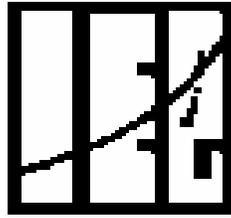


**LOOKING INSIDE MARRIAGE: LIVED EXPERIENCES,
NOTIONS OF LOVE AND KINSHIP SUPPORT AMONGST
WORKING WOMEN IN NEW DELHI**

SHALINI GROVER



सत्यमेव जयते

**Institute of Economic Growth
University of Delhi Enclave
North Campus
Delhi – 110 007, India**

Fax: 91-11-27667410

Gram: GROWTH – Delhi – 110 007

Phones: +91-11-27667101, 27667288, 27667365,

WEBSITE: iegindia.org

**Looking Inside Marriage: Lived Experiences, Notions of Love and Kinship Support
amongst Working Women in New Delhi¹**

Shalini Grover

Institute of Economic Growth

University of Delhi Enclave, Delhi 110007

sgrover@iegindia.org

Abstract: This article presents in-depth ethnographic evidence of women's lived experience of arranged marriages and love marriages, their agency and constraints in a working class neighbourhood of New Delhi. Against the backdrop of economic survival, the forms of emotional and material support that natal kin provide to their daughters in these conjugal unions are centrally investigated. Kinship in north India has long been associated with a negative image of long-distance marriages, alienation from natal kin and women's restrictive marital agency due to lack of durable support structures. This article offers an alternative insight into everyday marriage relations, into notions of love and kinship support in north India, which demonstrates close post-marital bonds, strong mother-daughter ties and intergenerational reliance. It illustrates how the type of marriage a woman enters into is crucially significant to her entitlement to post-marital support, which strengthens her fall-back position within marriage.

¹ Acknowledgements: This paper is based on PhD research for which fieldwork was carried out in Delhi from November 2000 to April 2002. I am deeply indebted to my Delhi informants for the generous ways in which they offered their rich and diverse accounts of marriage and love; my doctoral supervisors at Sussex University, Filippo Osella and Geert De Neve, for their valuable input; Katherine Charsley, Henrike Donner, Patricia Uberoi, Sylvia Vatuk and Vegard Iversen for their suggestions.

Introduction

In the anthropology and sociology of India much emphasis has been placed on interpreting kinship rules, norms, structures, alliances, marriage prestations and rituals. While the institution of marriage is recognised as crucial to women's lives, little is known about their experiences of marital relationships, love, commitment and intimacy. These important aspects of the contents and trajectories of married life, have thus far received inadequate analytical focus. This article examines the marriage and kinship experiences of poor Scheduled Caste women in Mohini-Nagar, a working class neighbourhood of New Delhi. It draws upon women's experience of modern-day arranged marriages (alliances initiated through parental matchmaking within a person's caste and religion) and love marriages (self-chosen marriages based on romantic love and consensuality) in order to facilitate comparative and critical reflections on the institution of marriage. By juxtaposing customary with modern forms of marriage, it elucidates the changing nature of marriage ideals, norms and patterns in a particular stratum of urban India. Importantly, the paper contributes towards contextualising the types of support that primary natal kin provide to their daughters and how such parental support shapes the content and nature of women's married lives. Few studies have addressed the subject of kinship support in relation to lower castes and classes in an urban setting.

In Mohini-Nagar, there is an unequivocal ideological polarization between arranged marriages and love marriages. Arranged marriages are perceived as robust and long-lasting, while love marriages are regarded as inferior, conflict-ridden, less successful and ephemeral. A powerful discourse differentiating arranged marriages from love marriages suggests that in the former, parental support (i.e. shelter, mediation and interventions) is extended to the couple in times of marital difficulties. The case material on arranged marriages, illustrates that natal families in Mohini-Nagar do generously endow shelter and support to their married daughters during domestic distress. Contrary to dominant representations of north Indian women's vulnerability in the domestic realm on account of their supposed alienation from natal kin, in the arranged marriage system the ongoing

practical support and protection that women receive from their natal kin affords them a strong voice and fall-back position in marriage. My research provides ethnographic evidence of women who spend a significant proportion of their married lives in the natal home whilst enjoying great flexibility in their movements between their natal and conjugal home. In particular it illustrates how urban kinship is an immediate and everyday affair, allowing for greater cooperation, assistance and dependability which enhances supportive ties and creates vividly intense relationships between daughters and parents. Women's ties with their natal kin are reinforced by strong mutual dependence driven by economic survival needs in a setting of poverty. The ethnography therefore draws attention to the material and affective dimensions of mother-daughter dyads, which have received little notice in anthropological studies (for exceptions see Jeffery, P. et al. 1988), being overshadowed by the great amount of attention given to mother-son bonds and male models of Indian kinship.

Whereas the Mohini-Nagar data demarcates that women have enduring ties with their natal families in arranged marriages, it also substantiates how the parental role is subsumed in romantic and consensual relationships. Married daughters who abide by parental choice remain intimately linked to their natal kin, creating a real and symbolic divide between 'arranged marriages' and 'other unions.'² By rejecting an arranged marriage and thus denigrating the family's reputation as well as the normative kinship order, daughters are less able to hold their parents accountable for their marital problems or secure their families empathy. In taking responsibility for their own marital choices, daughters therefore do not extensively draw upon natal kin support or shelter. Within love marriages there is a diminution of women's marital bargaining power, which critically depends on natal kin support. Accordingly, despite popular media imagery placing a heightened emphasis on romantic love and globalisation theories (Giddens 1992) portraying marriage as transmuted globally with gender equality becoming more

² Apart from love marriages, 'other unions' includes secondary unions (informal forms of consensual re-marriage) and widows' subsequent marriages. My doctoral thesis (Grover 2006) captures women's experiences of marriage, love and parental support in these different forms of conjugal unions. Given the space constraints, I am unable to detail secondary unions and widows' remarriages that form an important comparative axis for furthering our understanding of arranged and love marriages.

important in relationships based on personal choice; the realities confronting women in love marriages contrast sharply with these assumptions.

Women's post-marital kin contact and support structures have received prominent focus in demographic and kinship models. Two influential north-south India schemas formulated by Dyson and Moore (1983) and Irawati Karve (1993), elucidate that in comparison with south India, kinship in north India is associated with a more negative image. They emphasise that north Indian marriages are caste-endogamous, based on patrilocal residence that is accompanied by a dowry. Women's marital agency is therefore restricted by gender and cultural norms tied with hypergamous marriage structures where bride-takers are considered superior to bride-givers. In south India, however, women are able to exact better treatment from affines and natal kin as marriage is enacted with close kin (cross-cousin marriages) in nearby and thus familiar locations, rather than with strangers in far-off places. Women's higher status is attributed to reciprocal and immediate marriage exchange, which diminishes the distinction between 'daughter' and 'bride', engendering greater freedom, socially as well as economically. Given these hegemonic assumptions affiliating south India with women's greater natal kin support, recent research attempts to make an important corrective to the supposition that women are more favourably placed in south India. Penny Vero-Sanso (1999) argues that it is a mistake to assume that close-kin marriages produce durable and supportive ties between natal kin and married daughters. Amongst lower castes in Chennai she found that natal kin are less reluctant to extend support to their daughters: 'Because families have multiple social and economic ties, natal families can be less willing to support their daughters and sisters for fear of jeopardizing kin relations'(Vero-Sanso 1999: 582). Amali Philips (2005: 109) also stresses how geographical generalities pertaining to north-south kinship systems are at variance with regional and local patterns and contradict 'how women as gendered persons experience the rules and practices of decent and alliance systems.' Focusing on Tamil women in Sri Lankan tea plantations, her ethnography demonstrates how gender inequality is a noted feature of natal, conjugal and affinal relationships. The above observations and the divergent Delhi data on arranged marriages

indicate that these regional hypotheses have bypassed women's articulations of their lived experiences and perceptions of marriage and kinship.

Studies on Scheduled Caste communities (Deliege 1997; Kolenda 1987; Searle-Chatterjee 1981) also present insights into low-caste women's post-marital networks and socio-economic status. In comparison with upper-caste women, they offer an optimistic picture of low-caste women's autonomy and marital position. In these texts, the emphasis is on the earning capabilities of Scheduled Caste women in traditional sectors such as brick-making, agriculture and sweeping, and how they exert considerable economic independence. Other attributes ascribed to Scheduled Castes is that the practice of hypergamy is negligible, and women retain stronger rights in their natal homes that strengthens their bargaining power in marriage (Kolenda 1987). Arguments until now about women's status, fall-back position and post-marital networks have been presented in line with regional variations, labour force participation, demographic restructuring, inheritance rights and the usual higher' and 'lower' caste dichotomy. This article stresses how far greater consideration needs to be given to the type of marriage that a woman has entered into. In Mohini-Nagar, woman's entitlement to parental support differs markedly in accordance to whether she has opted for an arranged marriage or a love marriage. By contrasting how women are positioned in different marriages and the dynamics of these relationships we are able to arrive at a deeper understanding of women's marital experiences and their ties with natal kin. Section I of this article demarcates the socio-economic profile of the study neighbourhood. Section II examines how natal kin intervene to address their daughters' marital tensions in arranged marriages. Section III discusses the subversive practices of marriage and love whilst framing women's subjectivities and interactions with their natal kin post-marriage. Section IV elaborates upon mother-daughter bonds and marriage residence patterns in a city.

1: The Setting

Fieldwork was undertaken between November 2000 and April 2002 in Mohini-Nagar, a low-income neighbourhood in South Delhi that comprises of slums (*bastis*) and resettlement colonies (*jhugghi-jhonpri* colonies). Slums are semi-permanent structures where inhabitants live in *jhugghis* (houses) made of bricks, wood, corrugated iron and plastic. The size of the *jhugghis* varies according to each family's economic status. Some consist of only a small room shared by four to six family members. Married sons often live in the same or neighbouring *gulis* (lanes) as their parents, in separate *jhugghis*. Slum residents receive inadequate basic services such as water and electricity as their *jhugghis* are located on unauthorised land and are vulnerable to eviction orders from the municipal authorities. In addition, slum settlements are adjacent to resettlement colonies, residential areas whose inhabitants own permanent housing, making them marginally better off than their slum counterparts. Residential homes in resettlement colonies are narrow concrete structures with single to four-storied units or 'plots' shared between married sons and their parents. Resettlement colonies have a higher concentration of families living collaterally, as the housing structure permits this.

Residents of both slums and resettlement colonies share cognate migration histories, caste affiliations, economic backgrounds and kinship structures. Inhabitants of Mohini-Nagar migrated to Delhi from the rural areas of north India in the 1960s-70s and created slum settlements across the city. The Delhi government reacted by initiating schemes to relocate slum dwellers to 'proper' neighbourhoods, with the intention of beautifying Delhi. Emma Tarlo (2000) demonstrates how colonies that have undergone resettlement are unofficially connected with the violence and displacement engendered by the national emergency crisis of 1975. During the emergency the government initiated draconian measures to evict slum dwellers, who were made the targets of sterilization programs (*ibid*). In exchange for sterilization, people were 'resettled' and given land plots ranging in sizes from 25 to 80 square yards, and were expected to construct houses by taking up loans (*ibid*). Since the government's resettlement attempt in 1975, the inhabitants of Mohini-Nagar have settled permanently in their vicinity. The neighbourhood does not

exhibit a 'shifting population' and neither have the slums that were the focus of this study been demolished since their inception. In the contemporary landscape of Mohini-Nagar the residents are the urban-born children and grandchildren of migrants entrenched in city life. New or emerging migration patterns are not discernable amongst the populace.

Mohini-Nagar is a heterogeneous neighbourhood with Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes, regional groups and religious minorities (Muslims and Christians) residing together. These groups exchange food and resources on a daily basis. The predominant Scheduled Caste population comprises Balmiki (sweepers), Chamar (leather workers), Dhobi (washermen), Jatav (leather workers), Khatik (butchers), Koli (weavers) and Teli (oil pressers). Other castes associate themselves with their regional identity, e.g. 'Rajasthani', 'Garhwali' and 'Rajput.' While these manifold castes fall under the rubric of 'Scheduled Caste' they do not in any measure constitute a homogenous category. Each has their unique historical, political and social standing. More so, they strictly follow the rule of caste endogamy, a noted feature across north India. All castes, communities and regional groups are also scrupulously evaluated and ascribed a particular position by the local community. Balmikis, for instance, are perceived as the lowest caste. Their profession as sweepers, which brings them into contact with latrines and sewers, is regarded as the most polluting. Balmikis who have lucrative Municipal Corporation sweeping jobs experience intense malice from other Scheduled Castes. Caste is therefore a strong component of social identity, with implications for couples who choose to eschew endogamous marriages.

Notwithstanding the hierarchies amongst Scheduled Castes, the uniformity of residents' economic conditions acts as an equaliser against social differentiation, as it is the significant working class identity that dominates in this setting. Both high and low castes struggle to make ends meet by working in the informal sector, which is characterised by unskilled, poorly paid and insecure jobs. Men work as construction workers, daily labourers, mechanics, contractors, bus conductors, auto-rickshaw drivers and market vendors. Some are employed in higher status jobs such as the lower echelons of government departments and in the private sector. Women and girls are employed as

domestic sweepers and housemaids, and may also work for NGOs, beauty parlours and export companies. As these informal sector jobs do not guarantee secure employment, economic instability is endemic in the area, fostering solidarity and networks of support amongst residents.

While caste and regional groups have their own particular characteristics and identities, they all demonstrate strikingly similar cultural patterns. Marital relations in the neighbourhood are lived and experienced by all residents in analogous ways. Marriages are modeled on north Indian patrilineal norms, usually arranged through parents³ and accompanied by a dowry. Giving dowry is a widespread custom, and even the poorest of natal kin try to muster dowries. There is virtually no difference between caste groups in the ways in which parental support is offered (or denied) to daughters, the nature of marital breakdown and conflict and the unfolding of love marriages. Men and women are expected to conform to the neighbourhood norms, which stipulate certain gendered codes of behaviour. Given the multiplicity of social groups in Mohini-Nagar, there is nevertheless as indicated in the case studies an overt homogenisation in the realm of marital, gendered and kinship practices.

2: The Parental Refuge in Arranged Marriages

In anthropological studies, an arranged marriage connotes parental matchmaking in the choice of a spouse, and represents a union not only between husband and wife but also between their respective families (Uberoi 1998). In Mohini-Nagar, arranged marriages are perceived as lifelong unions that primarily remain intact through continuous parental nurture from the couple's families. Significantly, whilst evaluating the merits of arranged unions, local residents stress that parental support offered during marital difficulties, is a

³ Many contemporary marriages in the neighbourhood include an engagement ceremony that is followed by the main wedding (*shadi*), after which the bride immediately joins her conjugal family. The *gauna* ceremony practiced in north India to mark the ritual transfer of a bride to her conjugal home is in decline in Delhi (cf. Parry 2001:795). Furthermore, conversations with youngsters in Mohini-Nagar suggest that the process of arranging marriages remains fairly strict and in the hands of elders. Marital choice, as they point out, is still the prerogative of parents who may or may not consult them at the time of match-making. In other South-Asian contexts, research (Donner 2002; Uberoi 1998) is suggesting a trend of flexibility in the realm of marital choice.

great privilege of the arranged marriage system. This particular reference to the dependability of natal kin corresponds with actual practice in that the most substantive form of support offered to daughters is ‘refuge’, i.e. a period of prolonged shelter and stay in the natal home during marital difficulties.⁴ An in-depth inquiry into refuge offers an interesting vantage point into women’s rights, access, and usage of the support of their natal kin.

In Mohini-Nagar, spousal conflict is highly visible in arranged marriages and in this light, women from all caste and age groups appeal for natal kin mediation. Marital tensions surface in particular when men are unable to fulfill normative expectations of provider roles. Irrespective of the working class context characterized by poverty and high unemployment, the prevailing social norms necessitate the salience of male breadwinner ideologies. The ideal husband is one who provides and takes responsibility for the long-term welfare of his family. This combination attracts women’s highest praise and is the closest one gets to a local definition of marital love in arranged marriages. The material context gives significant contours to women’s emotions; economic fulfillment being synonymous with expressions of love. The exemplary gender division of labour is based on women carrying out domestic chores and men providing effectively. These notable male breadwinner ideologies are in stark contradiction to the predominant perception that poor Scheduled Caste women display autonomy in their working lives (cf. Vero-Sanso 1995). In Delhi across caste-groups, husbands restrain wives from working, as the latter debases family respectability and honour. Yet in actuality there is a considerable gap between the ideal and reality, as many women are nonetheless expected and indeed ‘compelled to work (*majburi*)’ when a husband’s social behaviour has crossed limits (e.g. through excess drinking) or in situations of financial crisis, both common occurrences in households. In entering waged work, women often end up as family providers, or, in compliance with social norms, they stop working once their husbands have found new jobs. Women’s work trajectories consequently remain fragmented over their life cycles.

⁴ There is no specific Hindi term for the right to shelter in the parental home. The phrase ‘to sit in the *pihar* (natal home)’ comes closest to symbolising a period of abstinence from the conjugal home associated with marital difficulties.

In the case of marital crisis or stressful relations, women maintain that they can arrive at their natal homes without first telephoning or sending notice in advance. Usually their natal homes are located within the Mohini-Nagar vicinity or in other parts of Delhi, forty minutes to an hour away by public transport. Although in north India there is a preference for long distance alliances, this is not seen as desirable amongst local residents. Daughters and sons born in Delhi are married off locally within the city. Alliances are frequently sought with families who reside in adjacent slums and resettlement colonies. Marriages are not arranged between girls and boys who have grown up in the same slum as the latter is tantamount to a sister-brother relationship. Marriage residence patterns are patri-virilocal, with married daughters living in nuclear and joint families (i.e. with the husbands agnatic family) in near reach of their natal kin. Case Study 1 delineates how daughters seek refuge in their natal homes.

Case Study 1: Lata and Rajbir

Rajbir, a man in his late thirties and Balmiki by caste, tells me that his wife is sitting in her *pihar* (natal home). They have been married for sixteen years. Rajbir is currently unemployed and so his wife, Lata, has begun sweeping homes. He says: “Look, I tell you frankly that I drink. But I do not squander money to drink. Which man does not drink these days? At least I care for my children. They all go to school.” According to him, the problem lies not with Lata but with her *pihar*: “She has gone to stay with her parents because I have no work...she goes and stays with them whenever we have problems. But they never bring her back or approach me with reason. They probably encourage her to stay on...as it is convenient for them. Do you know that Lata’s sister has stayed with her parents for most of her married life? Lata keeps shuttling back and forth between her *pihar* and me. I am fed up with this.”

I meet Lata in a resettlement colony, situated 25 minutes away from Mohini-Nagar, where her natal family lives in a two-storey plot. She is angry: “Rajbir drinks heavily with other men. Look at the other husbands who hand their salaries over to their wives. My mother has given me her job because Rajbir is

unemployed. My parents have taken out loans to support us. I've filed a *kharcha-pani* case against him at the Mahila Panchayat.”⁵ She adds, “He suspects me all the time of having affairs when I'm at work. In the early years of marriage I never left the house because of his suspicions. I would be taunted and beaten if I did.” Lata's parents join us: “That Rajbir is terrible, and so is our younger son-in-law. Everyone knows how our daughters have been treated. Why does Lata put up with him? He does not care about her or the children.”

Lata's sister tells me that she has been married for fourteen years, out of which she has lived with her husband for only four years at a stretch. Her husband does seasonal work, and “when he earns money, we begin to live together again. But then he blows it on alcohol and we get into financial trouble. It's been like this for a long time. The children have grown up in my *pihar*. Some time ago my parents raised the subject of a new marriage (*doosri shadi*). But if my *bihata* (husband from the primary marriage) has not kept me well, what guarantee is there that a new marriage will be better? I may end up much worse off.” Both Lata and her sister reflect simultaneously: “How long can we continue to live in our *pihar*? We will outlive our parents, and our brother and sister-in-law also live with them. Things remain uncertain. My mother and sister-in-law are both protected. Our father has a municipal corporation job and our brother has a government job with the Bank of Baroda...they also drink heavily, but they at least they fulfill their financial duties. Our husbands do not.” But Lata later tells me that she will return to her husband soon: “He's come here many times to ask about me. At such times it becomes difficult for the children. My parents keep asking why I put up with him...but eventually I may not inherit anything. And what if in the future Rajbir sells our *jhuggi* and runs off? I will be left in the lurch. Neither do I want to

⁵ The conjoining terms, *kharcha-pani*, connote the role of providing for a family through a monthly allowance. The *kharcha-pani* complaint, is a grievance, that marks ill-treatment by a husband who is denying his wife a maintenance allowance. Women file cases with Mahila Panchayats (feminist NGOs), as the latter are able to assist them in negotiating a maintenance allowance from their husband. Women register cases at their local Mahila Panchayats with the encouragement of their natal kin. Yet Mahila Panchayats are also offering novel structures of dispute settlement and modes of reconciliation, as an alternative to natal kin interventions. This expansive subject on Mahila Panchayats requires separate analytical treatment (Grover, 2006).

destroy my relationship with him.’ Lata confides that her sister is somewhat at fault: “She has not made enough effort to work on her marriage. She relies far too much on my parents.”

In Mohini-Nagar, married women have the distinct right to seek refuge, whereby in the wake of marital crisis they can take up residence with natal kin for extensive periods. It is vital to point out that it is not considered shameful or disrespectful for women to seek refuge. Following a marital breakdown, women are not expected to live alone, as this has connotations of immorality. As the case study demonstrates, women are not silent about their marital problems, nor do they conceal unhappy domestic relations. The language of ‘marital adjustment’ and ‘compromise’ is inconspicuous in these working class neighbourhoods; instead ‘marital breakdown’, ‘cases’ and ‘ill-treatment’ are discussed in everyday life. Natal kin are also vocal about their daughters’ legitimate expectations of support, and they intervene, taking ample responsibility for their daughters’ marital problems as is evident in the way mothers provide financial and practical support.

Women can find ways of redressing marital tensions within asymmetrical marriage structures by invoking a variety of support mechanisms from natal kin. It is the easy access to refuge that facilitates critical exit options. When a wife is taking refuge, gossip about her absence spreads in gulis, which is humiliating for her husband. In the eyes of the local community, refuge can suggest excessive ill-treatment on the part of the husband, prompting him to attempt immediate negotiations with his wife’s natal kin, for husbands too find the process of marital-breakdown tension-ridden. For women, the option of seeking refuge is a particularly strong bargaining tool for renegotiating domestic arrangements, as refuge involves rights of residence in an environment where it is socially unacceptable to live alone. In the safety of the parental home, women can bargain effectively, by evoking threats with the aid of brothers to compel husbands to alter their behaviour through resuming provider responsibilities and relinquishing alcoholism and domestic violence. This form of bargaining through seeking shelter in the natal home provides a powerful alternative compared to a situation where a women has

taken up employment.⁶ According to bargaining models such as Amartya Sen's 1990, 'Co-operative Conflict Model', a woman's economic contributions are meant to enhance her fall-back position in the conjugal household. As per Sen's argument, women's weaker economic power and health status, and lower educational levels are barriers to effective bargaining. However I found several cases of women considering refuge as an exit option wherein even after, having provided single handedly for their children and unemployed husbands through entering waged work they were still subject to male violence, alcohol abuse and taunts of suspicion. Women mentioned that conflicts and violence had exacerbated since they began to work, as their husbands would intensely question their loyalties towards them. Scholarly engagement on masculinities (Jackson 2001) signals how this phenomenon, articulated by women, is linked to the insecurity, low self-esteem and vulnerability that men face when they are unable to deliver. Henrietta Moore (1994), for instance, relates male violence to the thwarting of or inability to conform to gendered positions where certain expectations fail, generating a crisis of self-representation or social evaluation. She perceives violence as the struggle for the maintenance of certain fantasies about identity and power. In Delhi, suspicions grow in case of instances when men's fantasies of power are challenged, as for instance by their failure to provide, prompting an extra eagerness to control women and scrutinise their movements. Arranged marriages are conspicuously marked by sexual antagonism, stressful relations and violence, revealing the inequality of marital relations.

Despite the fact that women are critical of marriage their preference for an arranged marriage is cogently anchored in the knowledge of their parents guaranteed support, which strengthens their voice and enables them to challenge male authority in arranged unions. This high level of female autonomy in domestic negotiations can destabilise a

⁶ However, taking up employment as a domestic worker in a middle-class colony can provide a good exit option for women. Poor women are resourceful, and their interaction with the middle classes cannot be discounted in terms of negotiating physical shelter such as servants' quarters. Yet it is acquiring shelter in a respectable middle class colony that gives women the option of leaving their marital home and the recurrent violence they may be facing.

marriage, as natal kin and married women need not cooperate with husbands and bride-takers. That a husband's kin (the bride-takers) are higher in status than a wife's (the bride-givers) is a position supported by patrilineal conceptions and the institution of dowry, which emphasizes the concept of an asymmetrical affinal relationship (Vatuk 1972: 148). Despite the prevalence of dowry-giving in Mohini-Nagar this has not created a complete degree of asymmetry between bride-takers and bride-givers. Dowry remains a prestige and obligatory factor, but in actuality, the relationship between bride-givers and bride-takers is one of more mutuality. So while marriages are arranged in a patrilineal milieu accompanied by dowries, natal kin maintain a substantial influence in their daughters' marital life.

The Mohini-Nagar material illustrates the minutiae of parental support in a metropolis where the proximity of post-marital residence makes it very easy for women to secure constant parental intervention. Nonetheless analogous arguments and the striking ethnography about women's enduring ties with their natal kin and flexible marriage residence patterns have also been put forward by Rajni Palriwala (1991) as well as Raheja and Gold (1994) with reference to rural north India. Although Raheja (1994: Chapter 3) does not discuss the mediating role of parents in domestic disputes she depicts diverse manifestations of natal kin ties. This is opposed to static conceptions of north Indian kinship, which assume that after marriage parents effectively distance themselves from daughters. In actuality, women in rural Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan regularly visit their natal homes over their life course and nurture their ties with their brothers, which challenges the patrilineal ideology of their complete assimilation with affinal kin. In an important article on women's residential practice, Palriwala (1991) argues that women's marriage residence patterns are more varied and complex than has been presented in the literature. In the Panchwas village of north eastern Rajasthan, the phase of *aoni-jaoni*, implies that a woman is beyond puberty, and after her wedding (*shadi*) and consummation ceremony (*muklawā*), she is allowed to shuttle back and forth between the natal and conjugal home to make gradual adjustments to the rigors of her *sasural* (husband's kin). The system of *aoni-jaoni* is specifically intended to allow repeated family visits to the natal home.

While offering shelter to daughters is a normal practice in Delhi, the event of refuge can also generate acute disruption in women's marital lives, illuminating their contradictory and variable experiences of arranged marriages. Lata and Rajbir's case study depicts how during marital discord women oscillate between the natal and conjugal homes and that these movements may occur repeatedly in a woman's marital trajectory. Palriwala (1991) has best conceptualised women's constant shuttling between natal and conjugal home as 'transitory residence.' In Delhi, the residence of married women in their conjugal homes is indeed of a shifting and transient nature. With marital relations being highly conflictual, a systematic pattern and wide-ranging picture of marriage emerges whereby married women routinely leave their conjugal homes. A notable way in which women experience arranged marriages is that they spend a significant proportion of their married lives in the natal home, the latter being an alternative residence for those who are dissatisfied with their domestic arrangements. By way of illustration, Kamla who is from Raju Slum (the largest slum in Mohini-Nagar) was married in December 1995. Her conjugal home is in a nearby slum. Kamla moved back to Raju Slum in early 1997, claiming that her husband was ill-treating her. She was also shuttling back and forth between homes during that period. Kamla finally returned to her conjugal home in August 2001, but in December 2003 I learnt that she was back in her natal home. Such incidences of intermittent refuge can be multiplied throughout Mohini-Nagar. No clear patterns or discourses of child rights emerge concerning where children reside during refuge, or which parent has guardianship over their children. Women stress that it is essential to leave children with their fathers so that they will not abdicate from their responsibilities completely. Otherwise it is noticeable that as a consequence of refuge many children grow up in their mothers' natal homes, which might be a small jhuggi or an over-crowded plot.

The process of refuge reveals the intense ongoing negotiations between natal kin and married daughters, and the predicaments that women face on account of their vacillating marital trajectories. The right to refuge does not guarantee permanent shelter, although women are permitted to stay for lengthy stretches (e.g. Lata's sister's ten-year stay).

Permanent refuge is unlikely, the more so as women will outlive their parents and are likely to have brothers who are normally entitled to inherit parental property.⁷ Daughters contend that although they make frequent use of refuge this is an arrangement, requiring continual negotiation. In addition they highlight how refuge can displace them from both their natal and their conjugal home in years to come (Palriwala 1991). If they continuously take refuge, the intimacy and durability of the marital bond will debilitate with their long absences.⁸ Women voice the concern that by taking repeated refuge they may abdicate their rights, entitlements and future role in the conjugal home. The alternative scenario is an uncertain future with their natal kin if they outlive their parents and brothers thereafter relinquish their support. Frequent resort to natal refuge thus raises critical concerns about a woman's impending role in her conjugal home. It also clearly draws attention to the paradoxical and ambivalent ways in which women experience their arranged marriages, as the long-term dependability of their natal kin and conjugal stability is in question.

Women who face recurrent marital conflict are offered the option by their parents to opt for a doosri shadi or a second arranged marriage. Women respond with the concern that a second arranged marriage may turn out worse than the first. Many women therefore continue to negotiate refuge as a second marriage is seen as precarious. Yet in situations where their children are of marriageable age, women emphasise that they are constrained to take refuge, since any indication of marital breakdown affects the family's chances of

⁷ In line with patrilineal norms, brothers are expected to inherit property, although there is growing awareness of recent laws that entitle women to an equal share. The practice for families in resettlement colonies is to partition plots of three or four stories between married brothers, while in slums, the expectation is that a son will ultimately occupy his parent's jhuggi. Yet there are numerous instances of married sons breaking away from their parents to form nuclear households. Hence it is difficult to gauge actual long-term living arrangements and inheritance practices, which are not straightforward in low-income neighbourhoods. Mothers mention that they often try to leave a small part of their house to their daughters. Parents also include their daughters in life insurance policies.

⁸ While refuge contributes towards enhancing marital instability, an obvious query is whether husbands initiate legal divorce when their wives refuse to cooperate or return to the conjugal home. The data indicates that marriage breakdowns in the neighbourhood are not irrevocable; rather the 'door remains open,' between husbands and wives, allowing for future reconciliation. Even during a prolonged phase of refuge and uncertainty, spouses may continue to negotiate the terms of the marital bond and coordinate essential responsibilities for their children. Legal divorce such as might be initiated in other contexts is not always the case where women are seeking lengthy refuge.

finding suitable brides and grooms. As for brothers, many are vocal about their sisters' right to refuge. Married brothers who reside with their parents habitually accommodate their sisters, empathising with their lack of options. Long-term refuge is nonetheless never fully approved by the brothers' wives, who often protest when their sisters-in-law (husbands' sisters) outstay their welcome. I witnessed women being pushed into refuge themselves because their sisters-in-law's periods of refuge were aggravating stresses and conflicts in the extended family. Alternatively, these women manipulate the use of refuge with the excuse that their sister-in-laws are staying for too long. These patterns suggest how easy access to refuge in working class neighbourhoods unsettles and fragments marriage and kinship.

3: The Parental Role in Love Marriages

In Mohini-Nagar, among sections of the young people, modern courtship is a growing trend. By and large the metropolitan landscape offers numerous opportunities for young people from diverse social backgrounds to meet in public spaces. With the availability of parks and affordable transport such as the metro system, the mobility of courting couples cannot easily be restricted. Hence, regardless of the fact that arranged marriages are the norm, courtship practices that cut across caste boundaries are palpable in Delhi. In addition the cohesiveness of the low-income Mohini-Nagar neighbourhood, marked by the extreme proximity of residential spaces, augments and weaves local courtships (cf. Donner 2002). The regular communal events and affective ties amongst neighbours in the locality, facilitates' the social framework for young people to fall in love. Below I set out Rekha's recollections of her courtship days, drawing attention to the local connotations of romantic love.

Case Study 2: Rekha and Sandeep

Rekha, a Balmiki girl, and Sandeep, a Rajput boy, grew up in Raju Slum. They got married during my fieldwork. Being from different castes, their families did not consent to their marriage for several months. Both sets of parents eventually consented to their marriage, giving in to the couple's repeated threats of suicide.

Rekha reminisces about how she and Sandeep spent much of their childhood playing together. Her mother, who is present, confirms their early childhood friendship. Rekha tells me that at the age of 15 she began working at a cinema as a female security guard. Her parents relied on her for financial support. When she began to work, several of her male friends showed an interest in her: “When I was working at Priya Cinema I had forgotten about Sandeep. But he would often badger me, saying that if I did not marry him he would kill himself. But I was not ready for marriage. One day he made a scene by eating something poisonous to show me that he could not live without me.” I asked her what had prompted her to marry Sandeep. “One day when we were at a movie together, he told me how much he loved (*pyar*) me.” In a hesitant manner she says: “After that, I do not know what happened ...but ours was not a sexual relationship. Sandeep used to sing lovely songs, which I liked. I had many offers from male friends, but what I shared with Sandeep as his childhood sweetheart (“*bachpan se pyar*”)....I could not have those feelings for other men.”

Rekha’s vignette demonstrates how young people evoke romantic notions of childhood togetherness. Despite the moral tone of propriety and respectability that accompany young women’s feelings, they are nonetheless open about their ‘childhood feelings of love.’ This love from childhood – *bachpan se pyar* – appears to hold a special appeal in terms of growing up together in the same neighbourhood, familiarity, trust and recollections of fond memories. Rekha admits her childhood fondness for Sandeep and describes their relationship as ‘childhood sweethearts’, indicating the memorable encounters they shared as children. This local interpretation of romance may be in opposition to marriage rules of slum exogamy, yet among some young people, childhood closeness which grows into love is idealised.⁹ In courtship narratives the Hindi term *pyar* is used to describe romantic love. In Mohini-Nagar, *pyar* is used across age groups as a generic term referring to different forms of love and emotional attachment. *Prem*, *muhabbat* and *ishq*, words employed in Hindi films to describe feelings of romantic love,

⁹ The underlying leitmotif of childhood love is dominant in distinguished Hindi films such as *Dev Das* where the hero (Dev) and the heroine (Paro) grew up together as neighbours in a locality.

passion and desire are less cited in courtship narratives. More notably, it is the English term 'love marriage' pronounced as 'luv marriaze' (or in Hindi '*apne pasand*', 'own choice') that is widely used in connection with a self-chosen marriage based on a trajectory of courtship. The courtship trajectory is a diacritical marker of a love marriage denoting the anti-thesis of an arranged marriage (see Donner 2002, for a contrast on how 'love marriage' is defined in Calcutta).

Recently there has been a scholarly focus on documenting how families, communities and caste groups in India are reacting to modern courtships and non-endogamous love marriages. Prem Chowdhry (1998; 2004; 2007) who has researched marriages of 'choice' has shown how elopements, especially those involving lower and upper-caste pairings, have escalated in rural and semi-urban Haryana, challenging caste, kin and community authority. Couples, who violate the norm of caste endogamy, meet with extreme violence from their families and the powerful traditional caste panchayats that authorize village style executions and economic sanctions in the name of family and community honour. Intra-caste arranged marriages that breach kin, *got* (incest taboo) and territorial exogamy are also regarded as highly contentious. Correspondingly, Perveen Mody (2002), who has examined the interface between love marriages and the law in Delhi's Tiz Hazari courts, observed the contradictory, ambiguous and interventionist ways in which love marriage couples experience the judicial system. She also highlights incidents of violence and excommunication that couples incur from their parents and social groups, who opposed their marriages. Hitherto while the dominant theme of these important studies is portrayal of the violence, family exclusion and the socio-legal adversities that couples face while opting and exercising their choices for a love marriage, an ethnographic analysis that shifts the focus towards the post-marital unfolding of love marriages is necessary to sharpen and add new content to the debate. For instance, it is of relevance to uncover the nuances of couples' interactions with their parents post-marriage and in the later years of couples' married lives. These themes have received notably little documentation.

The Scheduled Castes in Mohini-Nagar are extremely disapproving of marriages that contravene the established rule of caste endogamy. Even the Balmikis, who are

positioned by other social groups as the lowest caste, profess a strong ideology of endogamy. Intra-caste marriages, too, meet with critical condemnation, as the arranged marriage remains a powerful ideal ensuring a family's prestige, status and reputation. Couples who want a self-chosen marriage normally encounter dissent and opposition from their parents. The usual approach is for parents to pressurise their child into an arranged marriage in an attempt to separate them from their partner, while also the responses of families in acquiescing to or rejecting a love marriage can vary. Caste panchayats, on the other hand are few in Delhi, and do not play a role in impeding love marriages. Caste based panchayats that are known for meting out social boycotts, fines and punishments have lost their credibility in Delhi as the courts, Mahila Panchayats (feminist-NGOS) and human rights organizations offer alternative routes to justice and marital arbitration. Whereas many families in the neighbourhood continue to forcefully separate young couples it is equally significant to underscore that marital decisions are no longer in the complete hands of parents. By utilizing legal institutions and NGO assistance, couples are exercising their agency, and asserting their preferences for marrying partners with whom they have long-term attachments and share feelings of emotional intimacy. In opting for a love marriage, the fact that daughters may have to defy parental choice that denigrates a family's reputation has crucial implications for the kind of support they can expect from their parents after marriage. The next narrative, elicited from Mala, prioritises the post-marriage phase and the critical issue of parental support.

Case Study 3: Mala

Mala, a Rajasthani woman, says she had an intra-caste love marriage that had grown out of a neighbourly courtship. Mala's natal family were unhappy about endorsing their daughter's love marriage with a next door neighbour, even though she was marrying within her caste and regional group. Nonetheless they did not contest her marriage or disown her. Mala recalls how after her marriage, she began living with her husband's kin. From the early days her mother-in-law was quarrelsome. One day, after Mala had returned from a visit to her natal home, her mother-in-law complained to her husband: "Your wife often visits her parents

without my permission.” Hearing this, she was beaten by her husband in front of everyone in the guli. Mala asserts that her husband had come under the control of his mother. After this incident she took refuge in her natal home, stressing that she had a strong mother who supported her through her difficulties. After three months of refuge she returned to resume living with her husband’s kin.

Mala emphasises that she has endured immense hardship in her marriage: “I did everything I could to please my husband’s kin, despite what they put me through.” Over the years, her husband has had many affairs: “I could not leave him, even though I had a supportive family. When you marry on your own accord, how can you leave the person? In an arranged marriage, you hold your parents accountable. Not in the type of marriage we had. You have to put up with it.” When Mala’s daughter walks in, she asserts that she will arrange her marriage: “I do not want my children to go through what I went through. In love marriages women are most at risk. Society is willing to forgive a man if he leaves his wife. After all, he will just marry again. What will happen to the woman?”

Mala’s narrative exemplifies that husbands start to enforce their domestic authority soon after marriage. Family ill treatment and domestic violence towards women are equally visible in self-chosen marriages. So while men opt for a love marriage this does little to dissipate their loyalties towards their mothers in the post-marriage phase. The expressions of romantic love and vigorous male pursuit that initially characterised the courtship period are replaced for men in the post-marriage phase by discourses of filial duties and obligations. During a marital crisis, natal families such as Mala’s do extend their support to their daughters, even though the latter may have acted against their parents’ wishes. Yet the intensity with which married daughters interact with their parents in arranged marriages, as in their lengthy and prolonged periods of refuge, is not an overt characteristic of love marriages. While women in love marriages may have approachable mothers, they stress that they are hesitant to complain, approach or transfer their marital grievances to their natal kin, as they cannot hold their parents accountable. Women

therefore do not draw extensively upon the support of their natal kin, and thus natal kin play a marginal role in their daughters' domestic problems.

However, although refuge and mediation are much less pronounced in love marriages, daughters continue to remain connected and assimilated with their natal kin, although they cannot expect the sort of support and care that they would receive in arranged marriages. Whether they marry with or without parental approval, women often form households in the same neighbourhoods as their parents or close by (as in Mala's case, women also reside with their husband's agnatic family).¹⁰ The proximity of the post-marital residence to the natal home curbs physical isolation, affording potential for fruitful interactions that might rejuvenate ruptured family ties. Furthermore, where daughters have eloped, causing embarrassment to their families, natal kin do not always sever ties with them. The birth of a child often brings reconciliation. Natal families may initially contest a daughter or a son's love marriage, but the daughter-parent dynamics can also alter in the post-marriage phase as a result of other factors. Mutual dependence between mothers and daughters in a context of poverty prevents a daughter's complete expulsion or long-term detachment from her natal family. Intergenerational reliance (elucidated further in section IV), a key factor in working-class neighbourhoods, dissipates family tensions and leads to the resumption of affective ties. By way of example, Neetu's parents, who are Balmikis, fiercely opposed her marriage to a boy from a higher caste (caste undisclosed). Neetu responded by eloping, and became estranged from her parents. Nevertheless, Neetu is currently living two gulis away from her parents in Raju Slum, and this substantiates that the daughter-parent rift was temporary. Neetu's parents tell me bitterly how they are unhappy with the way their daughter eloped and married. Neetu reacts by mentioning that she assists her ageing parents materially and emotionally, while her brother, whose marriage was arranged with substantial expenses separated from his parents by forming a nuclear household. Her statement attunes us to the discrepancy between the public show of parental disapproval and actual

¹⁰ Four couples from Raju Slum have married people from the same slum in which they themselves grew up, suggesting that the rule of slum exogamy is often contravened in love marriage cases. The families of these couples have not been boycotted or maligned. Residents of Raju Slum do nonetheless pass remarks such as: 'These love marriages have ruined the neighbourhoods reputation.'

manifestations of intergenerational reliance.¹¹ Even so, Neetu acknowledges that if she were to face marital estrangement she would not expect sympathy from her natal kin, as they would say: ‘Did you listen to our advice when you wanted to get married?’

From women’s assessments of their love marriages stems a seamless discourse about their sense of vulnerability. Whereas marital dissatisfaction is frequently espoused in arranged marriages, women in love marriages hold themselves accountable for their choices and feel that their disappointments are met with little sympathy. Women’s narratives of love marriages are distinctly marked by uneasy silences. There are also distinct gender differences in the ways in which love marriages are discussed and evaluated. Women underwrite the risks, sacrifices and difficulties associated with love marriages. Mala’s attempts to ‘win over her husbands’ entire family’ is a powerful statement, indicating that women need to actively appease their parents-in-law and put extra effort into making their marriages work. Moreover, in love marriages women face a markedly higher risk of being critically scrutinized by the wider society. As they have transgressed the convention of arranged marriage by willfully asserting their independence they are constantly vilified in their immediate surroundings as sexually promiscuous. The disparagement that women face reduces the chances of empathy from their local community when they encounter marital problems. Two sisters who had love marriages with their neighbours in Raju Slum told me how over the years their husbands have become heavy drinkers. As a result they single-handedly provide for their families and are constantly searching for work. Their tales of hardship offer a different insight into love marriages. In a working-class milieu, couples who have married for love often face a strikingly different phase in their lives once they marry and settle down. Men face the urgency to provide for their families, and once the needs of real life become urgent they may no longer feel consumed by the intense passion that motivated their love marriage.

¹¹ Couples in love marriages may also remain financially reliant on their parents, as in the case of a Balmiki boy and a Koli girl, neighbours in adjoining gulis, who eloped to marry. The couple’s parents accepted their marriage when they learnt that the girl was pregnant. The couple lives in a jhuggi near the boy’s parents in Raju Slum. The boy is known to borrow money from his parents since he does not have a stable job.

In circumstances of stressful marital relations, violence and shifting male emotions, women are reprimanded and told to adopt a conciliatory approach and to account for their mistakes as they ‘chose their marriages,’ even if their marriages have been intra-caste ones.

Consequently, in the Mohini-Nagar love marriage sample we see a strengthening of conjugal relations, as women rarely dissolve their marriages. This contradicts local discourses about the short-lived nature of love marriages as in fact consensual unions are producing greater conjugal stability. Hence the love marriage union based on romantic love lacks the potential for enhancing women’s marital agency, as we see a dilution of their bargaining power. It is in these marriages based on personal choice where women have a weak fall-back position. While the incidence of love marriages is increasing, women in such marriages are unable to exercise effective exit options such as refuge, marital breakup and divorce. This resonates with Jonathan Parry’s (2001) Chhattisgarh study where modern ideas on marriage and love have paradoxically resulted in a decline in the divorce rate and reinforcement of gender inequality, countering Giddens’ (1992) global hypothesis that modernity is manifesting more egalitarian practices and norms in marriage.

4: “Those Cows Are Ruining My Marriage”: Mother-Daughter Bonds and Married Women’s Labour

In Mohini-Nagar, married daughters are permitted family visits (as distinct from periods of refuge) for rituals, childbirth and periods of rest. However, as married daughters live close to their natal homes, kinship relations are intensified by women’s regular, informal visits to assist parents with chores, look after them when they are sick, attend to other siblings, or simply drop in on the way from work. This section elaborates further upon the interstices of women’s everyday visits to the natal home, close post-marital bonds, intergenerational reliance and mother-daughter ties in the city, aspects that are crucial in shaping women’s trajectories of arranged and love marriages. Case Study 4 documents a

mother-in-law's reaction to her daughter-in-law's family interludes at her natal home in an arranged marriage.

Case Study 4: Shakuntala

Shakuntala is a widow of the Khatik caste. She and her sons live in two spacious resettlement plots. Shakuntala is complaining about her elder *bahu* (daughter-in-law): "What have we not done for my bahu? She just wants to keep going back to her pihar. The last time, she was going to visit her pihar for eight days and she stayed there for almost two months. She goes away on all kinds of excuses and takes the children with her. Then she gets really proud when we plead with her to return. We always have to visit her natal family a couple of times to ask her to return. Her parents do not treat us with respect. What's the point of having a bahu who is never around? We are fed up with her going back and forth."

I meet Shakuntala's son. He feels that a time will come when his wife will have to fend for herself. She will not have cultivated a proper relationship with him, and in time her parents will no longer be around. Her two brothers have moved away from her parents and established separate nuclear households: "My wife's rights lie in this house, and not with her parents." Shakuntala's Muslim neighbour, walking in, says that she is facing similar problems with her bahu. They exchange frustrations and lament that their bahus are ruining their lives: "Sometimes it's my bahu who goes away for long stretches, and sometimes it's hers. Obviously their parents keep them for their own selfish needs. A mother has complete rest when her daughter is around." Shakuntala and her neighbour compare their lives to those of their bahus: "When we were married we were so poor." Shakuntala's neighbour recalls: "We came from our village, and my husband set up a vegetable stall. Later on, he got a job as a cook in the Ashoka hotel." Shakuntala adds: "I did construction work for many years. Then my husband got a job as a gardener. We were moved from the Greater Kailash jhuggis to here." They agree: "We stuck it out with our husbands. We helped them to build a home. Bahus of the younger generation know nothing about this. Not all mothers-in-laws are bad. Our

bahus have nothing to complain about.” A week later, Shakuntala’s son met his father-in-law on the street and told him: “Is this some kind of a joke, that my wife is never around? We will not come to collect her again.” The following day his wife returned to her conjugal home.

Shakuntala’s case study illustrates how married women’s family visits take on a pattern of transitory residence that brings out tensions, frustration and resentment (Palriwala 1991: 2770). Visits that are permitted for ten days can last for up to two months, or even longer. Shakuntala is frank about her lack of control over her daughter-in-law’s visits, which suggests that the mother-in-law-daughter-in-law relationship is not entirely governed by hierarchical norms. In her article *Dominant daughters-in-law and submissive mothers-in-law?* Vero-Sanso (1999) argues that in Chennai’s low-income settlements, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law ties and intergenerational household relations are not necessarily static. These ties are shaped by socio-economic factors and family demographics rather than by cultural expectations. The vulnerability of an ageing widow or mother-in-law who outlives her husband depends on how many sons she has or the amount of land she owns. While a daughter-in-law is initially dependent on her mother-in-law she may have little long-term interest in cooperating with her, as the family’s economic circumstances are likely to change. Instead, mothers-in-law may have to use several strategies to appease their daughters-in-law. This explains why elderly mothers-in-laws and widows in Delhi, may not have strong fallback positions in their households on account of physical and economic dependencies whereby they are in a position to curb neither refuge in arranged marriages nor lengthy family visits.

Lengthy family visits to the natal home, as with Shakuntala’s bahu who had not expressed any marital dissatisfaction, cast doubts on the motives of married women and their natal kin. When a husband’s character is assessed as good, a married woman’s constant visits home are questioned. The bonds of affection between spouses cannot develop if a married woman is not present; and if she is continually in her natal home she is not interested in nourishing those bonds. Nonetheless, is it not convenient for women to keep slipping back to their natal homes, which are nearby and where there is freedom,

support and affection? Sylvia Vatuk (1972: 140) observed critical structural changes in urban neighborhoods in Meerut in north India in the 1960-70s. Vatuk provides considerable evidence of gradual but fundamental shifts in the kinship system in a sample of middle-class white-collar migrants. Compared to earlier generations, in the 1960s married daughters in Meerut frequently visit their parents, younger siblings spend longer periods with their married sisters and sisters who used to be married off to distant places are now living closer and keeping in touch after marriage. Vatuk attributes these changes to a bilateral shift in urban kinship in line with migration to the city: 'We see in urban India a trend towards lesser incorporation of a married women into her husband's kin network and greater assertion of her ties with the natal family' (1972: 147). Vatuk's rich analysis focusing on middle-class families suggests that urban kinship has significant advantages for women as they are in a position to access extensive kin networks. In Delhi, amongst the poor, we observe a similar bilateral emphasis, as arranging marriages close-by is acceptable, while even in love marriages daughters form households in the same neighbourhoods and slums as their parents enabling them to meet natal kin on a daily basis. In response to why marriages are arranged with people living nearby natal kin specify that as their *biradari* (community) members reside in close proximity it is easier to search for alliances from that pool. Keeping an eye on their daughters' marital problems is equally cited as a motive for close marriage alliances. Marriages arranged with grooms in rural areas are ruled out by natal kin, the explanation being that daughters are likely to experience village life as alien, and on the whole such marriages are regarded as unkind.

Close post-marital bonds can also create unconventional scenarios between married women and their affines, and in this regard, Vatuk points out:

"However, residence near the wife's parents in the city does cause strains in the traditional affinal relationship. The woman who lives in her natal mohalla – or whose parents have moved nearby after her marriage, as many have done – cannot sharply separate her statuses as daughter and bride as she could in the traditional setting. The strong emotional ties between parents and daughters, which would have been compartmentalized by traditional residence rules and clear role definitions, are allowed active expression when a daughter lives within easy walking distance of

her parents. Instead, of periodic extended visits to the natal home gradually diminishing in frequency, the married women in this situation can make almost daily ones” (Vatuk 1972: 142).

Correspondingly, Jeffery & Jeffery (1993: 80) note how close post-marital bonds undermine a husband’s command. Men in Bijnor are keen to maintain a distance from their wives’ natal kin in order to retain their domestic authority. Bijnor women also express ambivalence towards marrying a husband from close by as they believe that this engenders excessive interference. They stress that being married distantly means that they will be treated more generously when they visit their natal homes, as close marital bonds abdicates certain privileges. Husbands in Mohini-Nagar complain incessantly that their wives spend an unnecessary amount of time in their natal homes. This male perception creates continual conflict between couples and augments jealousy. A more vocal interpretation by local residents as to why married women are frequently given refuge or allowed to visit their parents so often is that a married daughter’s labour benefits her parents. Case Study 5 focuses on Amit and Sunita to explore this underlying argument concerning a married daughter’s labour.

Case Study 5: Amit and Sunita

Amit and Sunita, who had an arranged marriage, are Kumhars by caste (classified in the category of Other Backward Classes/OBC), and live in a joint family in a resettlement plot. When I meet Amit he frets that Sunita has hardly been around since they married: “Look, I provide for her well. In our three-year marriage she has only lived with me for six months. We have been trying constantly to get her back. Her pihar has shown no signs of co-operation.” I hear that Amit’s father is determined to confront Sunita’s natal kin once again. They request some neutral arbitrators to accompany them to her house – members of the Mahila Panchayat team and myself.¹² Sunita’s natal home (45 minutes away from her conjugal

¹² Between 2000-2002, I documented dispute settlement cases in the Mohini-Nagar Mahila Panchayat and became involved in many of them, including Amit and Sunita’s. Whereas women usually register complaints of ill-treatment against their spouses, Mahila Panchayats also receive a small number of cases from men whose principal grievance relates to their wives’ refusal to return from their natal home.

home) is located in a newly-built locality that has a rural atmosphere with animals roaming freely. On entering Sunita's house, a woman in her forties, the marriage intermediary, greets us. Amit's father announces: "Either you send Sunita back or we agree to a divorce. It cannot go on like this. You have been evading us for too long." The marriage intermediary answers half-heartedly: "We will only send her back if she is treated well."

In the presence of the Mahila Panchayat members, Sunita speaks with us directly. We inquire about her absence from the conjugal home. Assertively she replies: "Amit is not as good as he makes himself out to be. He beats me. He and his mother gang up on me. He never lets me phone my pihar." Her natal kin join in and are highly protective: "She is our daughter. Should she not come to us if she is being ill-treated?" Amit denies the allegations: "I want to work on my marriage. Why would I plead for her to return, if I am to ill-treat her?" The arbitrators ask Sunita whether she wants to return to her conjugal home: "Do you expect your marriage to work out if you're always sitting in your pihar? Your parents are not always going to be around. Neither is it easy to marry for the second time. It is better that you make your home than break it." The marriage intermediary responds: "If she is not being looked after well, her natal kin are willing to keep her permanently. Her future will be decided by her fate." Amit's father finally tells Sunita's mother also remains obdurate, but after three hours of exchanges she agrees to send her daughter back. Both families give a written undertaking in the presence of their neighbours that Sunita is to return to her conjugal home.

A week later, when Sunita is in her conjugal home, her mother arrives with two local leaders and a policeman. They claim that Sunita was forcibly taken from her natal home whilst she was undertaking refuge. Sunita returns with her mother to her natal home. Amit files a case in the government courts (Patiala House) for marital reconciliation, whereby a judge intervenes to counsel the couple at a low

fee. We meet Amit's parents in their house before the court proceedings. They discuss Sunita's mother's resistance: "You have seen their house. They have a lot of housework. From the start they have kept cows. Sunita's father's mental condition is deteriorating. Her two brothers leave in the morning for work and return home late. Her youngest sister-in-law does the other household chores. But looking after the cows has always been Sunita's responsibility. Soon after they got married, Sunita's mother requested that we send her to her pihar. Her brother was getting married and they needed help. We allowed her to go. Two months passed and she did not return. Then her mother asked if they could keep her longer because of the cows. When she failed to return again, Amit told her they also needed her 'help' at home. Within weeks of returning home she went back to her pihar. For three years it has been her pihar, pihar, pihar. Those cows are ruining her marriage. Then when we raise objections she claims we ill-treat her." Amit's father tells me shakily that his reputation is being ruined in his biradari. We discuss Sunita's future. They show me around their house: "Look, this is her house and this is where her rights lie. One day she will realise what she has missed out on." Amit's father cynically adds: "Or she may just run away with another man when her pihar no longer needs her." (In 2003, Sunita and Amit's case was in the courts with the outcome of reconciliation remaining uncertain.)

Amit and Sunita's case study highlights that husbands and the local community perceive the collusion and excessive involvement of natal kin in their daughters' lives as selfishness; it is handy to have daughters around the house. Some elements of truth emerge from this local discourse. Undeniably, the use of a daughter's domestic labour begins at an early age, when she helps to supervise the household and siblings. In this regard daughters are often taken out of school before they complete class 10. Mothers in particular extensively utilize their daughters' labour, for which there seems to be great demand and competition. Adolescent girls accompany their mothers to work to help them, and if their mothers fall ill they take over domestic chores such as sweeping and cooking. Hitherto what comes through sharply is the mother-daughter dyad of mutual reliance, as mothers and daughters depend on one another for material support. Daughters

and mothers stress that 'their stories are intertwined' and that they empathise with each other's predicaments, especially in cases where male family members neglect their responsibilities as providers. Mothers are allies in difficult times, in tune with their daughter's problems; they check on them regularly and accompany them to file cases against their husbands, and they often berate their sons-in-law.

The tendency to restrict a married daughters' return to her conjugal home is most evident in the case of Sunita, whose mother was resisting mediation attempts. In her study on marriage residence patterns in Rajasthan, Palriwala (1991) shows how a married daughter's labour is used during 'aoni-jaoni' (the adjustment phase between the wedding and consummation ceremony that allows women to shuttle back and forth between their conjugal and natal home to make gradual adjustments to the rigors of their conjugal home). Palriwala reveals how aoni-jaoni is not always related to family visits or an adjustment phase, but can also be connected to the use of a daughter's labour to ensure that a household receives sufficient help in the fields, particularly when male family members have migrated to find work. A married daughter's labour is preferred to that of an unmarried daughter or a daughter-in-law, as she is able to transgress several norms. She need not veil herself, is more familiar with the household, and is considered a more experienced worker. Most importantly, if she is sexually violated in the fields the family's honour can be saved, as she is, after-all, recognised as a married woman. Yet natal kin will never acknowledge that their daughter's visits are linked with agricultural work. Instead aoni-jaoni is associated with marriage prestations to the husband's kin and the continual expenses for married daughters, which gives it legitimacy. One of Palriwala's most compelling findings is that while a daughter's labour is fully utilised it is never valued or visible. Moreover, under the transitory residence movements and marriage residence patterns daughters end up being fully accepted neither in their natal nor in their conjugal home.

While in Rajasthan aoni-jaoni allows for manipulation of a daughter's labour, in Delhi periods of refuge and family visits also give mothers opportunities for utilizing a daughter's labour. The regular casual visits that are actively supported by natal kin seek

to strengthen ties. These continuous attempts to manipulate access to daughters' labour illustrate the economic insecurities of urban low-income households and how these shape marital relations. Natal kin rely on their daughters' labour input, especially when sons have evaded their filial duties by breaking away from their parents.¹³ For natal kin, the added economic costs of accommodating daughters and grandchildren are traded off as women assist their parents with the upkeep of the household economy and city life, making the older generation more reliant on the younger. Yet using a daughter's labour intermittently is only one explanation, since natal kin also practically and economically assist their daughters and keep them without exploiting their labour. The emotional support and dependability of daughters is considered stronger than that of sons, while brothers are also vocal about filial responsibilities if their sisters face difficulties. From Amit and Sunita's case study the collusion of natal kin in destabilising a daughters' marriage is very visible, and once again goes against dominant perceptions that arranged marriages are secure and long-lasting and that parental choice and involvement strengthens the durability of such marriages. As observed, the support of natal kin in arranged marriages, whether on account of daughters' marital problems or of their living nearby, shapes marital relations in diverse and unpredictable ways.

Concluding Remarks

This essay has presented perspectives on working class women's marriage and kinship relations. My intention is not to champion the arranged marriage as better than the love marriage or vice-versa. Such surface comparisons on 'arranged versus love' have and continue to remain the mainstay of popular magazine polls and surveys. Far more scholarly interest needs to be devoted to the type of marriage women are choosing (and whether the right to exercise choice is available to them at all), the implications of entering into subversive and different forms of marriages that remain under-researched and women's experiences with their spouses and natal kin in the post-marriage phase. The hardships that women face in love marriages and society's resistance to self-chosen marriages needs to be addressed at a political level so that women and couples can enjoy

¹³ See Parry's (1979: 193) discussion on how a man's interests and responsibilities begin to diverge from the joint family after marriage, while women are usually blamed for family break-ups.

more congenial marriages whilst actually being allowed to combine their choice of 'love' with 'marriage.' Women suffer ill-treatment, violence, conflict and stressful relations in both love and arranged marriages; yet the data illustrates that women experience their marriages in distinct ways. This discrepancy in lived experiences may not feature to the same extent in other Indian and South Asian contexts. Research on the diaspora and middle class marriages in India (Uberoi 1998; Donner 2002) signals a blurring of these two marriages with the 'arranged-love-marriage' (love marriages endorsed by parents and thereafter treated like arranged marriages; Uberoi 1988) gaining prominence and parental matchmaking being reset in a modern form allowing for greater flexibility and a period of courtship. In Mohini-Nagar, couples who manage to attain parental consent whilst negotiating a love marriage also use epithets such as 'arranged-love-marriage' signifying the clear stamp of parental approval. The fact however remains that women are more favourably placed within the system of arranged marriages. By virtue of their right to demand lengthy periods of refuge, they are in a position to bargain effectively with their husbands, albeit within a hierarchical framework. Women in love marriages feel the greater need to work at their marriages and are equally advised to compromise and accept responsibility for their own marital choices. Hence while love marriages are on the increase amongst the working classes, for women this is accompanied by an inability to exercise exit options, or rather what surfaces in the love marriage sample is a strengthening of conjugal relations. This contradicts local stereotypes and prevailing notions of love marriages as barely lasting beyond a couple of years. On the other hand, marital dissolution and instability in arranged marriages is high on account of significant parental involvement. The repeated use of refuge and visitations to the natal home linked to a daughter's labour can fragment kinship ties and displace women from their conjugal homes in arranged marriages. The ethnography has illuminated the shifting and transient nature of arranged marriages and women's contradictory experiences in these marriages. In the larger picture, kinship in urban working-class neighbourhoods is an everyday and immediate existence: in the face of poverty, natal families and married daughters seek continual mutual support which simultaneously strengthens women's fall-back position and destabilizes their marriage.

References

Chowdhry, P. 1998. Enforcing Cultural Codes: Gender and Violence in Northern India. In Mary. John & Janaki Nair (eds.) *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India* pp. 332-367. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

----- . 2004. Private Lives, State Intervention: Cases of Runaway Marriage in Rural North India. *Modern Asian Studies*. 38 (1): 55-84.

----- . 2007. *Contentious Marriages, Eloping Couples: Gender, Caste and Patriarchy in Northern India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Deliege, R. 1997. *The World of the 'Untouchables: Paraiyars of Tamil Nadu*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Donner, F. H. 2002. 'One's Own Marriage:' Love Marriages in a Calcutta Neighbourhood. *South Asia Research*. 22 (1): 79-94

Dyson, T. & Moore, M. 1983. Kinship Structure, Female Autonomy and Demographic Behaviour in India. *Population and Development Review*. 9 (1): 35-60.

Grover, Shalini. 2006. Poor Women's Experiences of Marriage and Love in the City of New Delhi: Everyday Stories of *Sukh aur Dukh*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Sussex.

Giddens, A. 1992. *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our World*. London: Profile Books.

Jackson, C. (ed.) *Men at Work: Labour, Masculinities, Development*. London: Frank Cass.

Jeffery, P. Jeffery, R. Lyon, A. 1988. When Did You Last See Your Mother? Aspects of Female Autonomy in Rural North India. In John Caldwell, Allan Hill and Valerie Hull (eds.) *Micro-Approaches to Demographic Research*, pp. 321-333. London: Paul Kegan International.

Jeffery, P. Jeffery, R. 1993. A Women Belongs to her Husband: Female Autonomy, Women's Work and Childbearing in Bijnor. In Alice Clark (ed.) *Gender and Political Economy: Explorations of South Asian Systems* pp. 66-114. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Karve, I. 1993. The Kinship Map of India. In Patricia Uberoi (ed.) *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*, pp. 50-73. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Kolenda, P. 1987. *Regional Differences in Family Structure in India*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

Mody, P. 2002. Love and the Law: Love-Marriage in Delhi. *Modern Asian Studies*. 36 (1): 223-256.

Moore, H. 1994. The Problem of Explaining Violence in the Social Sciences. In Penelope Harvey & Peter Gow (eds.) *Sex and Violence, Issues in Representation and Experience*, pp138-155. London: Routledge.

Palriwala, R. 1991. Transitory Residence and Invisible Work: A Case Study of a Rajasthani Village. *Economic and Political Weekly*. November. 30, 26 (48): 2763-2777.

Parry, P. J. 1979. *Caste and Kinship in Kangra*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

----- 2001. Ankalu's Errant Wife: Sex, Marriage and Industry in Contemporary Chhattisgarh. *Modern Asian Studies*. 35 (4): 783-820.

Philips, A. 2005. The Kinship, Marriage and Gender Experiences of Tamil Women in Sri Lanka's Tea Plantations. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. 39 (1): 107-138.

Raheja, G. G. & Gold, G. A. 1994. *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Searle-Chatterjee, M. 1981. *Reversible Sex Roles: The Special Case of the Benares Sweepers*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Sen, A.K. 1990. Gender and Co-operative Conflicts. In Irene Tinker (ed.) *Persistent Inequalities: Women and World Development*, pp. 123-49. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tarlo, E. 2000. Welcome to History: A Resettlement Colony in the Making. In Denis Vidal, Emma Tarlo, Veronique Dupont, (eds.) *Delhi: Urban Spaces and Human Development*, pp 51-71. Delhi: Manohar.

Uberoi, P. 1998. The Diaspora Comes Home: Disciplining Desire in DDLJ. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. 32 (2): 304-334.

Vatuk, S. 1972. *Kinship and Urbanization: White Collar Migrants in North India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Vero-Sanso, P. 1995. Community, Seclusion and Female Labour Force Participation in Madras, India. *Third World Planning Review*. 17 (2): 155-166.

----- 1999. Dominant Daughters-in-Law and Submissive Mothers-in-Law? Co-operation and Conflict in South India. *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*. (5): 577-593.

RECENT WORKING PAPERS

Title	Author (s) Name	Paper No.
Commercialization of Shrimp Trade, Environment and Rural Poverty: A Socio-Ecological Exploration in Coastal Orissa	Sarmistha Pattanaik	E/274/2006
Economics of Environmental Management System in Oil India Limited: An Environmental Economics Perspective Case Study of Oil, Duliajan	Devashis Bose	E/275/2006
Internalizing the Cost of Biodiversity Loss due to Aquaculture: A Case Study of the Indian Sundarbans	Kanchan Chopra Pushpam Kumar Preeti Kapuria	E/276/2006
Environmental Implications of Agriculture and Policy Initiatives in India and the EU: Review of Evidence and Issues	Amita Shah	E/277/2007
Fertility Transition in India: 1985-2003	Alok Ranjan Chaurasia	E/278/2007
Interaction between Trade and Environment Policies with Special Interest Politics	Meeta Keswani Mehra	E/279/2007
Imbalance in Child Sex Ratio: Trends, Causes and Emerging Issues	R.S. Bora	E/280/2007
Inclusive Growth in Hilly Regions: Priorities for the Uttarakhand Economy	Sabyasachi Kar	E/281/2007
On Environmental Accounting for Sustainable Development	M.N. Murty	E/282/2007
Immunization Coverage In India	Suresh Sharma	E/283/2007
Education for All in Rural Himalayas: A Case Study of Uttarakhand	Suresh Sharma Nilabja Ghosh	E/284/2007

“The earlier IEG Occasional Paper Series in Sociology has been integrated into the IEG Working Paper Series and IEG Discussion Paper Series”.