanding and loving father, who accepts her love for Shiva.

Patricia Uberoi has listed some central contradictions plaguing modern Indians that can be seen in the film *Hum Apke Hain Koun..!* (Uberoi 2006). These tensions are also often present in other Hindi movies such as *K3G*, as well as the story of Sati/Parvati and Shiva:

Freedom	vs.	Fate
Desire	vs.	Duty
Individualism	vs.	Family values

Marriage in India is an institution that encompasses all of these things (ibid.). Arranged marriage involves the entire family, or rather the two families between whose son and daughter the bond of marriage is established. My informants often emphasised that their parents were better qualified to choose a mate for them: they felt they hadn't enough experience in these matters to dare and choose the person that would be by their side for the rest of their lives. Many also felt that this kind of self-chosen love was "not right" and "existed only in movies", and they maintained they "didn't believe in it". Also, young women and men didn't really have all that many chances to meet or date someone of the opposite gender. To many, arranged marriage seemed not only like a fitting choice but also their only option. My friends stressed the fact that *if* they were to marry according to their own choice, this union would be based on nothing but friendship and done only with a total parental consent and arrangements. Patricia Uberoi similarly points out that in *HAAK* family ties and friendship are valued more highly than erotic love. Even the romantic couple is shown to be

bound more by friendship than passion. (Uberoi 2006.) This is a theme to which I shall return in chapter six.

According to Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Hum Apke Hain Koun..!* “reaffirms the value and significance of the family and arranged marriage” (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 2004, 4). This is self-evident and easy to agree with. What is more curious is that the same could be said of *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, even though, at least to a western spectator, it seems to propose somewhat radical and reversed ideas of love, individuality and marriage. Here is how Karisma experienced the film:

Karisma: [From *K3G*] [w]e learn that whatever happens, you should actually never forego your parents. That’s something very bad. In the movie they actually show how a son goes against his father.

Karisma goes on to explain: “There’s nothing wrong in loving somebody, even the parents do feel that. But you should choose the right person. Because generally people have this misconception that a guy sees a girl and a girl sees a guy, so fine, ok, love at first sight. But actually, they might just be in the infatuation of just a crush. They misunderstand that it is love. And then they are like, fine, we’ll get married. We’ll fight with our parents and all. You know, some people are there who don’t even take a second to think. They don’t even try to tell their parents, they don’t even try to approach them. Without even trying, they rush to things. [...] Your parents have done so much for you. And it’s your own marriage and you don’t call them. It is just a sentiment, an emotional feeling, that we have to respect them. They should be endorsing our marriage. Then the well wish is there, the best for us. That’s something very nice.”

Karisma’s friend Shruti completes her explanation by noting: “In India, marriage is first sacred, and only then it is legal. If they [parents] give blessing, only then your life will be happy and prosperous.”

Love, for Karisma, is not something controlled by fate. It doesn’t hit you like a lightning or choose a random object. If you are to choose your own partner, you should follow the same guideline as your parents. This practical and conventionalist approach was embraced by most of the young women I interviewed. It must be noted here that 18-year-old Karisma was of upper middle class; her father was a wealthy businessman and she herself was studying law. Thus she had a wider range of options available and there was a

potential she would meet her future husband at her university, for example. Parinita, by contrast, of modest background, studying in the conservative MKP Girls' College, lacked the chance of meeting boys or deciding for herself: "In these films they show that parents agree. So the ending is very happy in these films, because parents agree. But in our real life it is not possible. [...] In my views marriage is only a compromise."

Either way, without parents' initiative or agreement, without parental attendance and "endorsement", a marriage can't be successful. Without the "well wish" and blessing of the parents, the couple is somewhat cursed: "they quarrel", they are unhappy, incomplete and lost, according to my interviewees and as depicted in the movies. Couples who have married for love have broken the holy bonds of family and gone against parental authority, norms, and hence against the society. Nothing good follows from such acts. The storyline of *K3G* affirms this social fact, even though, in its own way (at least in my opinion), it tries to question the axiom of upmost parental authority. Nonetheless, the rebellion ends very shortly and the son gets back in line. The audience breathes a sigh of relief and rejoices.

5.3 A Joint Family – a Joint Personhood

Patricia Uberoi writes that "for the last century-and-a half, if not longer, public opinion in India has been obsessed with the spectre of the imminent break-up of the Indian joint family system through processes of urbanisation, industrialization, westernisation, individualization and the liberation of women." (Uberoi 2006, 157.) In the light of my interviews this fear seems unnecessary. Joint family⁵ was clearly considered the best living arrangement by most of my interviewees. I asked 55 young women which living arrangement they would prefer. 80% stated that they would like to live in a joint family after getting

⁵Traditionally in India the woman moves into her husband's home after she gets married, where the brothers, with their wives and parents, form a joint family. There are, however, also matrilineal groups in India.

married. 17% said they would prefer to live in a nuclear family. 4% would rather stay at their childhood home. With the 40 males I asked about this the figures were: 83% for joint family, 10% for nuclear family and 8% didn't know yet (the questionnaire they answered had this option).

In the next, longish quote, 18-year-old Dipti sums up what seemed to be the common opinion about the joint-family living arrangement and its supremacy:

Riikka: After you get married, would you like to move in with your in-laws?
Dipti: Yes. I want to live in a joint family with my in-laws. I think that is the best way, our tradition. They are our elders. Like right now we are living with our parents, and so they will be like my parents. Like we are adjusting with our parents. [...] Sometimes we are liking them, sometimes we are disliking them, but we must adjust.

Dipti goes on to list the good points of joint family living:

“What is good in a joint family is that if you are having some festivals, you are all celebrating it together. And you are making that festival more, more glorious. More meaningful! [...] In nuclear family only husband, wife and children. And everyone is busy. Man is in his job, children are at school and the wife is there all alone. So what will she do? She is spending whole day in a loneliness. In joint family what we can see, you have so many people. You have your cousins, you have your uncles, aunties, you have your in-laws. You have so much company. You can share your feelings, you can gossip with each other. So that's so much more fun in joint family, I think.”

However, this wasn't the only story. Even Dipti confessed to me later on, during a sleep-over at her place, that: “Sometimes I feel, I wish I was living alone, making my own... Fulfilling my own wishes. You know, self-independent. Wherever I would want to go, I could go. No boundaries, no restrictions. Sometimes this feeling arise. My own life, my own identity.”

Niha feels she “has to” get married some day and go live with her husband's family:

Niha: Yes, we have to manage all the things. We have an understanding and respect in our family also, that relation we have to follow in other family also. Husband's mother is my mother now. Husband's father is my father now.

Everything depends on the girl. How can she manage? She has to manage. If she has married, she has to manage.

Niha's friend Swati: [To me] I think you should stop this marriage, marriage, marriage. I hate marriage! [Laughing]

Niha: I also hate marriages. But if I have to do marriage, I will follow the same rules which my mother followed. We know it is very necessary to us.

Riikka: Why is it necessary?

Niha: Why? If somebody has not married, then people will ask: Why she has not married? Something is wrong with her. [...] It is very necessary to get married in our Indian culture.

I tell Reena that I've heard there might be some difficulties in joint families; it might, for example, be difficult for a daughter-in-law to pursue her career. Reena disagrees: "They say, you work, but you should do *all* the work. After office you do also the household work. So it is not difficult to work in an office, but it is difficult to manage everything. Yes, they'll tell you: You can work. Why don't you work? [Laughing.]"

Unlike for Reena, for Niha (and for most of the young women I interviewed), working outside home after marriage was not necessarily a matter of choice: "That depends. That depends on the family. After marriage, there are so many relations: You are somebody's wife, somebody's *bhabi* [sister-in-law]... You have to follow so many rules."

Uberoi points out that in *HAKH* all these tension-filled relationships within the joint family have been eliminated. Prem and Rajesh don't have a biological father to "act like a despotic patriarch". They have no mother, so there is no competition between the brothers or between the brothers and the father. The problematic relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is also absent. Pooja becomes the unchallenged lady of the house. There is also no tension between sisters-in-law, because had everything gone as planned, Pooja's own beloved sister would have filled that role. (Uberoi 2006, 157.) In that sense, *HAKH* truly is the perfect utopia of a joint family. It presents the joint family and Indianness as Platonic pure forms, as they would be in the ideal case.

A Joint Personhood

Fruzzetti, Östör and Barnett have studied the cultural construction of a person in Bengal and Tamilnadu. They compare the concepts of a person in India and in Western countries: “[F]or us the person is prior to any particular social formation; for South Indians the construction of the person derives from a hierarchical conception of society” (Fruzzetti, Östör and Barnett 1992, 14). This idea was easily recognised from the interviewees I had in Dehra Dun.

18-year-old Jesuini goes to the far-famed Doon International School in Dehra Dun. She is wearing western-style expensive jeans, her English is perfect and she speaks freely about her dreams of doing something “creative” in her life – not just becoming a doctor or a teacher. I ask her if getting married makes it difficult to have a career. Her answer is similar to Niha’s : “We don’t know how the family of the boy is. If they accept, fine, but.. [...] But the girl won’t go against them. She has to stay her whole life with that family, with that boy. So if she goes against him...”. I go on asking Jesuini if she feels free to do what she wants in her life. She replies: “I don’t know... If I don’t put shame on my family. Our family should not feel ashamed that their girl is doing this. They should be proud of us.” This made me understand how differently personhood is experienced in India compared to the West. In India people are not perceived as separate entities, roaming around freely, representing only themselves. “Freedom” is not a desirable state, but can instead mean disconnectedness and incompleteness. One is and should be bound to his/her family. On the other hand, coming from a small town in Northern Finland, I can well understand Jesuini’s orientation towards family. In the small town of Kuusamo I was never just Riikka (my first name), but first and foremost Koutaniemi (my family name), always representing my family, trying not to bring shame on my parents, but instead make them feel proud in the eyes of others. But just like a person in Finland is somehow “joint” in addition to being a distinctive individual, a person in India can have individual aspirations and desires in addition to being joint, just as Dipti said. Again, the challenge is combining these different orientations.

5.4 The Message Can't Be New. Movies: Reaffirming What Was Known All Along

Family is the most unshaken unit of Indian society. I argue that the culture may face new impulses and change externally, but the core, the primality of family, remains. The new “consumer ideology” has penetrated the whole society, and the changing scene of media creates connections, images and ideas beyond one’s local context. The young people in India today might have a wider margin to act and pursue their individual aspirations. Their personhood nevertheless remains “joint” and their identity tied to their family relations. Thus the importance and meaning of family and the relationships and hierarchies within it remain and even intensify. The core of the core institution family, arranged marriage, may change its appearance and gain alternative modes but it nonetheless remains arranged by the elders of the family: love cum arranged marriage is, after all, an arranged marriage. This point becomes apparent in the interpretations of *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*.

In the spirit of Mazzarella I argue that the movies act as a part of a wider discourse about values, change and what it is to be an Indian in a globalising world. These discourses or negotiations exist in mediation: in and through the cinematic disposal of family relationships and principles of intermarriage. But as Mazzarella points out, cinema does not work as a distinct realm imposing ideas on already-constituted local worlds (Mazzarella 2004, 353). Instead, media play a crucial part in constituting local worlds, in constant interplay with other media, audience and its everyday realities. But I argue that in order to have prominence, a movie has to meet the realities and morals of the audience on some level.

Jesuini illuminates this argument by stating:

“Most of the movies they show how Indian society is, how Indian families are. Like what are the relationships: uncle, aunty, caca, caci and all that. The films are showing how these things are seen in India. How boys and girls are seen in India, how romance is seen in India. And at what level these things are preferred in India.”

Movies are always produced in relation to the surrounding world. According to Jesuini, moviemakers work as mediators, portraying the principles of Indian culture, kinship relations and love as they “are seen in India”. The movies – and here comes my point – the *successful* movies, work as a kind of collective imagination. This collective imagination, however, is not a wild one, as Appadurai (1996) argued, but rather an imaginable continuum to the everyday realities of the spectators. This becomes apparent in the fact that movies are omnipresent in everyday conversations, actions, plays, fashions, objects and images. They do not form a distinct sphere, but instead build a stream in the all-around social flow. The ideas that movies represent can’t be new. The discourses, themes and ideas are already there, in the cultural categories and imaginations of people, and the movies take part within these discourses – they do not create them. Movies were not on the outside, but part of the everyday realities, inner worlds and categories of the young women I interviewed. The movies that failed to meet the ideas and ideals the young Dehradunites had of marriage, family and society, were rejected. The Karan Johar film *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (*KANK*), which I brought up in the Preface and will continue to discuss in chapter 6.6, didn’t go with the social flow or reproduce a commonly accepted view of marriage, family and Indian values. It portrayed a reality that was contradictory to the cultural categories and beliefs of Indians, and thus the movie *KANK* “made no sense”, was “not possible”, “not Indian culture” and hence was labelled “the worst movie ever”.

In contrast, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, a previous film by Karan Johar, managed to meet the realities of the audience by appealing to cultural stories, myths and a wider cosmological order of Indian culture. *K3G* conformed to the idea of the world as it intrinsically and ontologically is in a categorical level.

I call *K3G* a conservative reformist movie on the basis of its depiction of love, marriage and family. The romantic love in this film is something preordained. The love songs of the film declare that: “Pairs are ordained already in heaven”. It’s the mythical and unattainable love of Radha and Krishna, which is already familiar to the audience from mythical stories, songs, plays and 100 years of

cinema. When Rahul sees Anjali for the first time, the surroundings disappear, time slows down and he knows: She's the One. Audience knows this too, and it also knows what it means. Due to the disapproval of the father, their love is almost left without fulfillment. This would be one love story recognizable to the Indian audience. But as Anjali's father dies – and the next point was highlighted by all my interviewees – Rahul *sacrifices* and marries Anjali. This is another love story understood by all. Here is how 15-year-old Keniya put it:

Keniya: I loved the way Shah Rukh Khan [Rahul] behaved! That he married that girl, because she needed him that time. Her father was dead, was he not? And she needed somebody who could help, support her at that time.

But as I have argued, the love as an act of sacrifice still wasn't enough to justify the union. The blessing of the families is essential. Without parents' approval one can't lead a happy, fulfilling life. There is always something missing. During those ten years of exile everyone in the family feels incomplete: the lack of joy, meaning and identity is obvious.

In the end most of the audience approved of Anjali's and Rahul's marriage, because there was twofold authorization involved. Indian audience recognized the myth of love as an unselfish act of sacrifice, which gives the first authorization for Rahul's and Anjali's union. The second and most important authorization comes at the end of the movie, when the father finally places his hand on Anjali's head and gives her his blessing.

Hence I would argue there is nothing especially radical in the set-up and treatment of family relations or love in *K3G*. Rather the idea of family, as the foremost and holy unit, to which an individual is always subordinate, is celebrated throughout the film. The son rebels against parental authority and leaves the family, but nothing good follows. The break-up tears him apart, leaving him empty and miserable. Only the reconciliation in the end releases the tension and puts things right again. And it is this reconciliation which wins the approval of the audience and gives it satisfaction.

5.5 Family Dramas: Paving the Way for an Indian Modernity

The above analysis follows Derné's ideas regarding to movies being interpreted via tradition, within a certain social reality. Like Derné, I also criticise Appadurai for being too optimistic about the influence of and change brought on by "new media images". For Derné, however, it is the solid state of social institutions that immobilises people and disables them from grasping these new meanings and "cosmopolitan lifestyles" they see on the screen: "Cultural globalization in India has had only limited effects on social practices because the underlying social structural realities that root these practices have not been simultaneously transformed" (Derné 2008, 17). To be more precise, it is the "economic institutions, that limit financial autonomy" that "lead men to distance themselves from new media messages" (Derné, 2005 43). Derné goes on to argue that social structure and social institutions "are experienced by individuals as external and constraining" (Derné 2005, 43).

Watching a film, according to Derné, doesn't include much of imagining. The captive spectator rejects the film's representations and ideas he can't afford, and embraces the ideas his institutional realities allow him to buy. Movies remain detached objects, presenting western lifestyles, new meanings and cosmopolitan identities foreign to a "locally oriented middle class" (Derné 2008, 12). In Derné's view, therefore, filmic representations of love marriages simply don't work for this audience. Facing a structural and institutional jail, ordinary Indian men reject these new representations of love, individual choice and the freedom of women. Instead they "embrace other meanings introduced by global flows because they can be used to bolster existing gender arrangements" (Derné 2005, 40).

Watching a film, on the contrary, according to Appadurai, means breaking loose from one's everyday realities and imagining a whole set of new identities to grasp onto. The spectator can reconsider his/her life through the prisms of all the possible lives presented by globalising mass media. (Appadurai 1996, 54.)

This rethinking produces “resistance”, “irony”, “selectivity” and “agency”, and hence new horizons and orientations towards the world (ibid., 7).

My approach to analysing reception – and the spectator positions and cultural orientations this reveals – differs from both of these scholars. First of all, I disagree with Derné’s rigid juxtaposition between social institutions and cultural meanings. For the purposes of my analysis, there is no point in separating cultural meanings and social structure. In addition, a culture is never a singular story. As I have noted before, what is “Indian” is constantly under negotiation. Within a culture there are alternative narratives, rotating discourses and second languages. The movies play a huge role introducing them. So thirdly, I argue, Hindi films such as *HAAK* and *K3G* are able to introduce and approve of novelties. This “new”, however, has to come from within the culture. The love marriage in *K3G* ceases to be a love marriage and becomes a love cum arranged marriage with the father’s blessing. The movie successfully conjoins these two ideas in a way comprehensible to the Indian audience. Love in this film isn’t a foreign thing, but a sacrifice – referring to an age old Indian cultural narrative.

To return to Paul Ricoeur’s notion, in my view successful films and their representations do “work” and precisely because they represent the reality in a mode familiar to us (Ricoeur 1984). As I have argued above, in order to succeed and win the approval of the audience, a film has to meet the realities and morals of the audience on some level. Films are in a constant interplay with the surrounding world. This is particularly apparent as the director, producers, film stars, as well as most of the settings and storylines of these movies are from India only, and represent “Indian culture”. This is nevertheless by no means a straightforward process, since the question “What is Indian culture?” is constantly under negotiation and discourse. So, films do not merely reflect the surrounding world, but as Gokulsing and Dissanayake have noted, also, for their part, shape it (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 2004, 11), or as Mazzarella elaborates, culture and media are coconstitutive, as social formations are never foreclosed (Mazzarella 2004, 348).

In the spirit of Mazzarella I argue that Hindi cinema has the power to align different aspects of Indian culture and bring in alternative narratives by working primarily on a practical level (as discussed in chapter four). They do not compose a distinct realm, but intertwine to all-around social flow. In other words, movies provide us with social material just as the rest of our surrounding world does. As I was listening to everyday discussions of my friends and relatives in India (I could understand some Hindi), I could hear them gossiping simultaneously about their neighbours, movie stars as well as fictitious movie characters. The same could be said about my friends in Finland. Talking about boys, relationships and the big and small choices in life, we often refer to TV serials or films. “What would Carrie do?” is a question often brought up in our conversations (Carrie Bradshaw is the main character of the TV serial *Sex and the City*).

In addition to working on a practical level (as a part of everyday realities), providing spectators with social material and working as reconciliators, films can work as guidelines on the right kind of conduct, a perfect kind of family, and, for example, create expectations of an ideal husband. Let us go back to Žižek’s comment on films being more real than reality itself (Fiennes 2006). The notion resembles Plato’s theory of True Ideas. A True Idea or Form is a blueprint of perfection, archetype or an ideal state of things. In this sense, films constitute the very reality by being ontologically true. The TV serial *Sex and the City* offers its viewers an interesting reference point. On a practical level, Carrie and her friends, their lives, actions, speech, styles, clothes and sexual encounters, among other things, provide us with social knowledge and experience of the world. On a discursive level they become the very archetypes of “free (single) women”, who do what they like and take what they want. Nobody could say it better, do it better or look better than Carrie. As my friend put it: “Carrie & Co, the Eternal Source of True Wisdom” (Facebook 4.1.2011).

In this sense, films certainly provide us with imaginary resources, as Appadurai argues. My point is, these imaginary resources must be *imaginable*. We interpret and make sense of the world through our cultural tradition and schemas. A

renowned psychologist and film theorist Rudolf Arnheim has argued there is no difference between seeing and knowing; how we know is how we see (Arnheim 2004 [1954], 87-88). Therefore I argue that imagination is not a “Wild West”, where new, strange ideas enter the void and start living a life of their own. In order to succeed and touch the audience, a film has to be built out of the elements of social reality, offering the audience tangible information about the world they live in: “Most of the movies, they show how Indian society is, how Indian families are”, said Jesuini, a 15-year-old school girl. This information can nevertheless be served with all the accompaniments that make the watching the more enjoyable: the showy castles, dance, song, big emotions, shiny movie stars, foreign locations etc.

As I have argued in this chapter, the movies *Hum Apke Hain Koun..!* and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* were so popular because they managed to reaffirm what was known all along: “It’s all about loving your parents”. They did this, however, by conjoining this social fact with other familiar cultural narratives such as individualism in the form of choosing one’s own partner or enjoying exuberant consumption to highlight one’s Indian identity. Similarly the idea of romantic love is nothing new in India. In these two films it was disclosed in the form of a sacrifice, friendship or a divine agent. This blending of different narratives creates what could be called an Indian modernity. And yes, it’s true that the “cosmopolitan lifestyles” are there, but only externally and playing a minor role. On the other hand, as argued above, indulgent consumption and showing off with material goods is not anti-Indian – as long as it is done within the family, for the family or for the rituals, that celebrate the family (Uberoi 2006, 149). In the next chapter I will broaden my discussion on the cultural role of Hindi cinema in India by showing how the movies can actually create something new out of the elements already present within the Indian culture.

6. Spectators of Romantic Hindi Movies: Combining Love, Marriage and Family On and Off the Screen

Playing “spin the bottle” was a common game during various sleepovers at my friends’ and relatives’ homes. My sister Richas’ cousins lived in a joint family and during these nights all the seven female cousins (13 to 23 years old) and I would gather to sleep in the same room on two big beds. At some point one of them would come up with the idea of playing “spin the bottle”. The others would eagerly agree. There was always something very grave and true about these situations, even though the giggling would from time to time wake half of the big family. The questions concerned the most important issues these young women could think off: Would you like to have a love marriage or an arranged marriage? Would you prefer studying or marriage? Who do you have a crush on? Would you rather marry Shahid Kapoor or Hrithik Roshan (two handsome actors)?

The answers were surprisingly similar. Most of my friends would answer the first question: “I would like to have a love cum arranged marriage”. This was a powerful statement, although it was often followed by teasing from the other players: “No, she will surely get an arranged marriage. She’s a mama’s girl.”

Studying was highly valued. The girls often reminded me of an Indian saying, “education is our jewelry”, meaning if you have an education, you have everything. 20-year-old Saakshi told me: “Many divorced women have nothing after marriage ends. That’s why I first want to study hard and then get married.” Some, though, were eager to marry, and considered getting out of school a blessing. I asked 23-year-old Anjali if she would like to have an arranged marriage. Her cousin Deepika translates:

Riikka: Does Anjali want an arranged marriage?

Deepika: She likes any marriage! She wants to marry! [Laughing] [...] She is saying she prefers love marriage. It’s arranged, it’s love, don’t matter. She wants to marry. She is excited to marry!

Riikka: What kind of husband would she like to get?

Deepika: That her thinking and his thinking would be the same. Good qualified, good educated, understanding, earning is good, loving her. He has a car, and they both are going for a ride.

Crushes were also common. If there was not a boyfriend involved, the target of the crush was a neighbour of the same age, a classmate or a movie star.

Approximately half of all my interviewees admitted to having or having had a boyfriend. However, only a few had told their parents. Often the young couple didn't have any place to meet, so they stayed in touch mainly via mobile phones (calling and texting songs, riddles, pictures etc). It was a completely different question, however, whether a boyfriend was considered a potential future husband. 22-year-old Shina told me how her future plans concerning her boyfriend depended totally on her parents :

Shina: [I]n the future I can introduce him to my mother and father and see their opinion. If they don't think he is good, then I won't marry him. I'll do according to my parents' wishes."

Many knew from the start that their relationship could never turn into anything serious. Reena and Imrat never had a future because it was simply an impossible scenario: Imrat knew his Muslim family would never accept a Hindu, and Reena knew her Hindu family would never accept a Muslim. Some of the girls confessed outright that dating was "just for fun", and that despite their dating they would still like an arranged marriage in the future.

In romantic movies the treatment of the themes of marriage and love usually involved compromises and the alleviation of contradictions. The storyline usually goes like this: A couple meets and falls in love, but they are pressured by society or family, and are unable to be together. In the end, however, the family or the families realise that love is the most important thing, and give their blessing to the union. In Dehra Dun this sort of marriage was called "love cum arranged marriage". This means the couple has met independent of their families and befriended each other, perhaps even fallen in love, but their families give them their blessing and make the marriage arrangements, so their union is, in

the end, arranged according to convention. This form of marriage is the most common one in Hindi movies.

Love cum arranged marriage was a term commonly applied also off the screen (the English phrase was always used). The difference between real life and *reel* life love cum arranged marriage is that in real life, according to my interviewees, it should be friendship – not romantic love – that precedes the decision to marry. This was the case with the enormously popular movie *Jab We Met*, which I shall discuss later. It was precisely the friendship between the main protagonists that gained support within the audience. Love as friendship was the theme and the moral remembered and embraced:

Bhavna: The moral of this film was that in the end you have to marry a person who you consider as a friend. [...] You see, when you marry a friend you know him completely, and nothing will go wrong in future

Another similar hybrid seen in movies is the arranged cum love marriage, which involves the parents arranging the marriage without consulting their children, but where the bride and groom nonetheless fall madly in love when they meet.

Like in chapter 5, I will next introduce two romantic dramas, *Vivah* and *Jab We Met*, and analyze their reception. I will then draw a parallel between the responses to representations of love, intermarriage and family in romantic films and the approaches and views these young women had towards these themes in “real life”. Again, I will argue that the real life attitudes, norms and schemes determined how the reel life was interpreted and experienced; My informants picked out the parts and themes from the movies which matched their own values and thinking (like love as friendship in *Jab We Met*). This is not to say that watching films does not engage the imagination. Accelerating globalisation has promoted some aspects and alternatives present in Indian culture. The second languages have gained strength and they have been heard (through the movies for example) (Bellah et al., ref. Derné 2005, 46). For young women combining three different aspirations and conflicting values – individual love, arranged marriage and respect for parental authority – was not necessarily an easy task.

Next I will examine the way the young women in Dehra Dun handled this confrontation as well as analyse the role of cinema in this reconciliation.

And yes - the last question of “spin the bottle” was easy to answer: the perfect husband would be like Shahid Kapoor in *Vivah* or in *Jab We Met*.

6.1 Presenting Two Romantic Movies: *Vivah* and *Jab We Met*

Vivah: a Journey from Engagement to Marriage

Vivah is a movie by Sooraj R. Barjatya – the famous director of *HAAK* – known for his traditional, even conservative, treatment of Indian family and marriage. *Vivah* was released in 2006 and became an immediate blockbuster. It tells an overwhelmingly romanticised story of an arranged marriage. Here is an outline of the film plot:

Poonam (Amrita Rao) is orphaned as a child and raised by her uncle’s middle class family. Exceeding her cousin (and all the other girls) in beauty, she is the one noticed by her whole community. Besides her outer beauty, she possesses all the virtues of an ideal Indian girl; modest, helpful, simple and adaptable, her reputation reaches all the way to a high class business family in Delhi. The father of the family is searching a match for his younger son Prem (Shahid Kapoor). He immediately takes an interest in Poonam, since he is looking for – “not a modern girl” – but a girl who represents traditional Indian values. The whole family takes off to a small town to meet Poonam and her family. Both Poonam and Prem are nervous to meet each other. But as soon as Poonam enters the room, Prem can’t take his eyes off her. Acting shy (as a girl in this situation is supposed to) Poonam only takes a few secret glances at Prem. In the end of the meeting they get a few minutes alone to see if their thinking will match. They immediately take a liking to each other, and the marriage is settled – it will take place in six months.

This six months between the engagement and marriage becomes a romantic time, during which Prem and Poonam fall in love. Their families take a trip together, and the young couple is able to steal a few moments just for

themselves. With his mobile phone, Prem takes pictures of Poonam, so he can dream of her while being apart. Letters and everyday phone calls are exchanged. Neither can wait for the wedding to take place.

A day before the wedding a terrible accident occurs. In a fire, saving her cousin, Poonam gets burnt badly. In the hospital the doctor tells Poonam's uncle that in cases like this, the wedding most likely gets cancelled; nobody wants a scarred bride. But Prem's love is so deep that he doesn't take a second to hesitate, but marries Poonam on the spot, before a crucial surgery. The operation goes fine, and after a few months Poonam comes home. A big wedding is celebrated and the loving couple finally gets to start their life together.

Vivah: the Reception

Without exception my interviewees loved the film *Vivah* and most of them named it their favorite movie. Like discussed in chapter four, *Vivah* was considered more real and practical than other romantic movies. It told the story of an arranged marriage, which the interviewees could relate to. The point that it was "decent" and "clean" was emphasised; this movie could be watched together with the whole family. It was also called a "cultural movie", since the interviewees felt that it showed Indian traditions and family as they really are. Gunjanza names it her favourite "because it's very cultural movie. It tells about Indian culture, Indian tradition. How family members help each other, and like that".

Here is how Anket, a 23-year-old male student, differentiates between *Vivah* and other romantic movies:

Anket: I don't think these romantic kind of movies give you anything. They are giving you a false thing. It is not real they are showing.

Riikka: But you liked *Vivah*?

Anket: But *Vivah* is a different kind of movie.

Riikka: Ah, because it is telling about an arranged marriage?

Anket: Yes, it was about an *ordinary* marriage. It was good, it was real. [...] That movie was also telling you you can fall in love with anybody at any point of time. Even with an arranged marriage.

The best part of the movie, which was always brought up, was that Prem accepted the girl even after she had burnt badly:

Vishali (15 yrs.): I like it [Vivah], because Shahid [Prem] stays with Amrita [Poonam] no matter what happened. He marries her by putting that sindur [red powder on the forehead as a sign of marriage]. [...] When we see this kind of movie, we feel that we should also get this kind of caring and loving husband. Who would understand us and despite of any problems or mishappenings he would accept us.

28-year-old Dipa has been married for 8 years and has 2 children. She lives in a small rural village near Dehra Dun. She doesn't speak any English, but my friend Dipti translated the interview. As for Vishali, according to Dipa *Vivah* works as a guideline of how one should ideally act. She brought out her concern about the degradation of values "in today's world". She appreciated the way *Vivah* fights against this by reminding about the right conduct:

Dipa: *Vivah* is the best movie. I like the fact that the young people are respecting their elders. Like Shahid [Prem], he is respecting a lot to his father. What father is saying to him, he is doing. We don't see this in today's world. People giving such a respect to their parents. Because.. In today's world everybody is doing a love marriage, but he is doing arranged marriage.

In the previous chapter I concluded how the right kind of conduct defines a person in India; respect and fulfilling one's duties towards one's family define what it means to be a good person. Logically, for Dipa, respecting one's parents amounts to having an arranged marriage. Hence being a good and respectable Indian requires one to have an arranged marriage.

Jab We Met – a Movie about Friendship, Sacrifice and the Importance of Family

Jab We Met (2007) was a movie that got great reviews. The critics loved it and it won numerous film awards. The movie was a great success also among the audience. It is directed by Imtiaz Ali and it stars Kareena Kapoor and Shahid Kapoor, both front-rank actors in India.

Jab We Met is a romantic comedy about friendship that turns into love. It tells a story of a young, silly girl, Geet (Kareena Kapoor), who falls in love with a guy, Anshuman. The male protagonist is Aditya (Shahid Kapoor), a rich and famous corporate owner, who has lost his zest for life. Geet and Aditya meet in a train at the beginning of the movie. Aditya is running away from his meaningless life and Geet is going to visit her home in Punjab, but plans to elope to be with her love, Anshuman. Aditya falls in love with Geet, but Geet can think of no one but Anshuman. Nevertheless, Aditya and Geet become good friends and Aditya is ready to do anything for Geet. He escorts her to Punjab to meet her parents and then helps her to elope with Anshuman.

It turns out that Anshuman was not serious about Geet, who had left everything to be with him. Embarrassed and hopeless, Geet escapes to a convent. When Aditya finds out what has happened, he goes to persuade Geet to go back to her family. Bubbly Geet has become a shadow of her former self, but thanks to Geet, Aditya has gained back his will to live. Their roles have changed.

Just when things are getting warmer with Geet and Aditya, Anshuman returns, saying that he was wrong to leave Geet. Geet is confused, but takes Anshuman back. Together the three go to Punjab, to Geet's home.

Geet is faced with serious choice: whether to take Anshuman, the man of her dreams who she lusts for, or Aditya, the loyal friend, who stood by her and whom her family adores. In the end she realises that Aditya is the right choice. A friend who she can rely on. Geet's family give their blessing to the couple and a grand wedding is held.

Jab We Met: the Reception

Jab We Met resembles family dramas in the sense there was no exposure (to negative *halla*/sexual content). According to Gitika: "*Jab We Met* is very natural kind of movie and very romantic movie." It is not always that these two attributes come together. The girls could watch this film in cinema halls without having to put up with *halla*: awkward remarks, whistles and embarrassment. As

noted in chapter four, the young women in Dehra Dun felt there was different kind of halla: the kind they could even attend and the kind that embarrassed them and made them feel uncomfortable. For example, showing a heroine in a wet sari, through a sexualizing male gaze, made them feel out of place. However, this was not the case with *Jab We Met*:

Riikka: Did you like *Jab We Met*?

Karisma: We really enjoyed the film. We went to see it together.

Riikka: Why did you like it?

Shruti: Because, there was no exposure in the film. Usually they expose more in the films, and then the film gets a good opening. But it was not like that in *Jab We Met*. The movie was good, the storyline was good. The direction was very good. The director was very particular about things, about the clothes of the heroine. She was wearing the clothes of a middle class girl. The clothes of ordinary women, without any exposure. That was the main thing.

The bubbly happy-go-lucky character of Geet was adored by many of my young interviewees. At the same time, her immature behaviour was disapproved by all. The young women felt that the main message of the film was for girls to “not get influenced”:

Choti (19 yrs.): Actually one message is there for the girls. Don't forget your home. Don't leave your home for some love. Don't leave with your boyfriend and forget your home. That girl, she believes everybody, her heart is very small. [...] She is emotionally very immature, you could say. I just hate that trend of the movie.

My interviewees often told me how they used to have crushes and foolish impulses, and how they went all “filmi” as a young girl. According to them, growing up means facing reality, taking responsibility and giving up such childish dreams and fantasies:

Shruti (18 yrs.): One thing I thought when watching *Jab We Met* was that I am never going to elope from my house. You know, when I was young I used to think that my parents are scolded and today I go. Today I go somewhere. At that time I was too young, I used to think like this. But now I'm thinking that this decision is very, very wrong. Which especially a girl should never ever take.

Aditya was seen as an ideal husband candidate: an unselfish, sacrificing and loyal friend, who was also accepted by the girl's family. Ambike tells me: "I like Shahid [Aditya], because he was very sweet, and his love was very mature. He used to give her the right decisions, like don't do this, don't be immature, don't run away like this." As mentioned before, friendship – not passionate or foolish love – made the match "right":

Shruti: The thing I liked most was that in the end, Kareena [Geet] selects, not Anshuman, but Shahid Kapoor [Aditya]. Actually she realised that the person who has helped her, that should be given preference, not the one who has ditched. That was the main thing that I felt was good.

Gitika, for her part, highlights the sacrificing nature of Aditya's love:

Gitika: The good thing is that Shahid [Aditya] really loves the girl. He doesn't just want her, but he is also sacrificing for her. I mean, he wants that she should be happy. Whether it's with him or with someone else. It is not an aggressive kind of a love. It's a proper kind of a love, with sacrifice, with real feeling.

As analysed in the previous chapter, love as an act of sacrifice is a cultural myth understood by all of the Indian audience. These kind of cultural narratives work as ontological models of how the world actually is; they create sense and order in the world. Finding and reading a story through these cultural narratives makes a film intelligible and enjoyable. Unsurprisingly, the most impressive and unforgettable scene of the American movie Titanic (1997) was when the hero sacrificed himself for his love. 18-year-old Hema has seen Titanic at least three times. She tells me how she loves the part where the hero saves the heroine from drowning and by doing so he himself sinks. "I love to discuss that particular part of the movie with my friends."

Again, the spectators, constructing these films and making them comprehensible, found a connection in love, friendship, sacrifice and parental approval.

6.2 Types of Inter-marriage: All Good as Long as Your Parents Are with You

In accordance with above citations about *Jab We Met*, also Manbhavan thinks the main message of the movie is that “we should think about our parents. We should understand our parents.” Eloping from your home is the worst thing a girl could do. Doing this does not simply go against one’s family, but against one’s society and culture. One gets excluded:

Samreen: One problem here in India in love marriage is that the family members leave that girl; she is dead for us. She is nothing for us now. She has ditched us, so we don’t want to meet her anymore. And the society, they use very bad words for that girl. She was this and that.

Saakshi: Everyone is very rude to her.

Samreen: So girls are very afraid of love marriages here in India. Because it is not our tradition.

Someone marrying for love is going against their family, culture and society. This kind of person is unreliable and questionable:

Riikka: What do you think of love marriage?

Gitika: It is not too successful, because you are going against your parents. If one can go against her parents then one can go against anyone. You can’t go against your parents, they have given you birth, they also love you. You can’t trust a person who has gone against her parents.

As discussed in chapter five, for the young women in Dehra Dun, it didn’t so much matter whether the future husband would be self-found or searched for by the kin. The thing that did matter was the parental approval and involvement in arranging – organizing – the marriage. Here it is important to note that for most young women I interviewed, meeting a man on your own did not mean having a boyfriend or dating openly. The logic of an arranged marriage entered this relationship. If a right “guy” was found, the rightness would mostly be based on the cultural criteria and demands set by the parents. Friendship and understanding – not romantic love – would precede the decision.

Riikka: Would you like to have an arranged or a love marriage?

Bhabia (21 yrs.): Love cum arranged.

Riikka: What does it mean?

Bhabia: First you understand him and then you want to marry him.

Riikka: So you would first like to have a boyfriend and then marry him?
Bhabia: No, nothing like that. Simple friendship. If he can understand my emotions, if he cares about me and all that, then I will think of marrying him.
Riikka: After that you speak to your parents?
Bhabia: Yes, if they agree, then I will marry him.
Riikka: And what if you don't find any suitable person..?
Bhabia: Then arranged marriage.

21-year-old Tamanna tells me she would like to have a love marriage.

Misunderstanding that she means a western type of love marriage I ask her:

Riikka: So you would like to find a boyfriend?
Tamanna: No, not boyfriend. First I want [him] to be a friend, not a boyfriend. I will be talking with a friend. If I choose him, yeah, I love him, then I will tell him and my parents.
Riikka: That you want to marry him?
Tamanna: Yeah.
Riikka: But what about dating?
Tamanna: No, I don't like. Wasting of time, wasting of money. Wasting of study.
[Laughing.]
[...]
Riikka: But is it important that your family is supporting you?
Tamanna: Yeah. I think they would agree with me. Because I have to live with him. So I have to choose.
Riikka: What if your parents present somebody for you and you see that he is very fine?
Tamanna: [Laughing.] That's really good! Yeah, also really good. I will look him, talk him and decide after that.

These short parts of interviews with Bhabia and Tamanna reveal many important aspects of the question of love and marriage. Here, even though Tamanna is saying she wants a love marriage, she is not referring to the kind of love marriage prevalent in Western countries. (Her description of love marriage would be labelled as love cum arranged marriage by most young Dehredunites. In spoken language these concepts sometimes interlace.) Secondly, neither girl approves of dating. You should first get to know the boy as a friend. If you think he would make a good match, the next step is to proceed to get the marriage arranged by the parents. Bhabia is fast to point out that if her parents don't agree, she won't marry the boy she has chosen. Lastly, neither sees a problem in having an arranged marriage, if their parents find a suitable boy they like.

Arranged marriage works as a kind of safety net if these girls don't find anyone passable by themselves.

In the next section I will look closer into the two intermarriage-types outlined as "possible": arranged marriage and love cum arranged marriage (6.2.1 and 6.2.2). In chapter 3.2 I considered what makes arranged marriage such a crucial institution in Indian society, and what is it that it brings together. Dumont pointed out that intermarriage is a crucial factor in keeping up and marking the limits for purity – caste hierarchy and continuity, that is (1966). Uberoi argues that through arranging marriages, the family elders maintain their authority and reproduce the kinship system and hierarchy (2006). Next I will examine the issue from another perspective: why was having an arranged marriage not just the only but also the best solution for the young women interviewed?

6.2.1 Arranged Marriage as a Norm

Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (1995) is one of the biggest Bollywood hits of all time (and the longest running film in the history of Hindi cinema – it is still playing in Mumbai). Aditya Chopra's debut film is a story about two young Indians, Raj (Shah Rukh Khan) and Simran (Kajol), living in London. During an interrail trip they meet and fall in love. Unfortunately Simran has been promised for another boy and she is taken back to India for the arranged marriage. Raj follows the family to India to prove to Simran's father that he is the best match for Simran.

Saakshi: I got one message from *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. If you want to achieve your love, you must go on the right way. In this movie Shah Rukh Khan says: You can choose two ways, one is wrong and one is right. Wrong attracts you very soon, but right way is very difficult to go on that way. So I learn that if you want to achieve your love, you must go on the right way. It's difficult, but finally you will achieve.

Riikka: What is the right way?

Saakshi: Right way is... If you want to go with your love, your parents must be with you. The laws must be with you. That is the right way. Don't go against your society, don't go against your family. Don't go against any laws at all.

According to Tenhunen and Säävälä, 90% of marriages in India are still arranged by the family elders (2007, 63). According to the survey⁶ on Indian marriages by Marie Claire India (January 2007), 81% of respondents had an arranged marriage. 69% of respondents felt that arranged marriages had a better chance of working out than love marriages. By comparison, 14% thought that love marriages were the more successful kind of marriage.

Over half (54%) of the 126 young women I interviewed in Dehra Dun preferred to have an arranged marriage in a traditional sense. 29% of the 86 women told me (after discussing the matter with me) that love cum arranged was their first choice. Here I was careful not to use the term “love cum arranged marriage” myself. In all of these cases the interviewees themselves brought up the term. I must note here that since my questionnaire didn’t list the option love cum arranged marriage, only 3% (1 out of 40 women who answered the questionnaire) stated they preferred love cum arranged marriage. To put these two groups of interviewed women together the percentage preferring love cum arranged is 21%. Among the 40 men who answered the questionnaire the percentage was 18%.

13% of the 126 interviewed women thought both were good, and 12% wanted a love marriage. But as noted before, the concepts were not always clear, and presumably the ones who stated they wanted a love marriage, didn’t mean it in the sense of eloping from one’s home and getting married without the parents’ approval. I never heard a single interviewee state that getting married without parental approval was an option.

All in all, it could be argued that for the young women interviewed, the way of getting married was secondary – as long as your parents were with you. In the light of my research it seems that the aim for both the family and the girl was to find and fix a perfect match: through choosing the arranged one or arranging the

⁶ The survey by Marie Claire was conducted in 2006, in eight Indian cities. It consisted of 1628 interviews. The respondents/interviewees were 20-35 years of age.

chosen one. In other words, either the parents presented the candidate for the girl to accept (arranged marriage), or in the latter case the girl presented the candidate for the parents to accept (love cum arranged marriage). *Choosing* the one arranged by the parents literally means accepting or denying their choice. Here is a piece of a long conversation I had with three girls, 22-year-old Vandena, 20-year-old Priyanka and 21-year-old Parinita, in the yard of MKP Girls' College:

Riikka: In this introduction, when you are meeting the guy and his family [for the first time], so do you, in this occasion discuss these matters [whether the girl wants to work for example]?

Girls: Yes. This is the place to discuss.

Vandena: If they [parents] have found a *right* person for me, it is only then that I will get married. It is not like you should marry this person.

Priyanka: It is not compulsory.

Parinita: It is not like you have to marry this person. It is only if we like this person.

All girls [heatedly]: We are free to decide, we are free to choose.

Riikka: So you can tell, that I don't find this guy nice..?

Girls: Yeah!

Parinita: If we find that his thinking doesn't match, if he is not an ok person, then we don't have to marry.

Vandena: The boy and the girl talk alone about these matters.

Parinita: So we can deny.

Riikka: And your parents won't be angry if you reject him?

Girls: No, no.

Priyanka: We are free to decide. We can say no or yes.

Parinita: In arranged marriages they ask if you like this person or not. If your views match with him, then you can marry.

The strongest argument for arranged marriage was the security and back-up it provided. If something went wrong, you could always turn to your parents. They would still be with you. In a love marriage you were the one responsible for the bad choice:

Parinita: I am in favour of arranged marriages, because if you are doing a love marriage, it is your responsibility. After marriage it is normal that husband and wife quarrel, but in love marriage it is you, and only you, who is responsible of this. But in arranged marriage you can tell your parents that this was their mistake. We can blame them, that they made a bad decision. You can come back home: I am not happy with him, how can I live with him? But in love marriage it is your responsibility, you have to live with him and you can't come to your home, you can't blame to your parents.

Arranged Cum Love Marriage

Based on what I saw in Vivah and heard from the interviewees, arranged marriage and romance could well be combined:

Parinita: In arranged marriage you can also find true love. It just comes after wedding. It is not necessary that only before marriage you love somebody. Also after marriage this can happen. Your husband may be so good that your boyfriend before never was.

This type of intermarriage was called arranged cum love marriage.

Riikka: What does arranged cum love mean?

Deepika: It is also good.

Riikka: But what does it mean?

Richa: The parents choose you the boy but then after marriage you love him.

For Parinita and Richa the falling-in-love part comes after the wedding. This view of love as belonging only to marriage was shared by my mother Madhu. "Love before marriage is meaningless", she often told me.

The story told in Vivah and embraced by the audience brought a little twist into this. The idea of falling in love during the engagement was not new, but the movie Vivah certainly encouraged the girls to talk and dream about a similar intermarriage process. Discussing love and marriage, 20-year-old Preity suddenly asked me: "Have you seen Vivah? I believe in this marriage. After engagement she wants to love him, not before." Similarly, Vandana brought up the movie when explaining her views about love: "I don't believe in love. But I like the movie Vivah." Vandana did not consider the kind of love that leads to a love marriage to be proper love. Actually, she doesn't "believe" in it. Vivah shows a totally different kind of love, one that takes place within a cultural scheme, in the right place. Love is not even love if it doesn't have the blessing of the parents. Arranged marriage creates the frame and setting for a right kind of love to take place. And in Vivah this frame is created through the engagement.

Deepika explains how Vivah is a "totally Indian culture movie". The next quote contains the premise, that love can be placed and experienced before the wedding takes place, as long as it happens in a right kind of cultural context:

Deepika: It [Vivah] shows Indian culture. You watched that movie? It's based on arranged marriage. Girl's parents meet the boy, and they both sit together and fall in love with each other. It's a totally Indian culture movie.

It was brought up many times how much intermarriage practices had changed from the times of these girls' grandparents. Bhavna and Hema, two sisters, told me how in Dehra Dun, these days, nobody marries blindfold. Instead the future bride and groom chose and decided for themselves. During the engagement time they could "enjoy like lovers". This didn't, however, undermine the role of kin as an organizing, arranging and authorizing power. The candidates picked for the girls to consider were still decided by the close kin. The horoscopes would still be matched by the family *pundit* (priest), and the wedding arrangements made by the parents.

Bhavna: In arranged marriage there is also romance. Because after boy and girl get engaged there is some time there before the marriage. That is the most precious time in arranged marriage. The time between the engagement and the marriage. In that time they can enjoy like lovers.

Riikka: So they are meeting and...

Bhavna: Ha. [Yes.] Having conversations in phones. Like that.

Riikka: Ah, so falling in love?

Both: Yes.

Riikka: So they are not strangers anymore when they get married?

Both: No.

Hema: But it used to happen earlier. Like my grandfather went to my mother's father and gave the proposal. Earlier they used to see the families. If the family is good then definitely the guy or the girl would be good. There was that kind of perception. So my grandfather went to my mother's father, and they gave the proposal of marriage. And they accepted. So they got married.

Bhavna: They didn't even see each other!

Hema: Just on the day. On their wedding day they saw each other.

Bhavna: With some Garwalis... in hill area it is still there. The boy and girl meet at their wedding day. These are purely... underdeveloped areas. Still underdeveloped.

Riikka: But what about Dehra Dun?

Hema: [Fast and giving a laugh] No, in Dehra Dun it doesn't happen. Now, it doesn't happen.

Bhavna: Actually now the boy and girl get to meet each other. If they both like each other in that meeting, then the marriage is fixed. Otherwise, if you say that I didn't like the guy, I didn't like his thinking.

Riikka: So have you had any proposal yet?

Both: Yeah.

Riikka: But they have not been quite right..?

Both: Yeah. [Laughing]

Bhavna: My mother also told me that there have been some offers coming. So I just say, yeah, this is ok, no, this is not good, this I like.

Visiting Dehra Dun in 2009 I met Bhavna again. Her mother and father had finally come up with a satisfactory option, who Bhavna could agree to marry; she had chosen the arranged one. Hence Bhavna's marriage was a traditional arranged marriage. The old story nevertheless had a new twist; it was Bhavna making the decision, choosing her future husband from various options. Next I will present the other case – a new story with an old twist: arranging the chosen one.

6.2.2 Combining Love and Arranged Marriage = Love Cum Arranged

Studies that ask whether a person prefers arranged marriage or love marriage can be misleading (including my own paper survey). As stated above, according to my oral interviews the critical choice was not between arranged marriage and love marriage, but between arranged marriage and love cum arranged marriage. Love cum arranged marriage means that the boy and the girl have met by themselves, decided to get married, sought for their parents' blessing and received it. So in the end, the parents have arranged the marriage for them. The last point is critical: love cum arranged marriage is arranged, even though not in a traditional order.

Deepika: "If you love any person, if you love any boy. And you take that boy to your parents, and they also agree that he is a good boy, his family is good. Everything is good, they are satisfied with my choice, with my decision. Then it is love cum arranged.

Love marriage is a whole different thing, morally and practically. Here is how Richa puts it:

Riikka: What is the difference between love marriage and love cum arranged marriage?

Richa: Love cum arranged means you love someone and your parents also agree. And then in love marriage, your parents don't agree. Only you love, and you agree and the boy agrees, but not the family of girl. Basically the boy's family also

agree, but the girl's family doesn't agree. Or sometimes boy's family don't agree, but girl's family agrees.

In love cum arranged marriage the ideas of love marriage and arranged marriage are combined, but in a way that stresses the role of parents in having the final word. The dubious and obscure character of love marriage is eliminated by bringing in the parents, and acknowledging their traditional authority and prestige in making the alliance.

Here is how Suranya describes a love cum arranged marriage:

Riikka: What does love cum arranged mean?

Suranya: Love cum arranged means that first you meet the guy and you like him. You go and talk to your mom and dad, you introduce him to your mom and dad. And your mom and dad are like, yeah, we accept him. Love cum arranged. Then it is arranged.

Riikka: And what do you think your parents would say in this kind of situation?

Suranya: It depends on the guy.

Riikka: What kind of guy is good?

Suranya: A good guy is of a good mentality, with good reputation. From a good class. Nice family.

Getting a love cum arranged marriage was easier said than done. As Uberoi has pointed out, and as learnt from the above citations, the girls were conscious about the fact that if they were to present a candidate for their parents, the boy had to meet the standards and criteria of their parents. But even in this case talking about these matters in front of their parents was by no means easy. The girls found it inappropriate and even embarrassing. My friend "Sushma" had a boyfriend, Manod, who she had been with for over a year. She was dreaming of having a love cum arranged marriage with him, but was finding it very difficult to proceed with the matter:

Riikka: Are you planning to take Manod to your home and discuss about marriage?

Sushma: You know, I'm very very shy. He told me, tell your parents about me. And then we'll get married. But I said ki [that] I'm feeling very very shy in front of my father. How can I say, I would like to marry. Because my elder sis is not married.

6.3 Love and Other Criteria: Aiming to Find a Perfect Match

Even though a vast majority of my interviewees preferred arranged marriage, only few were ready to condemn love cum arranged marriage. In fact, the girls seemed to keep their eyes open in case a good husband candidate showed up. The mission was to find a good husband. If they could find him on their own and get their parents' blessing, it was no worse an option than a marriage completely arranged by parents. Moreover, arranged marriage as an institution seemed to work as a "safety net". If you didn't find anyone suitable on your own, there was always the "back-up option" of arranged marriage:

Riikka: So you think that arranged marriage is a good thing?

Ashima: Yes.

Riikka: Better than to find a man on your own?

Ashima: No. No comparison. No comparisons between love marriages and arranged marriages.

Riikka: What do you mean no comparison? Both good?

Ashima: Yeah, both are good. If you are happy with the person, if you like the qualities of the person, if you truly love the person who you are with, then you should get married to that person. And I didn't find that love in anybody, so arranged marriage was a good option for me.

Riikka: But if you had found a man, would you have presented him to your parents, and...?

Ashima: I would have done that, I would have taken him to my parents.

The way Ashima put it, to "like the qualities of the person", to "truly love the person" would have been enough to make her present the man for her parents. Most girls, however, realized that the realities of the situation would be a bit harsher.

Richa: [H]ow can I do against them [mother and grandmother]? I also have duties towards them, as they have towards me. I can choose my own husband, but I have to go according to their wishes. [...] Most important is that the boy is Garwali [the same ethnic group], of same caste. Next important is his career. That he is good in his studies and will get a good job. And then, also he should be of good nature, caring and understanding.

Let us go back to Uberoi's notion: "Though the match may be self-arranged, it should be of the kind that the young couple's parents would have arranged for them" (Uberoi 2006, 253). Being aware of the requirements, the girls felt that

there might be some room to negotiate. For example, according to Manu, the caste-factor would be possible to bypass, if all the other elements were there:

Manu: [I]f the boy is nice, he has a good background, he belongs to a good family, he has a good culture, good traditions, as well as good qualifications and he is independent. So then there is no problem with that. [...] So if we find a guy who is fulfilling all our dreams, who is fulfilling all our parents dreams, then I think it doesn't matter if he belongs to a different caste.

But in the end, everything depended on the parents. If the parents were to oppose the suggested union, all the young women interviewed would give up the idea of marrying the man in question.

Ambika: I think that if your family is totally against it and they are not getting convinced, then I think you should also not take the extreme step. It is not correct to go against your own family. Those who have brought you up, those who are your parents, you cannot cheat them, and you cannot say, now this thing is over and I will go with him, because I love him. So what! You love your parents also. And everything is not the love for this guy, you know. Because this kind of love you can get with anybody, I think. After staying with somebody you get to love him. You learn to love. It is not like without this guy you will die or you cannot live. That there's nobody other than him.

Also the next quote – which is certainly no movie-talk – illuminates the practical views about love:

Karisma: There's nothing wrong in loving somebody, even the parents do feel that. *But you should choose the right person.* Because generally people have this misconception that a guy sees a girl and a girl sees a guy, so fine, ok, love at first sight. But actually, they might just be in the infatuation of just a crush. They misunderstand that it is love.

For the young Dehradunites I interviewed, romantic love was not first on the list when thinking about their future marriage. Surely romance was something important and even a crucial element of a married life, but for these young women marrying someone on the basis of merely loving him would have been absurd. The older the interviewee, the more practical the views. Falling in love with a “wrong person” was not even categorically possible. I asked my friend

Suranya what she would do if she fell in love with a *Dalit* (Untouchable). Suranya answered me:

“In this situation it is not necessary that you marry this guy. Maybe you just like him as a friend. Because you are used to living with such a status. With a Dalit, you can’t afford such living, such lifestyle. [...] If you know your limits and boundaries, you will never fall in love with a Dalit boy.”

So not only should love happen within a right cultural scheme and framework, but it should be directed towards a right person to become valid. This is not to say that loving “outside the system” – before the engagement or wedding, with “the wrong person”, or without parental approval – would be impossible. It just had “no meaning”.

6.4 Boyfriends, Kajol and Secret Daytrips: Participatory Getting-Into-Trouble

Not to get too abstract, I will next give you an example of the life of a 22-year-old Brahmin girl in spring 2008, as I experienced it with her.

I got to know Shina through my sister Richa – they were classmates. She lived in a nuclear family with her mother and father near our house. Her father, having been the only son, had been left with the house and estates. Her mother was a housewife and her father worked as a government officer – a middle class family with a nice house, a scooter, a TV, expensive carpets and even a microwave that a niece from America had brought. Shina had a lot of friends – both boys and girls, with whom she could hang around quite freely. Usually she was expected to be home around six, when it got dark. But going to the movies or to a friend’s birthday party made it possible to negotiate and even stay out late, as long as a trusted male classmate or a male cousin would escort her home.

Shina being only 22, the main concern for her parents was her schooling, not marriage. Shina was about to graduate as a bachelor from college, and the next step was to decide where she would continue her business marketing studies. Being strikingly beautiful and fair, she, however, had received various marriage

proposals, which her parents had considered. Shina's mother confided in me once telling me that they were worried sending Shina out of Dehra Dun to study, since there she could associate with strange boys and even find a boyfriend. The mother was aware that schooling was the most important thing right now and marriage too early, but if a right guy was found, the marriage could be settled and arranged after a few years, when Shina would have finished her studies.

Shina's family had received five marriage proposals already, but all of them had been rejected because Shina was still studying. Half a year ago an old couple had spotted Shina on the market place and asked her about her name, family, studies and place of residence. It turned out that the old couple's relatives lived in the same neighbourhood. Without notice, on a fine Sunday, the old couple suddenly showed up. After a small talk they told they were looking for a match for their nephew. The boy was good – he had a high position as an army officer and was making a good salary. Shina could even travel abroad with him. They were curious to know Shina's date and time of birth for horoscope matching.

The match seemed auspicious and Shina's parents started to consider the offer seriously. What they didn't know was that Shina already had a boyfriend. And this was something that Shina could obviously not tell them. So when Shina's parents consulted Shina about the boy, she expressed her reluctance, giving her studies as the reason.

Shina's boyfriend was called "Adil" (name changed). She had met him on a train, "just like in *Jab We Met*". Shina had travelled with her relatives, so she and Adil had only exchanged a few words but many glances. Secretly, before getting off the train, they exchanged numbers. After talking on the phone for two days and sending numerous messages, Adil "proposed" to Shina. I asked Shina and her friend Priyanka about the proceeding:

Shina: First a boy says to you, yeah, I like you and I want to marry you some day. It means the guy is serious.

Priyanka: Yeah, but no boy asks: "Will you marry me" at first. He says, will you be my girlfriend. That is called proposal.

Shina: Adil is telling me all the time he wants to marry me. [Laughing]

During the few weeks Shina and Adil were together, Shina could think of nothing else. They would talk over the phone for several hours every day. Adil sent her songs via mobile, which Shina would play and sing along ceaselessly. When Shina and Adil had been together for 16 days, Adil had already sent Shina 204 text messages swearing he would love her forever and take care of her parents (since Shina had no brothers). He was trying to persuade Shina to present him to her parents. With his brother and a friend, Adil even travelled over 200 kilometres from Delhi to a nearby town to meet Shina. It would have been too risky to meet in Dehra Dun.

To make this meeting possible, Shina had to come up with a plan. It was decided that Shina and her two cousins would tell their parents they were taking me to see a famous hill station nearby. Shina's parents agreed, as long as the trip was done during the day and we would be home before sunset. I found it difficult to lie to Shina's parents, but Shina was so excited about the trip that nothing could be said to stop her. For days she tried out different kurtas and scarfs to find a perfect match. A new plaque was bought to put on her hair and drawing kajal was practiced.

The trip went well, but after a week Shina started to have doubts. During the trip Shina's cousin had spotted Adil drinking from a small bottle. This made them suspect he was using alcohol. The fact that Adil was a Christian, not a Hindu, and that he didn't have a permanent job, made Shina realise that her parents would probably oppose her marrying him: "I really love Adil, but I know I can't marry him. I have to think of my parents also. They have given me so much. They have spent so much money on my education."

During Shina's contemplation of Adil, a new marriage proposal came in. Her mother told me: "This one is too good to reject". The boy in question was a son of a friend of a friend of Shina's mother. He was a Garwali Brahmin, who had a permanent job in a bank in Dehra Dun. This time the parents just informed Shina

that if the horoscopes would match, they would try to negotiate the marriage to take place after a few years, when Shina would have finished her studies.

Shina concluded that her parents had found out about Adil and hence rushed into deciding about her marriage. As a girl with plenty of ideas, she came up with a counter plan – marrying her good friend “Ajal” (name changed), who had proposed to her several times:

“I’ve realised that Adil is not meeting with my parents’ demands. That’s why I’ve chosen Ajal, because him they can accept. [...] He is very good boy, doing well in his studies in Graphic Era [a renowned college]. So I think he will earn something like 40 000 rupees in future as an engineer. [...] Also his family is very good. I know his sister and brother. And I’ve talked to a lot of people about Ajal, and everybody says, he is very good. I also think. Very shy and sweet, not fooling around with girls. He only had one girlfriend, when he was in 11th grade.”

Since I had befriended Shina’s mother as well as her daughter, their mutual – but separate – search for the right match appeared to me to be a game: who would succeed first – Shina or the parents? Would Shina’s boyfriend Adil be able to persuade Shina to present him to her parents? Would Shina do this, risking her reputation and putting her parents’ trust on probation? Would Ajal be accepted if Shina was to choose him? Or would “the banker boy”, after all, be the most reasonable option? It seemed to me that both Shina and her parents had the same goal: to find her a suitable husband who would meet the demands of all the parties as well as of the divine order (in form of the matching of the horoscopes). For Shina, the big question was whether to choose the arranged one or arrange the chosen one.

In the end, Shina was able to postpone the proceedings. She finally got her way and applied to a Business School in Bangalore in Southern India, where she was accepted. At present she is working in Bangalore, but applying for jobs in Delhi to live closer to her parents. Writing via Facebook she tells me she has a boyfriend in Bangalore, whom she is going to present to her parents “when the time is right”. Meanwhile, according to her cousins, her parents are searching for a husband for Shina in Dehra Dun.

6.5 Choosing the Arranged One, Arranging the Chosen One: How to Incorporate Love into Family Traditions

Through the examples of two romantic films and their reception, I have now drawn a picture of continuities and changes in systems of kinship in India. To restate Uberoi's point, the tension-creating clashes apparent in Indian society today, revolve around the question of intermarriage, since arranged marriage is the core of the Indian kinship system, which for its part is the most central institution in Indian culture (Uberoi 2006). In my thesis I have argued that arranged marriages still hold up the traditional structures of family and society. But contrary to Derné, arranged marriage, in my view, is not a constraining "institutional framework", but a core cultural value that at least the young women I interviewed voluntarily embraced. Arranged marriage condenses the most important and valuable aspects of Indian identity: respect for family elders, connectedness, and fulfilling one's duties to one's kin, sense of one's own value and dignity etc.

The institution of arranged marriage has, however, changed its appearance. For young middle class women in Dehra Dun, the choice was not between a love marriage and a purely arranged marriage, even though many scholars, like Appadurai and Derné, have felt this to be the case. Appadurai argued that global media images that celebrate romantic love would create a new legitimacy for love marriages. Derné claimed that "ordinary middle class men whose opportunities for employment and consumption have not greatly changed continue to embrace a strong Indian identity", which is rooted in arranged marriage (Derné 2008, 206). In the light of my study, tradition is not changing from arranged marriage to love marriage. But neither is arranged marriage as unbending as described by Derné. Analysing my data, I have demonstrated that the critical choice for my interviewees was whether to choose the arranged one or arrange the chosen one. This shift in kinship arrangements means a considerable increase of agency for the young Indians making decisions about

their marriage. At the same time, this shift highlights the striking continuities in kinship systems. Getting married without parental approval was not an impossibility (eloping was always an option), but it would have been unshielded, objectionable and even obnoxious. So it was not the institutional restraints that kept the youngsters in line, but the cultural values and identities they themselves cherished.

Christopher C. Taylor and Joel Robbins have both done research in societies facing change. They have examined what happens when different cosmologies and value systems meet and clash: when a new “cultural logic” enters the existing social system, does it replace it, adapt to it, or do the old and the new coexist, creating tension and inner conflicts for the individual trapped between these different systems? (Robbins 2004 and Taylor 1992.) As noted above, the tension-creating conflicts in Indian society today condense around the question of marriage. The main contradictory values are: freedom of choice vs. fate, individual desire vs. duty and individualism vs. family as the main locus of identity. (Uberoi 2006, 143.) Dumont basically argues the same by making a separation between relational and hierarchical India, and individualistic West (1980 [1966]). My argument has been that culture is not a singular, consistent story. These conflicting values are actually already contained in Indian culture. Globalization has nevertheless changed the dynamics of these conflicting aspirations and given strength to alternative narratives.

Taylor has studied the Rwandan society and its changing economy. Before, in Rwanda, he argues, the exchange economy was based on the logic of the gift. The reciprocal relationships maintained the social flow. When the reverse logic of a commodity – capitalism, that is – entered the society, people faced a serious inner conflict. (Taylor 1992, 4-6.) To resolve these contradictions Rwandan people now turned to a new cult called Nanga. It is a form of communal therapy, in which sociality and symbols for it are renegotiated. Nanga cult thus became the contact point and intermediary between the two conflicting systems. (Taylor 1992, 194-196.)

In India the intermediary between the conflicting systems, I argue, is Hindi movies. The movies work as contact points, offering a chance for reconciliation between the conflicting aspirations and narratives. They pave the way for a distinctively Indian modernity that incorporates different values and orientations, romantic love, for example, into family traditions.

Bifold has argued that Hindi films work as a great unifier and as a means by which the Indian self, family, belief systems and values adapt to modernity (Bifold ref. Gokulsing and Dissanayake 2004, 13). In my view the story is not this simple. As I have shown in my thesis, India is not on its way from traditionality to modernity – nor does this juxtaposition take us anywhere. I agree with Bifold in that movies play an important role in conjoining and alleviating the conflicts between the different values and belief systems that come together in the paradox of marriage. But the movies succeeding in this are able to draw on different traditions and myths *within* the Indian culture. This alignment has to be done in a delicate way. According to my analysis, a successful movie is built on firm Indian soil, but manages to blend the old elements in a new way and thus create something “new”. Doing this, a movie is based on nothing but Indian culture (which was always considerably important for the interviewees), but at the same time makes a stir by presenting Indian sort of modernity. For example: Even though being seemingly thoroughly conservative in its exposition of family and marriage, the movie *Vivah* managed to create something new by sewing the old fabrications together in a resourceful way. It did so with good Indian taste, treasuring all that is sacred for the audience, but bringing in a modern touch. Just like *Hum Apke Hain Koun..!* had done over a decade earlier.

The intermarriage process depicted in *Vivah* conjoins love and marriage in a way that appealed greatly to the audience. Arranged marriage is put up on a pedestal: every single step in the process is followed carefully, and the morality and “the rightness” behind the actions is highlighted. However, at the same time the movie manages to introduce a modern touch and conjoin it to the traditional intermarriage process. The couple is given space and a chance to fall in love with

each other during the time between engagement and wedding. Daily phone calls, letters, cellphone pictures and shared family trips to hill stations make it possible for the couple to “go out” in a romantic way before marrying each other. The arranged cum love marriage represented in *Vivah* brings together the ideas of love marriage and arranged marriage in a most satisfying way. It celebrates the sacred character of family and marriage – and the way these two come together in the arranging of the marriage by family elders – but conjoins the individual romantic love that the couple shares to the idea of arranged marriage and thus widens the concept.

Romantic love before or outside marriage is not an anomaly in Indian culture (as apparent from stories, mythology, cinema etc). However, as my “mother”, Madhu, put it: “Love before marriage is meaningless”. It doesn’t have a social place nor authorization. In *Vivah* it is now given legitimacy and a new position. This could not be done in a random way, otherwise the audience would reject this alignment. In *Vivah*, giving love space between the engagement and the wedding was subtle enough and didn’t challenge the institution of arranged marriage or the parental authorization behind it. The love between Prem and Poonam came with all the benefits: the romance, the new technology enabling the romance, the freedom (for the woman to study and work for example), the sacrifice, and, most importantly, the families’ support. It was due to these reasons, I argue, *Vivah* was such a success.

There was nothing foreign in *Vivah* – the new came from within the culture. *Vivah* created an acceptable narrative of Indian modernity, enabling its spectators to identify with and feel proud about their Indianness, and strengthen their “belief in all this”. This was not the case with the movie *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, which shall be discussed next.

6.6 Presenting a Failure: *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*

Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna (*KANK*) was a movie with great expectations. The director, Karan Johar, was considered the most promising director since Yash

Chopra. All the elements were there: the five biggest Bollywood stars (including the King of Bollywood, Shah Rukh Khan), catchy songs that everybody knew by heart even before the release, and huge advertising campaigns. People all over the world couldn't wait to see this film. The opening weekend in India was great. But then – nothing. It's like a big wave had come and passed. On Wikipedia it is stated that “the film was a success internationally and in the United States it became the highest grossing Indian film of all time”. But Boxofficeindia.com informs us that in India “*KANK* falls after 1st week”. So what happened?

Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna tells an unconventional love story between Dev (Shah Rukh Khan) and Maya (Rani Mukherjee), soulmates who meet at Maya's wedding. Out of loyalty to her adopted father, Maya is about to marry his son Rishi (Abhishek Bachchan). Dev is a football hero, with a five-million-dollar contract in his pocket. He is married to Rhea (Preity Zinta), a successful business woman, and they have a son, Arjun. The day Dev and Maya meet becomes fateful in many ways. The meeting of these two strangers works like a spell, leaving them both enchanted and perplexed. Despite this, Maya goes on to marry Rishi. Leaving the wedding and thinking about Maya, Dev walks right in front of a car. This accident changes his whole life since, now crippled, he is no longer able to play football.

Four years pass. Maya is unhappy in her marriage, even though Rishi is doing all that he can to be a good husband and make his wife love him. Dev has turned bitter and blames his wife, whose career is on the up grade, for the problems in their marriage. It is at this moment that Dev and Maya meet again. They start spending time together and it doesn't take long before they realise they have fallen in love. Efforts to stay apart fail, and Dev and Maya end up having a passionate extramarital affair. It is not until Maya and Rishi's father dies, that Maya realises she has gone too far. She and Dev decide to tell the truth to their spouses and seek forgiveness. Both Rishi and Rhea are furious and decide to request a divorce. Dev and Maya are kicked out of their homes. Unfortunately, protecting each other, Dev and Maya both lie to each other, saying everything is fine, and that they are forgiven by their spouses.

Two years have passed, and both Dev and Maya have led a lonely, joyless life. Their ex-spouses, on their part, have moved on with their lives. Coincidentally, in Rishi's new wedding, Rhea and Rishi bump into each other. They realise what pain Dev and Maya have gone through and help them meet again. At the end of the movie, Dev and Maya are reunited and finally get each other with the blessing of their ex-spouses.

Most of my interviewees had seen *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*. And almost without any exception they all hated the film. Some could not even talk about it, because it had shocked them so badly. Some could not remember what had happened in the film (they had made an effort to forget), and some got angry or embarrassed even recalling it. Some girls, like 23-year-old Priya, had even been banned from seeing it. Despite not having seen it, she knew it was a "very dump sort of movie". Ambika had had the worst experience with *KANK*: it had been the first movie she and her new husband had watched together. She stated it was the most embarrassing three hours of her life:

Ambika: Oh my God, this was the first movie we saw after our marriage. And we just... [twists and turns] My husband told me, my god, this is a rubbish movie I've brought you to see... I didn't like... I mean, we both didn't like that.

Riikka: So how did you discuss this movie after seeing it?

Ambika: We said, it was a disaster, you know. Nobody should watch it. Because it is very immature, you know. Because of little things. You stop adjusting, you stop liking each other. This is not our tradition. In our tradition we are told that this is the person you have to stay with, you have to start family with. Little problems are with everybody. [...] Nobody's perfect in this world! So you have to adjust. Because one day you have to adjust with somebody. If you cannot adjust with this person, how can you adjust with someone else?

Usually the conversations about *KANK* would end up short. Unlike other movies, this movie did not inspire its spectators to talk away. Normally the interviewees impressed me by remembering every little detail about the movies they had seen. With *KANK*, the memories seemed to have blurred. When I asked about *KANK*, Dipti first answered with a question of her own about the movie. However, she has an explanation for the failure of *KANK*:

Dipti: [I]sn't it something like they change their wives? This is out of culture. It [KANK] was a flop movie. [...] What is the reason of this? Because our culture is not accepting the things they are showing in the movie. That's the main thing, that's why this movie is going down. If they are showing the reality, things that are going according to the society, then this movie is going to be a blockbuster. Which people are accepting. Same thing. This movie is showing something vulgar. Against society. That's why this movie is going down.

The interviewees found it hard to understand the storyline of the film, since they felt it didn't have any resemblance with the real world. Retu's short statement about the film illuminates this point: "I don't like totally fiction films, like KANK. Totally horrible movie, no storyline. Money wasted." The film made "no sense" to Deepika either: "If she [Maya] marries with Abhishek [Rishi], then why she goes with Shah Rukh [Dev]!? I don't understand."

The character getting the least sympathy was Maya:

Richa: There is one lesson in this film. If you don't love someone and your parents are forcing you, the girl should say: "I'm not interested". Because it's the girl's [Maya's] fault in this movie. The girl said, yeah, I love you, but then she crushed his heart. It is your responsibility to say if you don't like the guy.

Deepika: It is all a mistake of Rani [Maya].

This interpretation is consistent with the findings I have presented in this chapter. The young middle-class Indians have gained more agency in the matters of marriage; choosing the arranged one or arranging the chosen one in any case involves *a choice*. But with the choice comes the responsibility of that choice. Once chosen and arranged, the marriage and the family that comes with it are sacred.

Lal and Nandy call attention to Hindi commercial cinema, since no other form of popular culture expresses "middle-class sensibilities and aspirations" as far-reachingly and descriptively as it does (Lal and Nandy 2006, xxiv): "The medium [cinema] has become a new, more powerful language of public discourse" (Ibid., front flap). I have similarly argued that by analysing the reception of these powerful media representations, the researcher is able to sketch the lines of a culture. By talking about the movies and positioning oneself in relation to them – which parts and aspects were embraced and which rejected – the spectator

demarcates the concept: what is enclosed and what is excluded. *Vivah*, for example, was a “totally Indian culture movie”. It crystallises and cherishes the very essence of Indian values, traditions and mentality. At the same time it manages to combine individual love and romance with traditional values and norms of family. This reconciliation is done within the Indian cosmology. The movie *Vivah* drew on different Indian traditions and subtly created a morally and culturally accepted story of love and marriage.

KANK, on the opposite end, went over the limit. It represented values, norms and human action foreign to an Indian spectator. Being caught face to face with this anomaly of a culture, without a warning, resulted in a reaction of shock. One reason for this unpleasant surprise was that *KANK* fused two genres. People went to see a family drama, but ended up watching a movie about extramarital affairs, and to make it worse, about a divorce. Sanje, a 24-year-old bloke from Mumbai explains: “I don’t like this *KANK* too much. Because that is a love and family story mixed.” The “mixing” of these two categories confused Sanje, because as shown in my thesis, different genres belong to different contexts which come with different expectations. Also seeing their favorite star Shah Rukh Khan going “out of culture” upset many: “When I saw this movie, I just hate Shah Rukh Khan!”, cried Niha, a 21-year-old art student.

According to Mary Douglas, “dirt” means any matter considered out of place. Dirt, or an anomaly, doesn’t belong to a given categorical order, but instead lies outside or between the categories. A pure thing can become dirt if it is in the wrong context. Douglas demonstrates how encountering an anomaly arouses feelings of disgust, denial and anger – exactly the feelings the spectators of *KANK* experienced. At the same time, an anomaly reinforces and validates the cultural order and categories by going against them. It becomes the exception that proves the rule. (Douglas 1966.) *KANK* made the limits visible by going beyond them. By presenting what is *not* Indian culture, *KANK* made it clearer for the audience what Indian culture actually *is*. Discussions about *KANK* might have started with a terrified look, a shudder and an interjection “This is not Indian culture!” But soon the interviewees would turn the discussion into the reverse side – to the

fundamental principles of Indian culture: the sacredness of the institution of marriage, the importance of family, and as Ambika noted, the commitments and adjustments a mature person has to make for a greater good.

In making the film the director Karan Johar obviously wanted to make a statement and provoke debate. This becomes apparent looking at his commentary on the DVD cover of *KANK*:

“Human relationships have always perplexed me. These seemingly simple bonds between people can amount to so much and cause such upheaval that lives change drastically with a minute change in these equations. Especially in a fast changing world of today, such changes seem magnified hundred fold forcing us to question our age old definitions of relationships and commitment. [...] The alarming statistics of failing marriages in the recent times, often made me wonder about the relevance of the institution to our society today. With men and women handling far more responsibilities than what was conventionally assigned to them centuries ago, it is natural for them to expect more from life for themselves. So in this complex scenario how much does one compromise on self gratification for the sake of commitment. Or should one compromise at all?”

In the light of my research the response seems clear: Yes, one should indeed compromise. And the relevance of the institution of marriage today remains as strong as ever. Karan Johar was right in concluding that the discourse “What is Indian Culture?” is maybe more relevant today than ever before. At least the young Dehradunites I interviewed brought out the words “culture”, “Indian” and “traditions” before I had time to tell them I’m an anthropologist.

What Karan Johar failed to realise was that Hindi popular cinema has an important role as a safety deposit box for core Indian values. The favoured films conserve and applaud all that is sacred for the Indian audience and remind what it is to be an Indian in “a fast changing world of today”. They *do not* go with the global flows, but selectively pick and reconcile the elements that match Indian values and thinking. Hence the successful movies are able to build a distinctively Indian modernity. This doesn’t have to mean disapproving of foreign elements, as long as they can be domesticated by incorporating them within the local master narratives. *KANK*, however, did not reconcile, but instead built walls.

KANK juxtaposed Indian and Western cultures, and made the latter look disagreeable and unwelcome:

Vandana: Shah Rukh Khan [Dev], after divorce he did not think about his son, he just believed in love. What is love, if you are not thinking about your son!? This is not happening. Oh god! It is *your* culture, that's why we didn't like it.

Vandana's experience of Western culture as a threat in the case of *KANK*, I argue, has to do with the intrusion of the foreign elements to the most sacred area of Indian culture: family. The cosmopolitan lifestyles, western-style fashions, romances etc., which Derré writes a lot about, all play a minor role for the audience. They are not the main thing, but a decoration. And as long as the heart remains Indian, they do not pose a threat for the Indian identity. This point is not a new one. It has been made by Raj Kapoor as early as 1955:

<i>"Mera joota hai japani</i>	<i>"My shoes are Japanese</i>
<i>Yeh patloon inglisthani</i>	<i>These trousers are English</i>
<i>Sar pe laal topi roosi</i>	<i>The red hat on my head is Russian</i>
<i>Phir bhi dil hai hindustani"</i>	<i>But even so, my heart is Indian"</i>

Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna tried to disposses its spectators of the most valuable thing they had: the pride of their distinctiveness, traditions, values and Indianness. The heart of this movie was not Indian and so it failed.

7. Conclusion: The Limits – The Final Word of the Spectator

This is a study of the changing practices of kinship in a Northern Indian context. In my thesis I have described a peculiar cultural change, as experienced by young women living in Dehra Dun. I have given kinship arrangements and practices, particularly arranged marriage, as examples of this change, family being the central institution of Indian society. I have analysed the reception of various popular Hindi films depicting this change and the distinctive modernity it brings

along. By carefully examining the interpretations, emphases and approaches the spectators have towards the films, I have been able to sketch the outlines of a culture in a categorical sense. The way my interviewees interpreted the themes and representation of kinship and romantic love in *reel* life, revealed their relation to the subject matters in real life.

The way the young Dehradunites related to the “new” ideas of kinship and romantic love was unexpected. Their interpretations of family dramas and romantic movies highlighted the importance of family and continuity in kinship arrangements. The most common themes that my informants identified in the movies were: family as the inviolable and most sacred institution in Indian society, love as a sacrifice or as friendship, and respecting the parents and fulfilling one’s duties towards one’s kin. A Hindi film, *Salaam Namaste*, told a radical story about an Indian couple living in Australia. They had “a living relationship” (meaning they moved in together before marrying) and even had a baby before the wedding. Right after seeing this film my friend Deepika noted: “I didn’t like this movie. What they did was wrong, it was against our culture. But still I liked the inspiration of this movie: You can never trust a boyfriend and marriage is the answer to every problem.”

This is just an example of the harsh criticism that my informants sometimes had for films and certain messages they carried. Themes that were too radical and went against cultural norms were rejected. At the same time the interviewees would latch on to cinematic material that supported traditional values, arranged marriage and parental authority. Romantic elements in the films had the function of spicing up the idea of arranged marriage, and the expectations and hopes that go with it.

The meaning of family as the most unshaken unit of Indian society has remained as strong as ever. Family equals tradition. It is kept safe and given a special purpose as the locus of Indian identity. Hence the institution of arranged marriage is not overtaken by love marriages, but neither has the institution remained unchanged. As I have shown in my thesis, the increased agency of the

young Indians, as they choose the arranged one or arrange the chosen one, is nothing but a new way of sticking to the old. Love cum arranged marriage and arranged cum love marriage tell the old story with a new twist. The role of the parents in finding the perfect match might diminish in love cum arranged marriage, but the final word and the rules of the game are set by the elders only.

The movies, on their part, coconstitute this change of nonchange. They act as a part of a wider discourse about values, change and what it is to be an Indian in a globalising world. As I have argued in my thesis, the Hindi popular movies have a special role as intermediators and contact points between conflicting values and aspirations. As a powerful media, Hindi popular cinema has the ability to alleviate these clashes and reconcile different narratives, for example by incorporating romantic love into family traditions. Both of these narratives are found within the Indian culture but it is the creative “blending” that brings in the twist and appeals to the audience by introducing a distinctive Indian modernity.

But finally, it is the spectator putting these ideas together inside his/her cultural imagination. I argue that the imagination does have an important role in reconciling different ideas, values and cultural narratives. But in order to enter the imaginations of people and not get rejected, a movie has to work these ideas together in a subtle way. Paving the way for the incorporation of romantic love, individual desires and destinies into family traditions and caste and kinship hierarchies has to be done in an accepted Indian manner. In my thesis I have shown how successful Hindi films work as a “safety deposit box” for core Indian values. Hence representations that violate the cornerstones of Indian identity are rejected. I have made the point that the imaginary resources, the media representations offer, must be imaginable.

The issues of culture, Indianness, tradition and identity were closely intertwined in the discourses in and about Hindi movies. The interviewed young women themselves brought these terms up when reflecting on the movies. In my thesis I have made the point that movies not only mirror society and shape it, but they actively take part in constituting discourses and local experiences. In my opinion

movies are a part of everyday realities. These two form a continuum. In order to succeed and touch the audience, a film has to meet the cultural categories, norms and values of its spectators, offering the audience tangible information about the world they live in. The greatly loved Hindi movies did not compose a separate sphere resolving conflicting issues “out there”, but instead they were amongst the audiences, having relevance and thus prominence. Through this omnipresent cultural place, both on a tangible and on a discursive level, Hindi cinema has the ability to work through and align different ideas and aspirations.

The cinema, as the most powerful form of popular art, has the ability to tell us something important about ourselves as well as our aspirations. It is true that Hindi films are fairy tales – fantastical, spectacular, full of big emotions and handsome stars. This imaginative exterior can nevertheless enshrine true stories about ourselves: tales and portraits of our relationships, values, dreams, fears and longings. These recognisable cultural narratives have the ability to explain our place and purpose here on earth by showing us something fundamentally true. But they can only be this real by appealing to master narratives and cultural myths that are larger than life, that can be recognised and embraced by the audience. In my thesis I have described how four successful Hindi films managed to do this and why one, *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*, failed. In order to enter the cultural imagination of people, a movie has to be built out of the elements of the social realities of its spectators. Aligning these elements in a creative way allows the moviemakers to present their idea of a contemporary Indian society and a distinctive Indian modernity and ‘propose’ to the spectator. The audience of Hindi cinema, however, is not easily seducible. The freedom of choice, highlighted by the girls in the matters of arranged marriage, also held true with the reception of cinema. The final word is the one of the spectator. Indian culture may face new impulses and change externally, but the core, the primary status of family, remains.

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