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Becoming modern: British-Indian discourses of arranged marriages

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Abstract

This article looks at the various ways in which arranged marriage is practiced among members of the British-Indian population. It argues against a singular definition of this practice by highlighting the diversity of routes that lead to an arranged marriage. It also makes a case for understanding arranged marriage as a discursive practice which represents the British-Indian views on matchmaking and kinship. Drawing upon original empirical research conducted in the North East of England, the article presents a 'spectrum of arranged marriage' practices that was prevalent among its practitioners. It highlights that the attraction of this institution lies in the elastic nature of the traditions associated with it. Finally, it proposes that the various discourses of arranged marriage are employed by British-Indians to interpret and tailor-make this traditional practice to carve out hyphenated identities such as British-Indian and other transnational forms of belonging. They achieve this by incorporating the demands

of modernity such as the notion of romantic love and a certain level of individual choice within arranged marriage practices.

Key Words

Arranged marriage, British-Indian, forced marriage, ,modernity, multiculturalism

Introduction

This article presents an examination of the ways in which arranged marriages are practiced among British-Indians in the UK. It makes two interrelated arguments; first, that there is no such thing as arranged *marriage* but arranged *marriages*; a number of matchmaking practices fall under its remit. The article argues against a singular definition of this varied and complex practice and highlights the diversity of routes that can lead to an arranged marriage. Drawing upon original empirical research, it presents a spectrum of arranged marriage customs prevalent among British-Indians by identifying four types of matchmaking practices. Second, it makes a case for understanding arranged marriages as a discursive practice - one which presents the British-Asian discourse of marriage and family and offers its practitioners opportunities to tailor make this practice to position them with respect to a certain degree of modernity that they had chosen to embrace as British Asians.

The article is divided into three parts: the first part provides the setting of the research including the methodology and an overview of the current literature on arranged marriages in the UK, the second part discusses the 'spectrum of arranged marriage' practices by highlighting the different accounts of the term 'arranged marriage' with a particular emphasis on the understandings of the terms 'arrangement' and 'choice' as they were

interpreted by the research participants. The final part makes a case for a discursive approach to understanding arranged marriages.

Research context and method

Arranged marriage practices hold an awkward position in contemporary British society. Many journalists (e.g. Naipaul writing in the Daily Mail 18/08/2012, Rustin writing in The Guardian 14/05/2011), elide them with forced marriage while in the social policy arena(www.migrationwatchuk.org/briefing-paper/10.8) they can be seen as assisting minority ethnic family migration. Even in their most liberal interpretation (e.g. Sardar writing in the Guardian 13/09/2008 and Trevor Phillips quoted in the Sunday Times 25/09/2005) arranged marriages are regarded as an anachronism and are routinely seen as less than, and certainly other to, mainstream marriage norms. Within the immigration policy arena, arranged marriage practices are held up to scrutiny because they are regarded as strategies which increase immigration and more recently in Europe (with a growing right wing climate) as posing a challenge to the integration of migrant populations in host societies. Within the UK, migration policy has a long history of regarding arranged marriage practices as counter to Britishness. As early as 1976, the first report from the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration quotes a foreign and commonwealth office minister as saying, 'We would want to discourage the arranged marriage system[We hope] that more and more parents will respect the rights of their children' (cited in Jhutti 1998, 59). The now abolished (by the labour government in 1997) notorious primary purpose rule required foreign nationals married to British citizens to prove that the primary purpose of their marriage was not to obtain British residency. It disproportionately targeted British citizens wanting to marry someone from the Indian sub-continent as their practice of

arranged marriages were not seen as a determinant of a normal British marital relationship (Hall, 2002).

This pathologization of arranged marriage practices is also evident in more recent policy discourses. In her analysis of the 2001 British governmental White Paper *Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain* which set out the terms for the 2002 Immigration and Asylum Act, Irene Gedalof (2007:84) comments 'The focus of new proposals to tighten controls on marrying British nationals as a way of gaining citizenship is clearly on 'those communities that continue the practice of arranged marriages' (2001: 18), thus producing Britain's Asian communities as a particular problem to be managed.' This management of the Asian 'problem' of arranged marriage can be seen in successive immigration policy reforms in 2012 when the new Coalition government raised the minimum income threshold required for a British citizen to bring a spouse or other family member to the UK from outside the EU to £18,600, with additional income required for children. It also increased the probationary spousal leave to remain from 2 years to a period of five years (Gower 2014).

While these changes have been presented as immigration policy that 'protects the tax payer' and the welfare state they have also been increasingly linked to questions of belonging and citizenship. As Byrne (forthcoming 2015) has shown that they are also 'ways of reasserting a notion of Britishness that *re-secured* its whiteness through particular figurations of the desirable (largely heteronormative) relationship'. In mainland European policy discourse too, arranged marriages are seen as posing a threat to the national identities and values of the migrant receiving countries (See for example Myrdhal 2010 in Norway, Schmidt 2011 in Denmark and Bonjour and de Hart 2013 in

The Netherlands). Within these policy discourses, a universal understanding of arranged marriages as practices thwarting individual choice predominates with little or no attempt to understand the actual diversity of practices that come under this umbrella term.

Consequently, arranged marriages become a useful trope to play politics with the rights and citizenship of migrant populations from the Global South (Pande 2014, Ahmed 2001).

I argue that this is a simplistic and incomplete picture of the practice of arranged marriage as it operates among British-Indians. It typically assumes a singular definition of arranged marriages; a contract between families where individual choice and agency have no role in matchmaking. However, as I will go on to show in this article arranged marriages are an increasingly flexible and dynamic matchmaking practice which do involve among others considerations of the choice and preference of the individuals getting married. The findings discussed in this article are based on a wider research project aimed at examining the motivations, performances and discourses of arranged marriage among British-Indians. The project's empirical focus was the Tyne and Wear region in North Eastern England. According to the 2011 census, the total population of the county is 1,104,825 out of which 27,094 (2.5%) were classified as Asian or Asian British. Out of this, 9,462 (0.9%) were of Indian background. The total number of respondents interviewed was 23. Out of these 15 were first generation (8 males and 7 females) and 8 were second generation British-Indians (4 male and 4 females). Most of them were part of the commonwealth migration wave of the 1950-60s and had lived elsewhere in Britain before moving to Newcastle (apart from one who had come as a merchant seaman to the port in North Shields). They traced their origin to the Indian states of Punjab, Gujarat and Bengal. For the purpose of this research, the term first generation migrant refers to those who, as adults, migrated to Britain. Second

generation migrants refers to those who were born in Britain or accompanied their parents as children on their move to Britain. Arranged marriages are a family enterprise where parents play a key role in the deliberations of a match. Consequently, in order to get a comprehensive insight into the various discourses of arranged marriages the choice of these two generations was deemed essential. All respondents were Hindus and middle to lower middle class. They varied in educational background from having a minimum level of secondary education to university degrees and professional training as teachers, doctors and engineers. Some ran their own small businesses such as corner shops and grocery stores. The research findings thus comprise and are limited to a largely Hindu and middle class discourse of arranged marriages. All first generation migrants had an arranged marriage. They had arranged their offspring's marriage or were intending to do so. The second generation migrants that were interviewed were either married (through an arranged marriage) or were looking to marry in the next few years. The data used here were collected through a qualitative research design which involved in-depth semi-structured interviews. The technique used to conduct the interviews was ethnographically informed; it included maintaining detailed field notes about the *before*, *during* and *after* experience of the interview. I have used this approach in accordance with Kvale's (1996) argument that interviewing involves complex social interactions with interviewees, and that interview data are co-produced in these interactions.

Arranged marriages: Existing frames of understanding

The notion of marriage occupies a paradigmatic status as the object of anthropological research where marriage has been understood as 'the definitive ritual and universally translatable regulative ideal of human societies' (Borneman, 1996:215).

Definitions of marriage have variously focussed on describing it in terms of 'sentiment and subjectivity, social or mental structures, or transactions and strategic choice' (Levine, online). Overtime, approaches to marriage has been theorised as an structural institution (Radcliffe –Brown 1940, Leach 1961) , as a postmodern relationship (Gidden 1992, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995,) and as a system aimed at preserving patriarchy and heterosexuality (Riviere 1971, Rubin 2009). Tovar (2001:1301) writing in the Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women defines marriage as;

a culturally approved relationship that legitimizes a sexual and economic union, usually between a man and a woman. All national states have definitions of what constitutes a legal marriage and under what circumstances it can be lawfully dissolved; indeed, there may be as many definitions of marriage as there are cultures and legislatures.

As such, the emphasis in current studies on marriage is not so much on defining marriage but on highlighting how marital institutions take various forms and to analyse them in relation to their social, economic and cultural contexts. Indeed, sociological and human geographical studies have been at the forefront of examining marriage as a relationship which underscores understanding of personal goals, identity and romantic love (Morrison 2010, Gabb 2008, Fink & Holden 2010, Yeoh 2013). Within this research, the division between marriage forms that are a result of romantic love and marriage forms where romantic love is a result of the marital union still persist. Moreover as Khandelwal (2009: 584) has argued, 'arranged marriage exemplifies the problem of exaggerated cultural difference' – consequently, scholars studying family and marriage among advanced economies privilege the notion of romantic love in heterosexual marriage with no reference to arrangement and strategic choice while those who study marriage in the Global South or

minority ethnic populations in the West focus on arrangement and strategic choice with little emphasis on the affective register of such practices. As I have argued elsewhere (Pande 2014), this divide in marriage scholarship not only assumes the complete hold over the migrant of traditional gender and family norms by underscoring the foreignness of their cultural practices such as arranged marriages but more problematically contributes to the discursive portrayal of arrange marriages as certainly *less than and other to* mainstream marriage practices. , As this article will highlight, instead of being guided by a rigid prescriptive definition of a universal arranged marriage British-Indians are increasingly flexible in their terms and references to this practice.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines arranged marriage ‘as a marriage the partners to which are chosen by others, usually their parents’ .This a good generalised characterization of the practice because it covers the essential ingredient that make a marriage an arranged one i.e. the choice of a spouse is not an individual affair but undertaken in consultation with parents, family members and/or relatives. I have used this definition as a starting point for understanding this practice because unlike other definitions it leaves scope for examining it without any preconceived notions of the presence or absence of coercion in the arrangement. The research was conducted among people who had chosen to have an arranged marriage. Arranged marriages in this context can be best understood as a matchmaking practice where the prospective husband and wife are introduced to each other through family relatives or friends. The decision to go ahead or to decline the choice of match always rests with the two individuals involved. In view of the confusion the term arranged entails some scholars have made calls to rebrand arranged marriage as ‘facilitated or assisted’ marriages (Mukhopadhyaya 2012, Ahmed 2006). Although generally seen as a

matchmaking practice popular among people of South Asian heritage, arranged marriages are also practiced among other immigrant group such as the orthodox Jewish (Rockman 1994) community in Britain.

In the extant literature, arranged marriages have been predominantly analysed using the lens of transnationalism, this is because traditionally arranged marriages especially among first generation migrants involved a union between a British resident and a bride or groom from the Indian sub-continent. This has led to some scholars referring to arranged marriages as transnational marriages (Kibria 2012, Shaw and Charsley, 2007, Shaw 2006, Charsley and Shaw 2006, Palriwala and Uberoi 2005). This field has provided us with a rich set of literature on the mechanics and motivations of arranged marriage practices. It has focussed on consanguineous or cousin marriages (Charsley 2007, Kuper 2008,) the politics of migrant rights and multiculturalism (Bonjour and Hart 2013, Myrdahl 2010, Schimdt 2010, Gedalof 2007, Phillips 2007) and kinship relations (Ballard 2001, 1990). Closely related to this is the literature on the status and role of women in arranged marriage practices. The gender relations within arranged marriages have been critically examined by feminist scholars. This literature can be divided into two strands - the first strand has been instrument in exposing the lack of agency available to women in transnationally arranged marriages (See for example Menski 1999 , Abraham 2005 and Hall 2002 on immigration regimes and women's rights; Constable 2005, Lu 2005 and Blanchet 2005 on mail order brides; Jeffery 1976, Werbner 1986 and Shaw 1998 on Pakistani women and patriarchal marriage norms; Palriwala & Uberoi 2005, Sheel 2005, Kibria 2012 on dowry and arranged marriages). The second strand has examined closely the complex gender dynamics within arranged marriages to show that women are not passive actors in the arrangement and match

making exercise (Donner 2002, Raj 2003, Sen et.al 2011, Pichler 2011, Mukpadhayaya 2013, Mohammad 2015, Pande 2015). This literature has illuminated the diversity of women's experiences of arranged marriages and the role they are able to play in them. This research has highlighted how women are actively involved in negotiations of arranged marriages and are able to exhibit choice and agency within what is still a largely patriarchal cultural settings. Noteworthy here is work by anthropologist Ester Gallo (2005, 2006) who through her research with Malayali (from Kerala) women migrants in Italy has shown that far from always being a site of lack of agency, arranged marriages can also offer opportunities for the redefinition of gender relations as a result of the women's pioneering status as migrants in Italy. Research by education scholars such as Bhopal (2009, 2011) who have shown that although arranged marriages may bring with them an expectation of suppressing women's choices, increasing access to higher education for British –Indian women has also meant that women can exercise more freedom and use their newly acquired social capital to facilitate a better match for themselves (Ahmed 2012). More recently, within human geography Robina Mohammad's (2015:20) research with British-Pakistani women raised in Birmingham, UK also provides evidence of the ways in which transnational arranged marriage practices offer the potential to navigate and rework patriarchal gendered norms of marriage conventions. She argues that her informants' narratives;

'illuminate the intricate gendered geographies of intimacy [and] reveal the processes by which informants gain a sharper awareness of their own expectations for companionate marriage and intimacy. They read these expectations as underlining their difference from their spouses and as part of the assertion of modern, Muslim womanhood, cosmopolitan identities belonging firmly within the host nation'.

The last point is particularly relevant to my research. It highlights the fact that even though marriage (of all kinds) is a 'a bundle of rights' (Leech 1961) and a border making union, it also involves opportunities for adapting the said institution to suit personal goals and aspiration, and as Mohammad's research (2015) and this article shows, among British Asians, arranged marriages are being increasingly reconfigured to define their 'modern' *British* identities.

In addition to this qualitative research on arranged marriages, there are also statistical studies discussing its varying rates and patterns as a measure of the assimilation of the migrant group in the host societies; here marriage is referred to as 'mate selection' and its cultural and social dimensions are not appreciated (See Korson 1969, Fox 1975, Gurak 1987, Xiaohe & Whyte 1990). For instance, Batabyal (2001, 2002, and 2011) has proposed econometric formulae to predict the likelihood and/or success rate of an arranged marriage. In his research, social factors have been reduced to externalities and the people involved in an arranged marriage to variables or economic agents which has contributed to the portrayal of arranged marriages just as cold rational strategy rather than also being the starting point of a companionate relationship between two people.

This is evident from a growing body of literature which focuses on the affective register of arranged marriage practices as they are practiced in India (Puri 1999, Parry 2001, Donner 2002, Fuller and Narsimhan 2008), Pakistan (Donnan 1998) and Sri Lanka (De Munk 1998).

This literature has shown how there are various interpersonal factors involved in the practices associated with arranging a marriage and that there are several different routes into an arranged marriage. Some of these routes have been discussed by researchers examining arranged marriage practices among British-Indians (Jhutti 1998, Raj 2003, Pichler

2011). They detail cases of arranged marriages where the prospective couple can 'arrange to fall in love' while giving due consideration to their parents and wider family's input in the choice of their spouse. This suggests a recalibration of choice and agency in relation to the performance of romantic love within arranged marriages. These practices referred to as 'semi-arranged marriage' and 'love/arranged marriages' are discussed later in more detail in the next section in this article.

While this literature has contributed significantly to our understanding of arranged marriages, there persists however a surprising lack of clarity and coherence in the usage and interpretations of the term itself. Most often arranged marriages are not clearly defined so forced marriages, consanguineous marriages and transnational marriages are all clubbed under the same term; arranged marriage. There are considerable differences between all three, forced marriages involve coercion and offer no opportunity to the perspectives spouses in negotiating an arrangement of their choice. Consanguineous marriages really only take place between South Asian Muslims (Shaw 2006) and not all arranged marriages are transnational, many are arranged among partners resident in Britain (Shaw and Charsley 2006). This is increasingly the case among young British Indians where their ties to the country of origin are not as strong as they were for the first generation migrants. Therefore, while some arranged marriages may be transnational, not all are. Even though there is an acceptance of the dynamic and flexible nature of arranged marriage practices (Stopes-Roe and Cochrane 1991, Shaw 2006, Bhopal 2011, Ahmed 2007), within the extant literature, arranged marriages are often defined by implication or tacitly assumed to have an accepted definition. Although I am wary of crafting definitions when it comes to socio-cultural practices, I believe that this lack of clarity in the understanding of the different forms of arranged marriages has foreclosed a more nuanced understating of the practices leaving it

exposed to pejorative stereotyping in the popular media and misinterpretations in immigration policy. Thus, this article is an attempt to reveal the diversity of arranged marriage practices. It argues that there are various different types of practices that come under the umbrella term arranged marriages. In the next section I will discuss this 'spectrum of arranged marriages'.

The spectrum of arranged marriages

In order to discuss the different forms of arranged marriage practices, it is firstly important to highlight the predominant understanding of arranged marriages that was prevalent among the British-Indians involved in this research. This was presented to me as responses to the question 'How would you describe the practice of arranged marriage to someone who had no idea of what it is?'

The most common way in which arranged marriage was described was as *a mode of matchmaking*. This description was given by both, the members of the first generation and second generation. They described an arranged marriage as one where the prospective bride and groom are introduced to each other, usually by their parents or in some cases by members of the extended family and relatives. After this it was up to the potential bride and grooms to decide whether they wanted to go ahead with the match or not. Words like facilitation or liaison were used to describe the role of the parents as is evident from the following quote:

Gaurav: arranged marriage is when instead of people meeting themselves with a potential partner or taking the initiative to find someone ... the family facilitates it. So they find potential partners for them and usually the parents look out for the best interest of their

children. The marriage only takes place.....when everyone is happy with a mutual agreement.

For Gaurav, arranged marriage practices refer to a means of facilitation where parents, relatives or friends are all involved in attempts to arrange ways so that one can meet a potential spouse. The research participants did not see a significant difference between arranged marriages and love marriages as they are practiced in the West apart from the mechanism in which you meet your future partner. So where Western couples may *arrange and hope to meet* people who might end up becoming their potential spouse in a pub or a club, for British-Indians this is done by their family members or friends in a formalized way. All the research participants were unanimous in their understanding of arranged marriage as a mode of matchmaking in which 'a cultural logic of desire' (Del Rosario 2005, 253) is administered and mediated by the self and the family. The 'cultural logic for desire' or the idea of romantic love was not regarded as a foundation for marriage but as an ingredient in the making of a happy marriage. During my research, I was able to identify at least four different ways in which the management of desire through arranged marriage practices was achieved which collectively make up the spectrum of arranged marriage practices. However, it is important to acknowledge here that arranged marriages incorporate a complex set of practices and discourses such that no two British-Indian families can be said to do arranged marriages in exactly the same way even though they all share certain common ideas about what arranged marriages are which will become evident in the following discussion of the spectrum of arranged marriage practices:

- Traditional arranged marriages
- Semi-arranged marriages
- Love-cum-arranged marriages¹

- Arranged weddings

At one end of the spectrum are traditional arranged marriages. All the first generation British-Indians admitted to having this kind of marriage which involved their parents along with close relatives taking the lead in matchmaking. Both the men and women said, that they had 'chosen' each other by looking at photographs exchanged as part of the matchmaking practice. They were then encouraged to meet as part of a family lunch or afternoon tea in the full presence of family members from both sides. As Ramesh, a 55 year old corner shop owner describes;

"They say it is a meeting but in name only, we barely exchanged a word ...Priya [now his wife] was sat between my sister and mother and I was on the opposite end of the table, I just liked the look of her and when my mother asked me if she should confirm the match I said yes... actually she said in code if she should serve the sweets, you know muh meetha karna (literally sweeten the mouth meaning shall I do the honours) and I nodded!"

What Ramesh is describing here is a typical matchmaking meeting, a well orchestrated social event which also serves as the arena for making the delicate negotiations in an arranged marriage. The would-be couple are not allowed to meet on their own because courting is frowned upon by the elders. So, a meeting is arranged where the social performance of *seeing* each other is conducted. The confirmation of the match was done with a degree of delicacy to make sure that the meeting did not come across as a business deal hence Ramesh's mother speaking here in code. Not all those who had a traditional arranged marriage had actually met each other, some had agreed to the match solely on the basis of having seen photographs of the prospective spouse.

The hallmark of this type of traditional arranged marriage was that the couple getting married had had no real contact with each other until the wedding was solemnized. The reason it was referred to as traditional was because it was agreed that such arranged marriages are not practiced anymore. The first generation migrants who had had this type of traditional arranged marriage were very clear in their insistence that their children were not or had not been expected to have this sort of traditional marriage. Their children's marriages were semi-arranged. *Semi or partly arranged marriages* come next in the spectrum and were those where a suitable match was decided upon in due consultation with the couple who is looking to get married, they had met each other in the presence of family and the wedding date had been decided upon. After, this the potential bride and groom were *allowed to fall in love* in the time period it took to get to the wedding date. My research participants fondly remembered how they would go to the cinema or to restaurants, sometimes chaperoned by a sibling or friend from either party. Some exchanged love letters or emails, celebrated weekly and monthly anniversaries of their 'first meeting'. In short, all the rituals of courtship were observed till the wedding date, which was seen as the climax of this exercise. Here the idea of love is being nudged on ever so gently by encouraging a spark that could turn into the cosy fire of domesticity (Desai, The Sunday Times, 2009). This courtship was not frowned upon by the family because the match had been made by the parents. As Sraboni described '*you know after our parents had met and the marriage had been agreed upon, we did do our share of dating, Ajit (her husband) took me on many romantic dinners, where he would unsuccessfully try to play footsie with me under the table (blushes and laughs)!*'. All those who claimed to have gone through this version of arranged marriage confessed to being in love with their chosen partners by the wedding date. Since they were functioning within boundaries of caste, class and religion in

looking for a spouse the marriage was deemed to be an arranged one. The potential spouses were matched and the opportunity to go courting was encouraged. The period between the engagement and the wedding was short usually not more than three to four weeks.

However, these two forms of marriage; traditional and semi arranged marriages appear to be going out of fashion as more and more young British-Indians choose to have what they called a *love-cum-arranged marriage*. It was the most common way in which the majority of second generation British-Indians described what arranged marriage means to them. They made a clear distinction between love and arranged marriage and professed to bringing both together in this new form of arranged marriages. For them, they were free to choose who they wanted to marry. The process of finding a spouse was described as meeting someone usually by chance (most were emphatic in clarifying that they were not 'set up' to meet) and then going through the courtship period. This scenario was described as the process of *being in love*. Once you had decided among yourselves that you were ready to get married you went to your parents and asked them to take over the arrangement of the marriage. This involved the parents then approaching their counterparts from the other side and finalizing the match. The chosen object of affection would usually have to be approved by parents or close relatives from both sides. Parental consent was important to both parties although those who claimed to have a love-cum-arranged marriage did confess that they would have gone through with the marriage even without their parents' blessings. However having said this they clarified that while falling in love they kept their parents' tastes in mind. As the following conversation with Alok and Kanta, two British Indians who said they had a love-cum-arranged marriage highlights;

Kanta: Being honest here, the fact that he is Hindu Punjabi...and we have common family friends. These were definitely plus points. He is well educated as well as and slightly older than me so he ticked all the boxes. Falling in love with him was not only natural but seemed the right thing to do. So yes when you look for a partner to marry you do look at the characteristics your parents would approve of.

Alok: You have to look at everything as a whole. Is he good with my family, will they like him? Does he fit in and his views as well the way he thinks about thing...all matter.

They were very clear about the fact that they had fallen in love. They met at a friend's wedding and 'went out' for a few months without the knowledge of their parents. It involved as Kanta described 'normal love /dating' and then they decided to tell their parents and then let them make further arrangements. However, while falling in love was important for the proponents of love-cum-arranged marriage what was more important was falling in love with the *right person*. One could not just fall in love but *try to fall in love* with somebody who would also be approved by their parents as a good match. So an element of self-censor in the choice of a marriage partner was exercised in terms of making sure that you did not choose to marry someone who would not be accepted by the family. Thus, love-cum-arranged marriage was regarded not as a compromise but as the ideal marriage of the desires of both the parents and the child. This was achieved by actively socially engineering the process of falling in love (Also see Fuller & Narasimhan 2008, Sen , Biswas & Dhawan 2011 , Raj 2003) The offspring's need to fall in love and to find their own spouse went hand in hand with the parents desire to be part of this process. Both the generations felt that their parents have an active role in their lives and it was important to listen to the voice of experience in this very crucial decision of their adult lives. They also described this

as the way in which tradition can live side by side with modernity where the *modern* idea of love can be made to match with the *tradition* of arranged marriage. The majority of my research participants also regarded this as the future of arranged marriage, the form in which it will survive among British Indians.

Finally, at the opposite end of the spectrum from traditional arranged marriages were what I have termed *arranged weddings*. This was a term used to describe a marriage union where once you had *fallen in love* and decided to get married, instead of you making the arrangements for the wedding with contribution from your parents your parents were in charge of all the arrangements related to the ceremony. As Reshma, described:

"You see I let my parents especially my mum, dad and my grandparents go to town with the wedding extravaganza. They threw me a lavish wedding and it was my way of letting them take part in the most important day of my life and their way of showing how much I meant to them. So they arranged it all and that is why my partner, who is Russian, says it was an arranged marriage as we did not do any of the arrangement."

Arranged weddings are closest in practice to their western counterparts where the parents of the groom bear the cost of wedding trousseau. The bride's family is usually the one that bears all the other costs of the wedding. It is worth noting here that there were a very few respondents (2) who described this as their understanding of what an arranged marriage entails. For them, the wedding, its rituals and the festivities associated with it were seen as very important part of the practice. Parents were seen as *being given the right* to use the occasion of the wedding to establish their place in the community.

What is clear from the above discussion is that within arranged marriages there exist a spectrum of practices (Fig 1) such as traditional arranged marriages, semi arranged

marriages, love-cum-arranged marriages and arranged weddings which make up the meaning of the term arranged marriage.

Traditional arranged marriage	Semi-Arranged marriage	Love-cum-arranged marriage	Arranged wedding
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Figure 1: The spectrum of arranged marriage practices.

In the spectrum of arranged marriage, if traditional arranged marriage refers to a very prescriptive form of deciding on the match, arranged wedding on the other hand represents the opposite end of the spectrum where the parent's role is restricted to providing their blessings to the couple with their financial support. The spectrum analogy helps to appreciate the fact that these practices are not mutually exclusive or 'types' in the strict sense of the word but rather exist in a continuum. Just like an electromagnetic spectrum all the different forms have their characteristic wavelength of 'choice' and 'arrangement' and depending on how these are personally understood, my research participants choose to describe their experience of and expectations from an arranged marriage. When it comes to understandings of choice, to begin with the most obvious one is the *choice to have an arranged marriage or not*. For some whether they want to have an 'arranged marriage' as against a 'love marriage' was a significant choice allowed to them by their parents and family members. As Preeti explained; *'I think the way I saw it was that either I would find somebody myself and have a love marriage and if I didn't, it would probably end up being an arranged marriage with the help of my parents'*. Following on from this, there is also the *choice to say yes or no to the match proposed* by your parents or family networks. This is the crucial choice that all practitioners of an arranged marriage have to make. The above two

choices usually work in union in the making of an arranged marriage. While the above two descriptions of 'choice' assumes the person who is going to have the actual marriage as the main agent of making the choice, this was not always the case. Nearly all the research participants also talked about their '*parents' choice*'. As is evident from the following quote by Gaurav "*Well I have to take into consideration my parents' choice as well. After all they are my parents, what about their hasraat (hearty wish), their choice in who their daughter-in-law should be. My mum has always had a tamanna (wish) for a beautiful daughter-in-law who she would treat as her own daughter; I don't have any female siblings you see*". Thus, it is just not a matter of individual choice but also taking into account the choice of the parents and their wishes. In Gaurav's statement above his mother's desire for a daughter-in-law appears to have principally guided his decision to get married. Choice was not just seen as something you make based on your own personal judgment and a weighing out of your own profit and loss. It was made in conjunction with the parents and immediate family's contributions. Hence, it was not simply the choice between who one would like to marry and how but considerations of family approval, parental choice and personal choice were all woven together in the making of the choice of a marriage partner via the medium of an arranged marriage. Indeed, this balancing act between individual choice and family choice is characterized by relations of power between the man or woman getting married and the respective family members. So for example, as I have discussed elsewhere (Pande 2015), to what extent the marriage will be semi arranged or will involve consideration of romantic love are delicately negotiated by men and increasingly by women too.

In addition to the question of choice, the degree and level of arrangement in an arranged marriage also varied depending on what sort of marriage practices a family favoured. One of the distinguishing features of the way marriage is practiced in South Asian societies as

against love marriage of other societies is the significance attributed to the factor of *arrangement*. It is termed 'arranged marriage' to signify perhaps the element of rational pragmatic arrangement that goes in its making. It is exemplified in the argument that in a love-marriage, one falls in love and there is an element of spontaneity involved while an arranged marriage is by design rather than by chance. A number of research participants pointed out how this understanding of arrangement as design, as planning one's choice of a life partner based on reason and pragmatism was regarded as the main characteristic of the practice of arranged marriage. Arranged marriages usually take place between members of similar social class. Some emphasis on similarity of caste and common religion is regarded as the most important condition for the arrangement (Ballard 1990, Kalpagam 2005) The reason why this was so important was given as the fact that a key objective of arranged marriage was to decide on a match in a manner that did not disturb the structure of society where everyone knows who they were in terms of religion affiliation and social class. Mixed marriages disturb this carefully ordered social milieu which many thought was not desirable and made one *'unsure of how to behave, as with one's own one knows what to do, what is the social code? But in mixed marriages it is all confusion too much mixing of culture, one doesn't know who one is any more, all structure is gone'*. For those who described arranged marriage as the management of the wedding by parents and family, arrangement referred to the arrangement of the material aspects of the marital union, the wedding and the reception. Thus, depending on the various ways in which the two themes of 'choice' and 'arrangement' were understood, they proceeded to *tailor make* their type of arranged marriage which best suited them and their family. The different meanings attached to the word arrangement and the value attributed to individual or collective choice vary between families and also among members of the same family resulting in their own personal way of

arranging marriages. This factor, I contend, contributes to the making of a unique British-Indian discourse of arranged marriages.

Arranged Marriages: In what sense a discourse?

In this section, I will put forward the view that arranged marriage is not a singular category but a discourse with varying definitions, values and meanings attached to its practice. Most significantly, there are particular ways of talking about and describing the practice in relations to the various discursive domains that are associated with arranged marriage. My examination of the different types of understandings of what an arranged marriage entails (traditional arrangement, semi-arrangement, love-cum-arrangement and arranged wedding) points to the existence of an array of views among British-Indians. These span the spectrum of practices that are conflated under the term arranged marriage. These forms exist as a discourse which not only reflects their views on arranged marriage but also the way in which they have chosen to describe the process of arranged marriage to me. It is a discourse of matchmaking which has characterised the institution of marriage among British-Indians. I find a discursive approach to the practice of arranged marriage useful because it helps me to visualise this process of kinship 'as identity work in action' (Lawler 2000, 32). It encourages me to appreciate the significance that is attributed to the practice by my research participants in relation to their identities as British-Indians. The focus on discourses of arranged marriage rather than on a definition of a 'universal arranged marriage' (Puar, 1995) makes it possible to acknowledge the various subjectivities, sensibilities and personal attachments that are involved in the making of a relationship as a result of an arranged match. This approach is in stark contrast to the popular misconception of arranged marriage

as a cold tactic employed by British-Indians to further the immigration of their extended family into Britain.

I borrow my understanding of discourse from Foucault (1972). Foucault (1972, 80) discusses in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that he has used 'discourse' to refer to 'the general domain of all statements, sometime as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements'. By 'the general domain of all statements' he refers to a group of statements which provide a language for talking about a phenomenon and a way of representing a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. For example: a theological discourse or a colonial discourse. He has also used the term discourse to refer to 'regulated practices that account for a number of statements' which refers to unwritten rules and structures in a society which allow the privileging of particular kinds of narratives over others. In the context of my argument, the term discourse will be used to refer to both usages.

Arranged marriage has its underlying discourse in the way it is understood and talked about. There is the academic discourse which examines it, as I have discussed earlier in the article, from a transnational perspective; there is also the feminist stance on the patriarchal nature of the practice (Bhopal 1999, Mand 2006, Menski 1999, Abraham 2005). There is a colonial imagery at play in the tabloid media that constructs people who have arranged marriages, as parts of 'traditional', 'developing' societies in spite of the fact that some of them (such as my research participants) might live and function in a 'modern' and 'developed' milieu of Britain. All these discourses fix the meaning of the practice as a singular phenomenon and by doing so also the identities of people who have arranged marriages. My research findings

about the spectrum of practices that fall under the rubric of arranged marriages deconstruct this idea of arranged marriage by drawing out the heterogeneous nature of the practice. In the context of the discourse of arranged marriage as 'regulated practices that account for a number of statements' (Foucault 1972, 80), I refer to the various ways in which arranged marriages are practised and the processes by which a match is decided upon. There is a remarkable consistency in the way people choose to describe how marriages were arranged. During the interviews, I was given a well established routine of steps that was claimed as being employed to look for a match. These involved firstly, the parents approaching their son or daughter, and asking them if they would like to have an arranged marriage or if they had somebody in mind already that they were planning to get married to. After this, if the person agrees to their parent looking for a spouse for them, they 'spread the word' (as one of the respondents put it) in the immediate social circle about this decision. This process may employ informal social networks of extended family, their contacts, more formal channels like a marriage bureau, placing an advertisement in the matrimonial section of the daily newspapers back in India or using a matrimonial website. (Raj 2003, Mukhopadhyaya 2012, Titzmann 2013). Once some suitable matches are shortlisted, a meeting is scheduled between the interested parties and the final choice is made.

The research participants however also admitted that in 'real life' the elements of chance, destiny and practicality played a more significant role in helping them to find a match than the 'methods' that they had talked about. As such, I have interpreted the logistics of finding a match through an arranged marriage as a performative discourse which allows for the perpetuation of rituals and ceremonies surrounding the practice.

As Hall (1992b, 291) has discussed:

One important point about the notion of discourse is that it is not based on the conventional distinction between thought and action, language and practice. Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But it is itself produced by a practice: 'a discursive practice'-the practice of producing meaning. Since all social practices entail meaning, all practices have a discursive aspect. So discourse enters into and influences all social practices. Discourse is thus implicated in practice.

It is in also in this sense that I contend arranged marriage is a discursive phenomenon. It is formulated by its practitioners in terms of a group of statements about what the term means to them and depending on their understanding of this term they perform their culture and identity. And as arranged marriage *is a practice* (cultural, traditional, ethnic whatever one may term it), central to its performance is a meaning making exercise. I contend that there are two discursive domains under which this this meaning making exercise is performed: traditional and modern. The discourse of traditional arranged marriage serves two ends. Firstly, it is used as a device to differentiate and set aside as 'backward' the practice of forced marriage. Secondly, it is used to provide a referent to contrast with the ways in which modern arranged marriages (semi-arranged marriages, love-cum arranged marriages and arranged weddings) are practised as in traditional versus modern arranged marriages. The discourses of traditional and modern arranged marriage were presented to me by the British-Indians as their own way of understanding the practice of arrange marriage while the discourse of forced marriage was acknowledged to be how 'others' see arranged marriage as a practice. The reason for why this discourse was still prevalent if most claimed to have moved on to the modern ways of practicing arranged

marriage was blamed on certain '*backward members of the Asian community who refused to change with the times*'.

I would argue that this particular way of visualising arranged marriage helps British-Indians firstly, to construct an 'other'. In this case the other is defined as the media, the Non-Asian majority in Britain and also certain so called 'backward' members of Asian origin who insist on the practice of forced marriage. Secondly, it helps to define the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'; *apana –paraya* (Ours and theirs). Hence, their construction of the discourse of traditional arranged marriage as not being the same as forced marriage. When an 'ours' (*apna*) talks about arranged marriage, where there was little choice or say for the prospective bride and groom, he or she will employ the term traditional as opposed to a foreign person's (*paraya*) view which fixes arranged marriage as forced marriage. Lastly, it supports the construction of an identity as a people those have changed with time by embracing the modern ways of arranging marriages. The use of the English words 'traditional' and 'modern' are employed to refer to how the Asians resident in Britain have made the change from being of Asian origin to becoming British-Indian.

The British-Indian discourse of arranged marriage was marked by a conscious exercise of the characteristics of modernity. This is reflected in their conscious attempts to be seen as embracing and accommodating the needs of modernity in the exercise of arranged marriages in Britain. With respect to their parents' generation, the second generation portrayed themselves as more *modern* because they were not expected to have a traditional arranged marriage but a more flexible semi-arranged marriage or love-cum arrange marriage or even a western style arranged wedding. They were keen to describe how they had chosen to exercise the very modern ideas of reflexivity, individual choice and agency to opt for what is seen as a traditional practice of arranged marriage. This was done

by creatively interpreting the questions of choice and arrangement with reference to the individual as well as the collective self. The choice of a spouse was guided by individual choice and parental influence; a perfect match would accommodate both in a fine balance. They also chose to incorporate the demands of modernity such as the ideas of romantic love in their practise of arranged marriages. This tendency to reflect on one's biography in the context of becoming modern is the hallmark of what Eisenstadt (2005, 1) has referred to as 'multiple modernities'. He argues that although 'the West' can be regarded as the origin of modernity, it is crucial to recognise that different cultures offer different pathways to modernity. He comments that 'the idea of multiple modernities presumes that the best way to understand the contemporary world – indeed to explain the history of modernity – is to see it as the story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs' (Eisenstadt 2005, 2). This view has an important implication for understanding modernity as geographers have reminded us (Blunt & McEwan 2002, Khotari 2008, McFarlane 2011) namely, that modernisation and westernisation are not identical and that western patterns of modernity are not the only authentic modernities.

What this points to is a way of embracing modernity where the traditions of a past are intermeshed with the demands of the reality of the present. In the case of British-Indians, it is manifested in nostalgia for the past in terms of continuing the practice of arranged marriage but at the same time also making it suit the realities of their present as residents in a (post) modern society. This is apparent in the various adaptations made to traditional arranged marriage practices which were marked by aspirations for selective features of western modernity such as romantic love and a certain level of choice. In contrast to a secular and highly individualized western sense of self, the British-Indian approach to modernity was more in line with a desire for an identity that could be described as a

progressive self but within the limits of religious and community boundaries. This self tries to shoulder the modern and the traditional simultaneously in a conscious attempt at integrating with British society and western modernity at large. In the South Asian context, Gerd Bauman (1997, 209-215) distinguishes between two forms of discursive practice – ‘dominant and demotic’. The dominant discourse reifies community and culture as essences, by employing currently accepted divisions between South Asian and British settlers, based upon religious affiliation and nationality. The demotic discourse transgresses these divisions in everyday life. He argues that in particular, young South Asians create a shared popular culture across these major divisions, fusing their identities as South Asian, through popular cultural aesthetic forms. They intentionally subvert the normative boundaries of ‘community’ set by parents. Nevertheless the same people who use demotic discourses revert to the dominant discourse on public occasions (Bauman 1997). In the case of arranged marriages, I would argue that it is not just a matter of practising a demotic discourse in private and then reverting back to a dominant, more powerful discourse in the public arena. The transgression does take place as people acknowledge that they have an arranged marriage because it is part of their culture (a dominant discourse of South Asian culture) but they do it on their own terms as various interpretations of ‘choice’ and ‘arrangement’ come into play. The point is as Werbner & Madood (1997, 18) argue, that this flux between the dominant and demotic discursive practices helps in:

Constituting a dual discursive competence that renders ‘culture’ and ‘community’ active terms of debate and negotiation in everyday life or vis-à-vis the local state. They draw on common sense ideas to objectify culture, community, and ethnos and even ‘race’ as self-evident homologues, while

at the same time being aware of the remaking, reshaping and re-forming these very terms in other contexts.

Moreover, the insistence of British-Indian second and third generation migrants to enter into an arranged marriage which puts them in contrast to the mainstream British cultural practices can be read as an example of the what Stuart Hall (1996), while theorizing the evolution of black identities in Britain, had termed as 'new ethnicities'. He argues that they are emblematic of a new politic of representation - one that has arisen as a result of an awareness of the Asian experience (in this case) 'as a diaspora experience, and the consequences which this carries for the process of unsettling, recombination, hybridization and 'cut-and-mix' – in short the process of cultural diaspora-ization ...' (1996: 447).

This new cultural politics of ethnicity is apparent, I would argue, in the 'cut-and- mix' ways in which traditional arranged marriage practices have been refashioned as *semi-arranged marriages*, *love-cum-arranged marriages* and as *arranged weddings* to suit their British-Indian identities. Furthermore, the repeated refrain of the respondents to differentiate 'backward practices of forced and traditional arranged marriages' from their chosen forms of modern arranged marriages can be understood as class politics at play to distinguish and define a British-Indian middle classhood. The focus of my respondents on recoding arranged marriage as a practice marked by the conscious exercise of embracing a kind of modernity can be read as an affirmation of their desire to highlight the contestations over what it means to be British *and* Indian *and* middle class.

Conclusions

In this article I have deconstructed the term 'arranged marriage' into the various discourses that were put forward in interviews with my respondents. I have argued that there is no such thing as arranged marriage (singular) – only diverse practices conveniently grouped under this heading. I have highlighted the diversity of meanings and expectations that characterise the exercise of arranged marriages. I have also argued how by using terms such as 'traditional', 'modern', 'arranged' and 'choice', Indians in Britain are involved in value coding the discourse of this practice. That is to say, that they use their own terminology to reflect on the significance of the arranged marriages in their lives. Whether it is a preference of the term traditional over forced or choices of family members over individual choice, they are engaged in mobilising these terms to define the unique way in which they chose to practice arranged marriages. My empirical analysis of the various forms of arranged marriages highlights that there is a need to appreciate the elastic nature of this practice. Instead of making a simple causative link between a British-Indian 'culture' characterised by a tradition bound society and a conception of arranged marriages as thwarting individual choice and agency one needs to take into account the fluid and dynamic nature of such expressions. What I mean here is that if we recognise that the idea of culture is always in the making, a matter of becoming rather than being then so is the practice of arranged marriage. My research participants described the numerous means of looking for a spouse that contribute to a spectrum of loosely defined ways which can be dubbed as arranged marriages. None of them on their own account for a complete idea of what an arranged marriage is, rather they signal towards what it can be depending on the factors that are described as being arranged. Hence, by reconceptualising arranged marriage outside of its dominant stereotypes, I have highlighted how the various discourses of arrange marriage are employed by British Indians to interpret and tailor make this apparently traditional

practice to suit their various individual and collective identity positions. Thus, I argue that arranged marriages will continue to find a place in British-Indian cultural practices because it allows for room to accommodate their shifting diasporic identifications with the countries of their origin and adoption .

¹¹ These terms were employed by the respondents themselves to describe the type of arranged marriages practiced among their families and friends. The English phrasing was used even by those who chose to be interviewed in Hindi or Punjabi.

Acknowledgement

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