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When love takes over:

Impact of the changing marital landscape on familial relations in Hindu North India.

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CHAPTER I: Introduction

1.1 General introduction

It is four a.m. when I leave the customs and security check behind me and set foot on Indian ground. I make my way through the crowds gathered at Delhi airport and get into one of the many taxis that are lining the road. As on my previous visits I enjoy the forty-five minute ride to the city centre and eagerly seize the opportunity to brush up my Hindi. As always, after the obligatory small talk about the local weather conditions and my country of origin, one of the first questions asked by the taxi driver is whether I am married. My negative response to this is immediately followed by the friendly though imperative advise that I should seriously consider to marry soon. Why is it that the subject of marriage is invariably brought up when addressing a young, unaccompanied woman?

Throughout my years at university, I have been trained to critically reflect and develop a healthy sense of suspicion when it comes to thinking in terms of black and white. However, there is one stereotype about North India which I find hard to dismantle and that is what has been labelled by other researchers as an 'enchantment' or even 'obsession' with marriage (Sandhya, 2009: 7). In India, one is literally surrounded by marriage, ranging from the billboards next to the road advertising all kinds of bridal attire to the central theme of television soaps and romantic Bollywood dramas.

Marriage among Hindu Indians in not merely an institution signalling the union between two individuals. Instead, marriage is a life-cycle ritual closely involving, apart from the spouses themselves, also their direct network of family members and kin. This is directly related to the fact that Indian individuals are highly family- and kin-oriented. The sense of belonging to a family is a central value in Indian personhood (Trawick, 2003: 1158-60).

This *embeddedness* of persons in a family, also termed 'familism', is closely linked to Indian religiosity as in the Hindu pantheon each deity has its own consort, children and relatives, and the relations between all of these are considered significant (Ibid.: 1174-5). This aspect became apparent during my fieldwork in the northern Indian state Himachal Pradesh, in which the majority of village deities are personified by masks made out of noble metals. On auspicious occasions these idols are placed on palanquins and carried from one place to the other by (male) devotees in order to visit neighbouring deities. These visits are not merely for the sake of amicability, but they also serve the function of maintaining and reinforcing the mutual relationship between those deities, who are most often believed to be directly related.

The meaning of the term 'family' has been central to a lot of academic debates across disciplines and especially so in the context of India. Researchers have repeatedly pointed out the large

incidence of joint families in the Indian subcontinent, but the exact meaning of 'family' and 'joint family' has been the cause for a lot of confusion (Uberoi, 2003: 1061-72). For the sake of clarity, when talking about a family here, I refer to a *commensal* and co-residential group of individuals. Apart from cohabitation, this group also forms a unit when it comes to production, distribution and consumption. Furthermore, the distinction between a nuclear and a joint family lies in the exact composition of that family, in which the former merely consists of the spouses and their children whereas the latter also includes other related individuals such as parents and brothers, often spanning several generations. Thus, generally speaking, in the case of a joint family several generations cohabit and their means of living depends on the production and distribution of the income of all its individual members. Such family compositions do have significant consequences for their individual members, which can be both advantageous and disadvantageous. For example; the joint family can on the one hand function as a social security net for its individual members, whereas at the same time the precedence given to family honour can place a heavy burden on the personal wishes and goals of those individuals (which I will discuss in more detail in chapter II; Trawick, 2003: 1158-60).

One occasion on which the family and close kin have a crucial role to play in the lives of individuals is when one is about to tie the knot. The vast majority of marriages in India is arranged, which means that family elders have an important input in the choice for a prospective spouse for their younger members. This cannot merely be understood as a display of authority from senior over junior family members, but is actually embedded in a larger socio-economic context. When arranging a marriage, the family seeks to form an alliance with another family with whom they share a number of characteristics and whose background is thus considered compatible in terms of caste, class and religion. Therefore, apart from the formation of new kinship ties, marriage is a crucial act in confirming and reproducing existing social and economic boundaries (Uberoi, 2003: 1090).

Furthermore, marriage among Hindu Indians serves the function of guaranteeing the purity of one's *patriline* and is connected to the centrality of maintaining religious purity in Hinduism. In practice this is done by means of regulating female sexuality. As unmarried girls are to become the bearers of the future generation, a lot of importance is attributed to controlling their reproductive capacities. Therefore, the normative duty of parents is to ensure their daughter's 'purity' (read virginity) and arrange her marriage in time. On that occasion they transfer their guarding role over her to her husband and in-laws. Thus, marriage is closely interwoven with religious ideals and normative social roles and by arranging a marriage the asymmetrical gender division, which is characteristic for Hindu North India, is upheld.

However, due to its changing socio-economic circumstances, the marital landscape appears to be changing in the area where I did my research. Respondents reported that nowadays youngsters favour what they label as 'love-marriages' over the so-called 'arranged marriages', a categorization which I will question further on. One crucial element which needs to be mentioned here is however that the agency to decide who is to marry who is differently located in both of these marriage types, as

in the former youngsters claim autonomy for the choice, whereas in the latter the decision is in the hands of their parents (even though the distinction is not always rigid).

This change in marital preferences has a number of underlying causes, which I will name only shortly here, but expand in the second chapter. Firstly, the autonomy of individuals is increasing because of the larger emphasis placed on higher education and the increased individualization of economic activities. Secondly, the influence of globalization becomes more and more locally perceived and especially the global ideal image of romantic love as the only valid basis for a marriage is gaining ground.

Social scientists have argued how, due to the increase of globalisation, cultural flows including cultural images and ideas are constantly travelling across national borders, thus connecting local to global meanings. Appadurai (2003: 45-6) is one researcher who has strongly contributed to this field of study, for instance by introducing a set of neologisms which can be useful as analytic tools in order to research and gain a better understanding of the process of globalization. More specifically, he labelled the strands of influence which spread during the process as *scapes*, through which cultural material moves across national boundaries. He makes a distinction between five different kinds of those *scapes; ethnoscapes, financescapes, technoscapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes.*

The cultural flows which are spread on a global scale by means of these *scapes,* do not only introduce new technologies and media to people but at the same time introduce new ideologies and ideas. Romantic love as the basis for a marriage is one such ideal which has travelled across boundaries worldwide and has thus not only crossed but at the same time connected local and global meanings connected to it (Padilla et.al., 2007: xi).

However, it is important to bear in mind that the spread of global ideas and ideals does not equal the unquestioned adoption of those ideas elsewhere. Instead what does arise is a dialogue between local and global ideas, in which global ideas are interpreted, altered and become meaningful depending on the specific local context and the economic, political and social situation in that locality (Inda and Rosaldo, 2008: 12-29).

Researchers do claim the existence of a worldwide trend in which romantic love in connection to marriage gains ground and becomes apparent as more and more young people nowadays claim they want to choose their own life partner (Hatfield and Rapson, 2005: 45-55). However, this does not mean that the meanings locally attributed and the strategies created to effectuate it are similar across localities.

This is exactly what I intend to focus on throughout this thesis. The impact of the increase in what in India is labelled as love marriages on relationships within the family and on existing social and economic boundaries has so far received only limited academic attention. Research which has so far been done on the increase of such marriages in North India mainly focused on their contentiousness, as they were not only contested by the spouses' family and kin network but also hampered by state apparatuses (Chowdhry, 2007 and Mody, 2002 and 2008) . The process to legalize

a love marriage, especially without the consent of the spouses' parents, is for example highly complicated by law. Moreover, not only court officials but also the police are often found favouring the parents' wish to annihilate or complicate the marriage over the wish of the couple themselves in favour of it (Mody, 2002: 241-8).

These studies moreover emphasize that with the increase in love marriages existing social boundaries are increasingly crossed by youngsters, resulting in a larger number of inter-caste and interreligious marriages. However, as my data show and I will argue further on, love marriages do not necessarily equal conflict and contestation. They might equally well coincide with a process of adaptation in order to avoid open conflict. Very little research has been done on such cases of love marriages which occur in an arena of admissibility, and the research which did breach the subject focused mainly on the agency of young individuals themselves in bending marriages in such a way to make them acceptable by their community (Netting, 2010).

However, as marriage is a family-centred event amongst Hindus in North India, I believe it is not only necessary to look at how adolescents engage in a creative process of selection and adaptation of elements connected to traditional Hindu family values on the one hand and the ideal of romantic love and autonomous decision-making on the other. Equally important in order to gain a better insight in the changes coinciding with the changing marital landscape, is to focus on how family elders and kin tackle the given situation and how it affects relations within the family. Therefore the central questions I have researched in the course of this thesis is:

How are love marriages amongst Hindus in North India perceived and in which manner do these differ from arranged marriages? What is the impact of the increased preference for love marriages on local family and gender relations?

Thus, I will first focus on which basis local categorizations for marriage are made. Do the different labels also signify essential differences between the marriage types, or is there at least some degree of overlap? Does a love marriage actually mean that parents and kin have less input than in an arranged marriage and if so, what are the consequences of this? Does this for example mean that the importance attributed to the larger family and kin group decreases? Is it also reflected in actual family compositions, with a shifting preference from joint towards nuclear living? Keeping in mind the functional side of arrangement, in which alliances between families are sought and female sexuality is curtailed, how is the possible loss thereof dealt with by everybody involved? These are some of the questions I will attempt to answer in the following chapters, in relation to my specific research sample. But first I will introduce my research sample and indicate what I mean with the term 'local'.

1.2 Research Sample

My research was based in Kullu district, a region in the North of India and located in the state of Himachal Pradesh. The sample for my research consists of local Hindus from Manali, a small town and hill station in Kullu district, and its surrounding villages, mostly belonging to the middle and upper-middle classes.

The categorization 'local' here, as well as throughout the rest of my thesis, is a label used by people in Kullu district themselves to denote the 'original' (however difficult this might be to retrieve) residents of the area. With this label people refer to long-time residents of the region who speak its *Pahari* dialect as their mother-tongue and are predominantly Hindu by religion. This categorization points them out as a different community from the various groups of more recent settlers, each with their own label – referring to ethnicity, locality and/or religion - such as for instance Lahauli, Bihari or Tibetan.

Furthermore, these locals posses the majority of land in the area and their land-holding position is strengthened by Indian land policies which make it extremely hard to purchase land outside one's own (birth) state or district. Thus, local people hold the monopoly over land rights and exceptions to this can only be made by means of bribes and backdoors, or through special state reservations (such as specific plots which are reserved to house Tibetan refugees). These policies give locals a strong economic benefit over other residents, a fact of which they seem to be well aware. I did repeatedly observe locals showing a certain sense of superiority in their demeanour towards other communities. Moreover, friends of mine belonging to other communities have on several occasions complained to me about the difficulties they encountered to set out a place for themselves, as they always stay dependent on the locals to rent a place or use a plot of land.

All but one of my respondents were married or had become widowed at the time of my research. Respondents were mainly female and *rajput/thakur* by caste (*jati*). Caste in the area, as in most parts of rural India, is an important element of each individual's social and personal identity. This became clear to me not only from the fact that every villager in the village where I stayed knew each other's caste background, but also from the fact that houses were mostly clustered along the lines of caste communities.

Moreover, on repeated occasions the local caste hierarchy became clear to me from the manner in which respondents would behave towards or talk about people from other castes, as well as from the actual restrictions which are made on the basis thereof (I will expand this in chapter IV, when discussing caste endogamy). The caste system is based on the belief in predetermination, as the conviction is held that one cannot shift castes in the course of one's life. However, castes throughout India are Sangeetafold and in practice the boundaries dividing them are rather fluid. As Fuller (2004: 12-4) points out, one way in which this becomes visible is as people refer to their own caste in different terms, either by referring to their caste, sub-caste or even a division of that sub-caste,

depending on each specific context. Furthermore, despite its notion of predetermination caste boundaries can become blurred in the shadow of class differences, as the climb on the social ladder by a low caste person might improve his social standing, irrespective of caste background.

The majority of my respondents belonged to the *rajput/thakur* communities, which are traditionally landowning castes and are thus associated with a higher social status. I have also talked to some respondents from a slightly lower and higher caste, respectively belonging to the *neri* and *sharma/pandit* communities. Amicable contact between all of these was common, but at the same time caste awareness and its connected feelings of superiority and inferiority were always present.

1.3 Personal motivation for research

Since the past ten years I have repeatedly travelled to India, both as a tourist, a volunteer worker and for my studies. Ever since the first time I went to India, I have developed a keen interest in the country and its culture and therefore decided to study these in an academic context. Recently I have graduated as an Indologist, specialising in the most-spoken modern Indian language, Hindi. In pursuit of being able to research cultural dynamics with a more profound disciplinary and methodological basis I subsequently enrolled for a degree in Anthropology at Leiden University.

Especially familial relations amongst Hindu Indians have always intrigued me, as I repeatedly experienced them from very nearby when spending time with Indian friends and during my repeated stays with a host family in Manali, who offered me food and lodging in their house. I came in contact with this family for the first time in 2005, while working as a volunteer in a nearby school. That time I rented a room in their house and since then I have returned at least once a year to the area and was always welcomed back in their house as a guest. Gradually our relationship transformed into a close friendship and on all of my recurring visits they invited me to stay in their home and share all meals free of cost (though happily accepting a voluntary gift and presents during these visits).

Whenever I discussed marriage with the younger generation in the area, people would inform me how they one day hoped to have a love marriage. They told me how they believe this means a breach with the traditional custom of arranged marriages and can result in tensions between the younger and elder generations. I was interested in exploring in more detail whether there is an actual breach between the marriage patterns and expectations of the younger and elder generations. If the marital landscape is really changing so drastically, then what is its impact on local family and gender relations? During my ethnographic fieldwork for this thesis I have attempted to find answers to this question.

1.4 Research methods and techniques

In order to obtain the kind of data which would enable me to answer my research question, I used a number of qualitative research methods and techniques, with the emphasis on semi-structured interviews and participatory observation. As each of the research techniques I employed led to different kinds of information and insights I believe they can be described as supplementary and mutually reinforcing in the process of gathering relevant data.

During my three months in the field I stayed with a host family in a small village named Simsa at the outskirts of Manali. The family concerned is the same family where I rented a room as a paying guest seven years ago and with whom I have stayed in close contact ever since. The family is a joint family and consists of a widowed lady in her fifties, named Sangeeta and her two sons, Suresh and Dev. The eldest son, Suresh, is married with Nirmala and they have a four year old daughter, Alka. Both Sangeeta and Nirmala were the main informants for my research and throughout the chapters I will repeatedly refer to them.

I experienced it as highly advantageous to stay with a local family, as this enabled me to get an insider-feeling of the life of local women. It also guaranteed me a place at the front row whenever some familial or relational issues were at stake in the village and were discussed at home. During my stay I assisted the women in my host family with all their household chores, ranging from doing the laundry, to cutting vegetables and helping the youngest family member with her homework. The only task I was exempted from was milking the cow, which can be entirely attributed to my own inability and clumsiness concerning such matters.

When I set out to do my research I intended to interview both men and women about their perspectives on and experiences with marriage, but once in the field I soon learned that it was easier for me to approach women on this topic. Consequently, the vast majority of my respondents were female and thus my research findings are mainly based on their perspectives. Male voices are however not entirely absent from my research data. I have interviewed some men and have had informal conversations with others on a number of occasions, but when looking at my overall research findings the majority is based on the moments I shared and conversations I had with women.

Men being a minority in my group of respondents is however not a surprising outcome, and it actually points at an important characteristic of my field of research, namely its asymmetrical gender structure. My research was based in the north of India, which is known for its patriarchal family structure and its division of male and female spheres. Being a female researcher in the given context, it is a logical consequence that it was easier for me to access women than men. Moreover, the subject matter of my research reinforced this, as I set out to research a topic which, though it is interwoven with both the lives of men *and* women, is clearly more related to the female sphere, namely the home and familial relations this is built on.

I have attempted to include male perspectives in my research, but this was complicated by the local gender asymmetry and worked out on two levels. First of all on a very practical level, namely the physical inaccessibility of men. As my research was mainly based in the villages surrounding Manali, it was foremost local women I encountered. In the region of my research not only the home, but by extent the village is considered female domain. This is due to the fact that professional spheres are highly gender specific, with the majority of men having a paid job while most women look after the household and work on the surrounding fields. As most paid jobs are based in the town, local men from the middle and upper-middle classes spend their days there whereas women stay in the village.

Secondly, there was the limited extent of willingness shown by male respondents to participate in interviews. Even though some men were willing to talk to me about their marriage, others proved to be less eager. Already in the first weeks of my fieldwork I discovered that there was less enthusiasm among the men to participate, as can be illustrated by my attempt to interview Ajay, my neighbour in the field whom I have known since several years and have been on friendly terms with ever since.

In the first month of my fieldwork I interviewed his wife Niru and planned to interview him as well in order to obtain perspectives from both spouses. Niru informed me that, as Ajay works in an office in Manali on weekdays, it would be most convenient if I would come on a Sunday to conduct his interview. Subsequently, I set out to visit them each Sunday for a few weeks in a row, each week however bringing a new excuse for Ajay not to participate, until I decided not to press it any further. It was clear that being friendly and doing activities with a foreigner from the opposite sex in the presence of others did not equal willingness to also talk openly about one's personal life to that same person, in her role as a researcher. Most probably Ajay's reluctance was not merely triggered by the personal content of the research, but also by the fact that the interview would require him to spend time alone with someone from an equal age but the opposite sex without the accompaniment of others. Face-to-face contact with unrelated people from the opposite sex is restricted in the area and regarded with a certain extent of suspicion and condemnation.

However, the lack of willingness I found with some local men was duly compensated by the incredible eagerness to assist me with my research expressed by local women. I found the majority of my respondents by means of snowballing, in which women I already knew and had interviewed on a prior occasion referred and introduced me to their female friends and relatives in order for me to take their interviews as well. An important consequence of this is that the amount of overlap in the respondents' backgrounds is large, as they mostly referred me to relatives and friends belonging to the same caste community and having a similar class background. However, as it was not my goal to make a comparative study between different communities, I do not consider this to be an inhibition to my research.

During the entire duration of my fieldwork I attempted to collect data on specific cases from different angles, by means of asking various respondents to offer their perspectives and ideas on one and the same event or situation. By looking at where these accounts overlapped I could pinpoint

specific dynamics. However, the information I gathered from looking at where accounts diverged and fragments of stories were omitted or changed, proved to be just as valuable. As I did not only gather the viewpoints from wives themselves, but also from their mothers, mothers-in-law, aunts, cousins and neighbours, I believe I have gathered enough pieces to create a multi-layered picture and indicate where tensions are located.

As I was not a newcomer to my field of research, but had visited the area repeatedly and often for a longer period since the past seven years, I had the privilege of already having a large network of friends and acquaintances there. Especially for the kind of research I intended to do I believe this was no unnecessary luxury. Being interested in people's marriages and familial relations required me to - up to a certain extent - dig into their personal lives. During my fieldwork I have repeatedly wondered if my respondents would have been as willing to lay all their cards on the table if I would have been a complete stranger to them. I believe that, being a familiar face, it was less daunting for research participants to converse about their personal lives and share their emotions concerning their married life with me.

Nearly all the women I approached to ask for an interview were willing to participate, with the exception of one or two women who were known in the village for being rather introvert and for avoiding personal conversations even with local women. Apart from the fact that for most of my research participants I was not a new face, another element which strongly influenced my accessibility was the fact that I speak Hindi. In the past I have experienced that local women, even though they often do have at least a basic knowledge of English, feel too insecure to talk in any other language than Hindi or their mother tongue, the local *Pahari* language. This is also reflected in the actual medium used for my interviews, as I did only one interview out of thirty in English (which was one of the few interviews from a male respondent). Otherwise all my respondents indicated to feel most comfortable talking in Hindi. The actual theme of the research also strengthened this preference for Hindi, as the terminology connected to the familial sphere is mostly expressed in Indian vernaculars (English on the other hand is preserved for other domains, such as for specific professional and educational jargons).

Furthermore, my research was also facilitated by the season of the year and its accompanying weather conditions. Manali is located at approximately two thousand meters above sea level and is the last hill station reachable by road from November until May on the National Highway 21 and the area is known for its cold and snowy winters. During my stay average temperatures of minus ten degrees Celsius were not exceptional, and I have on several occasions had to put on snow boots in order to help my host family to clear the roof of their house from the freshly fallen snow. As winters tend to be very cold here, it also means that winters are the only season of the year in which there is no work to be done on the field or in the orchards. Most houses have only one room which is heated, with a wood-burning stove (*tandoor*) which is usually placed in the kitchen or living room and functions both as a heating device and as an instrument to cook food on. Subsequently, in winters women tend to spend

their days and often also their nights around the stove, while knitting socks, cooking food and discussing the latest gossip in the absence of their husband. Therefore, I could not have picked a better season to do my fieldwork, as now I spent most parts of my days sitting cross-legged with the local women around one or the other stove in the village, conducting interviews and eavesdropping on the latest gossip while warming my hands at a cup of freshly brewed tea.

This did however have one side-effect, being that the room with the stove was rarely empty, and therefore many of my interviews were conducted in the presence of children, elders, friends and relatives of the respondent. Initially I did strive to have my interviews one-on-one, as I feared respondents would feel restricted to answer some of my questions in the presence of others. However, due to the severe cold it was often not possible to part from the stove and as I soon discovered, quite often the interviews conducted in the presence of others turned out to be a source of especially useful data, as onlookers sometimes decided to share their perspectives on a given topic and discuss specific matters in group. These were to become some of the most interesting moments of my fieldwork. At times during these discussion respondents did however shift to their local language, which I can only partly understand, but as I recorded all of my interviews I could later ask someone from my host family to translate certain parts of the conversation for me.

In total I conducted thirty semi-structured interviews, apart from the many informal conversations I had with respondents. I have interviewed women who framed their marriage in terms of arranged marriage, love and love-cum-arranged marriage as well as their relatives and acquaintances. This enabled me to have a comparative angle concerning perceptions and practices related to each marriage type.

I believe my research findings can be generalized to a larger geographic area, as some of my respondents originally came from quite distant areas but moved to Manali after their marriage. Therefore my findings hold at least true for Kullu, the district in which Manali is located. As I have also conducted some interviews from higher and lower caste Hindus (respectively from the *neri* and *pandit* community), with similar findings, my argument can be generalized to local Hindus belonging to all the middle and higher castes in this area.

As I did not only look at those cases in which marriages were accepted by wider kin networks, but also at cases in which marriages were contested, rejected or only reluctantly accepted I have covered a wide range of possible scenarios and thus attempted to obtain as representative a sample as possible. I have actively looked for deviating patterns within my research population, by looking at where the accounts of local people diverged from what I actually observed in the field. This tension between what people claim to be taking place and what actually happens is a central theme throughout this thesis.

1.5 Ethics

I have repeatedly been perplexed by the amount of information women were willing to share with me. As much of the data I gathered concern personal information about my respondents, either obtained from respondents themselves, through gossip and rumours related to me by others, from my own observations or most often extracted from a combination of these sources. As many respondents have placed a lot of confidence in me, I consider it to be my responsibility not to harm them in any way whatsoever.

During my fieldwork I did have my personal agenda, namely to gather as much relevant information as necessary to be able to successfully conduct my research and formulate a plausible answer to my research question. However, I endeavoured at all times to guard that this personal agenda would not be the cause for any harm or discomfiture in the field. As a precautionary measure I have therefore opted to alter all the given names of respondents in order to guarantee their anonymity.

During the process of my fieldwork I was on a number of occasions confronted with ethical issues, as I had to ensure not to reveal any sensitive information about my respondents to others. Whenever I wanted to verify specific stories, I did this by giving anonymous examples or by hinting at specific situations, while omitting those details which would reveal the identity of the person concerned. On some occasions respondents literally asked me not to relate any of the information given by them to others, whereas on others I was asked not to mention certain topics in the presence of specific people. All of these requests were interesting in the sense that they were instructive about where and with whom sensitivities were located. As a researcher I believe it is my responsibility to use this information, whereas at the same time respecting the integrity and trust of my respondents.

At the beginning of each interview I endeavoured to fully explain the aim of my research to my respondents as well as what would happen with the information they entrusted in me. Especially whenever I turned on my voice recorder, this issue was raised by respondents, as they wanted to know who would have access to these recordings. However, none of my respondents objected to my recording their interviews, as long as I would be cautious about whom could or could not listen to them. I refrained from using a written informed consent, as I preferred to orally inform respondents and personally discuss their possible questions about and restraints with the research.

1.6 Design of the thesis

This thesis is divided in six chapters, which each serve as a building block for the construction of my argument. There are four chapters following this first, introductory chapter. In the next (second) chapter a conceptual and theoretical framework as well as a historical perspective are presented which

serve as the basis for the analysis of my ethnographic data which are presented in the chapters three to five.

In this second chapter I will discuss the hegemonic patriarchal family structure which is characteristic for most of North India. I will especially focus on how the family is ideologically perceived and which gender roles and power structures are connected to it. Subsequently, the concept 'love' will be theoretically explored by focusing on its characteristics and placing it in its academic context. I will specifically explore the concept love in relation to marriage (love as the foundation for marriage) and discuss the assumptions which are connected to this ideal and how it has increasingly spread worldwide. In the final section of the chapter I will again focus on India and argue how, in theory, the concept of love and marriage out of love seem to be incompatible with the hegemonic family ideology. I will point out a number of contradictions and tensions and these will lead to the framing of a number of (sub)questions which will be explored by means of data from the field in the subsequent three chapters.

In the third chapter I will link the theoretical concepts from the previous chapter to the concrete field. I will indicate how the patriarchal family ideology is strongly adhered to by local Hindus in Manali. Then I will argue that, despite the relatively conservative attitudes in the area, respondents themselves claim that there is a sharp increase in what they call love marriages since the past decades. I will explore a number of contextual changes and reasons which might have implemented this increase. In the final section I will discuss what respondents refer to when they talk about love and love marriages and which assumptions they attribute to it.

In the fourth chapter I will look at how love marriages in Manali are shaped. I will do this by first looking at how individuals select their marriage partner and whether in doing so they breach socially accepted boundaries or rather select their partner by means of accepted social lenses. I will explore this issue by looking at which traits respondents label as necessary in order to guarantee the compatibility of spouses and then look at whether these traits are also taken into consideration in the case of love marriages. Then I will discuss how love marriages are actually organized; are parents consulted, who decides for the marriage to take place and when; what is the role of parents in a love marriage etc.?

In the fifth chapter I will discuss the consequences which the shift in marital landscapes brings. Central to this is its impact on individual and familial responsibilities and networks of support. I will argue how these shifting responsibilities can be perceived as well as the impact they have on relations in the family and larger kin groups (both natal and marital).

In the sixth and final chapter I will give an outline of the main arguments from each preceding chapter and by means of these answer my research question. The key argument in this is that there is a large amount of overlap in the local marriage patterns despite their different categorizations. Parents as well as youngsters engage in a creative process of inventing strategies in order to create hybrid forms of marriages which are adapted to changing socio-economic contexts.

CHAPTER II: Conceptual framework and historical perspective

2.1 The Hindu family: Structure, Power and Ideology

As I shortly mentioned in the introductory chapter, India can be characterized as having a very strong family ideology, in which joint living is preferred over nuclear living. I will now outline the main characteristics of this family structure and ideology. It needs to be stressed however that, being an ideology, the outline presented here is not a blueprint for the everyday realities of Indians in general. Instead it is a normative image which is adhered to by many Indians - especially in the Northern, Hindi-speaking belt - as is not only reflected in their choices for family composition and familial relations, but also in the mainstream imagery portrayed in popular media (Uberoi, 2006: 29-31). All of the aspects which I will name here have moreover been referred to by my respondents, which confirms their relevance in mentioning them. In the following chapter I will focus on how these norms play a role in the area where I did my research but first let me focus on some of their general characteristics.

The Hindu joint family is rooted in patriarchy, which means that family roles and responsibilities are gender-differentiated. More specifically, within the family a hierarchical division of authority exists which varies according to sex and age, as senior males have a more authoritative position over females as well as over younger and economically inferior men (Geetha, 2007: 4).

Furthermore, the majority of families are formed along the lines of a *patrilineal* kinship system in which descent, succession and inheritance are assumed to happen along the male line. The rule for residence is *virilocal*, meaning that after her marriage a woman leaves her natal home and moves in with her husband. An important consequence of this residency custom is that it effectuates the structural undervaluation of women as they are considered to be only temporary guests in their natal home. Sons on the other hand are expected to stay on with their parents and are thus often given a preferential treatment. This can range from paying higher importance to a son's education than that of a daughter, to more extreme instances such as female malnourishment and infanticide (Mukhopadhyay and Seymour, 1994: 11-12; Chakraborty and Kim, 2010). Moreover, men within one family are always *consanguinal* whereas married women are 'outsiders', which might lead to difficulties of adjustment, especially in the first years after marriage. One way to improve her status in a family is by giving birth to a child and preferably a male child as this guarantees the economic stability of the family in the future by ensuring it of having an heir (Chawla, 2007: 8).

A central element in the patriarchal family structure is that collective goals and values are privileged over individual ones. This collective does not only consist of the joint family unit, but also includes larger kinship groups and is captured in one of the central ideologies of the Hindu family

structure, namely the sacrifice of individual self-interest for the good of the collective. This ideal of duty and altruism can be witnessed on several fronts, such as the sacrifice of one's daughter at the time of her marriage as she is 'given' in marriage to her husband and his family, but also in the sacrifice of one's conjugal love in favour of family loyalty (which I will discuss in more detail in section 2.1.2; Uberoi, 2006: 33).

Another important characteristic of Indian families is that a lot of importance is attributed to the honour of the family, notions of which are embodied by both men and women albeit in a different way. Whereas women are considered to be the repository of honour, men have the social as well as religious obligation to regulate it (Chowdhry, 2007: 16-7). This has to be seen in the light of the weight given to the maintenance of caste purity amongst Hindus, which can be guaranteed only if a marriage takes place between two individuals belonging to the same caste (caste endogamy). Due to women's reproductive capacities, and thus their role in giving birth to the future generation, the way to assure the paternity and lineage of the offspring is by controlling women's sexuality. In practice this means that male-female interactions are restricted in order to ensure the woman's virginity and prevent her from having possible sexual liaisons with individuals belonging to a lower caste (Hindin, 2009: 97).

However, honour is not merely about caste and caste purity, but by extent about status and standing. Honour is attained and maintained by means of ritually and socially appropriate behaviour which ensures one's lineal respectability. Thus, by means of honourable or dishonourable behaviour, one can respectively increase or lose one's status and power among caste equals. The norms concerning honourable behaviour moreover differ for men and women. Whereas for men honour is situated in the maintenance and protection of the *patrilineal* order against all kinds of external threats, for women honour is achieved by means of modest behaviour and the internalization of shame concerning their own sexuality (Mody, 2008: 196-200). Normative behaviour for women thus lies in the maintenance of their virginity and chastity.

Finally, the two central concepts of collectivism and honour are closely interwoven in the Hindu family structure as the behaviour of individuals reflects on the larger collective they belong to. Therefore, individuals are expected to meet the social obligations set by their collective in order to not only maintain in-group harmony, but also the honour and status of the collective. In the case of deviances, the collective might therefore severely sanction an individual, in pursuit of repairing their own damaged honour.

As I shortly mentioned above, the control of female sexuality is a crucial element in patriarchal North India and an important manner to guarantee this is by means of controlling who is to marry who, which is institutionalized in the custom of arranged marriages.

2.1.1 Arranged Marriages

Marriage is considered an important and compulsory life-cycle ritual for Hindus, with the only deviation allowed to some priests and ascetics. Unmarried mature women are regarded with suspicion and marginalized in society and therefore parents consider it their ritual and social obligation to timely arrange a proper marriage for their daughter (Mullatti, 1995:18).

The institution of arranged marriages serves the goal of ensuring the purity of the *patriline* and thus of guaranteeing the family's honour, as by arranging their children's marriage parents can ensure that the spouses are suitable in terms of social backgrounds. A Hindu arranged marriage is therefore not only a union of two individuals but an alliance between two families whose aim is to maintain and reinforce their own status by means of allying themselves with status equals. This makes arranged marriages a social rather than an individual act, as individual wishes and emotions are subordinate to the goal of serving the higher purpose of maintaining purity and status (Chowdhry, 2007: 1-2).

Thus, marriages in India are bound to a number of rules and norms concerning who is allowed to marry who and these are rooted in the goal of guaranteeing a pure *patriline*. These rules are not only inclusive, as they dictate in which community a possible marriage candidate can be sought, but they are exclusive at the same time, as they state who cannot be considered wedding material. The main dictates in this set of rules amount to caste endogamy concerning the inclusive part which means that spouses should ideally belong to the same caste, or to castes whose hierarchical difference is negligible. The only exception to this is that girls can marry to someone belonging to a higher caste and thus improve their own status, which is referred to as caste *hypergamy* (George, 2002: 209 and Uberoi, 2006: 24-6).

When it comes to the exclusive side of the rules and norms for marriage, the main criterions are that one cannot marry an individual belonging to the same *patrilineal* lineage (*gotra*) and that marriage within the same village community is prohibited. Territorial and *gotra* exogamy are closely connected due to the convention of *virilocality*. In practice this means that a relatively large number of males within one village are consanguinal, as male relatives usually continue to live in the same location. Therefore, marriage within one's own village should be avoided in order to reduce the chance to marry someone who is biologically related (Wadley, 2008: 46-7 and Trautmann, 2003: 1117-8).

Furthermore, a number of secondary criteria are important when selecting a spouse, such as physical features, moral value compatibility, academic compatibility, the family's moral history and horoscope compatibility (Chawla, 2007: 6). This last element is in line with the strong belief most Hindus have in predestination, as they believe the course of their life is already largely determined at birth and depends on the totality of their deeds from past lives (*karma*). Therefore, they also consider the question of who is to marry who to be religiously predetermined, thus downsizing the active role individuals have to play in this.

When arranging a marriage parents and kin thus make a number of considerations on the basis of various criteria and traits. Apart from looking at caste and class, they seek to form an alliance with a family that has a good reputation, while at the same time looking at the compatibility of the spouses in terms of character, professional and educational background. As the Hindu wedding is believed to be a religious sacrament, supernatural validation is sought by means of letting a *pandit* (Hindu priest) cast the horoscopes of the spouses. The ranking on a scale of importance of these criteria can vary across geographic regions in India.

At the time of her marriage a dowry is usually given to the girl by her parents and kin. The term dowry refers to the amount of money, utensils, consumer items and all other forms of property which a girl brings with her to her husband's home at the time of their marriage. Moreover, in a wider sense the expenses made by a girl's family for the marriage celebrations and ceremonies could also be included (Menski, 1998: 16-7). Expenses most heavily weigh on the girl's parents, as they are expected to give a dowry to their daughter on the occasion of her marriage.

The expenses connected to marriages have sharply increased since the early 1900's, which can be attributed to the demographic conditions of the times in which women of marriageable age outnumbered potential husbands. Therefore, by giving a large dowry, parents tried to increase the chances of finding a groom for their daughter on the highly competitive marriage market (Sandhya, 2009: 1-11).

Furthermore, from the 1980's onwards the custom of giving dowry has received a lot of negative media attention due to the increase of dowry abuses and murders. As a result of this, in 1984 the Dowry Prohibition Act was passed which made the giving and receiving of dowry (excluding voluntary gifts) a punishable offence (Basu, 2009: 181-2). So far this Act has not proved to be very successful, as the giving of dowry continues to be rather rule than exception. However, dowry is not always problematic, and even has been an important means of support for many Indian women throughout the centuries. This support is two-sided, as on the one hand dowry in theory belongs to the woman herself and therefore can be seen as a kind of safety net. Moreover, as many women in India are excluded from inheritance (despite being legally entitled to it) dowry can be seen as a kind of pre-mortem inheritance. On the other hand dowry is a status marker, as its amount is believed to correlate to the bride's social status (Oldenburg, 2002: 9- 24).

2.1.2 Love and the traditional family ethos

As individual goals and emotions are not considered authoritative when arranging a marriage, romantic love is not considered a requirement at the time of entering a marriage. Youth are expected to depend upon their elder's choice concerning a marriage partner, trusting in their knowledge and experience when it comes to making a suitable match. Especially in the past the bride and bridegroom

were usually complete strangers to each other as they were not given the chance to meet or even see each other prior to their marriage. This is also an element which is captured in one of the central ritual acts of Hindu marriages, as the bride keeps her face covered with a veil until the ritual moment when the groom lifts it over her head and they can for the first time see each other's face. Thus, the romantic love between spouses is not a prerequisite for marriage but it is believed that their love will grow with time (Mody, 2002: 225 and Pothen, 1996: 38).

Therefore, it is not romantic love between the spouses which is considered essential in a Hindu marriage, but rather the love and respect of youngsters towards their parents and vice versa. On the one hand children show their love and respect towards their parents by letting them arrange their marriage, while on the other hand parents show their love for their children as they endeavour in finding a suitable life partner for them. Only at a later stage, after the wedding has become finalized, does romantic love come into play.

However, the public portrayal of intimacy and explicit affection between spouses is discouraged. This is not only triggered by the cultural norm that lust needs to be curtailed, but there is also another reason. It is believed that excessive love between spouses could result in them prioritizing their mutual relation and thus channelling their loyalty and care to each other rather than to the larger family. Therefore fear exists that romantic love between the married couple might interfere with the coherence of the family unit. Thus, in the joint family ideology lineal relations are privileged over conjugal relations (Uberoi, 2006: 30).

Accordingly, in the Hindu joint family sexuality between spouses is not prohibited, but it is supposed to be covert rather than public (and thus moved to the 'backstage'). Within social research it has been argued that these norms concerning sexuality in practice are the cause of tensions within the family, and specifically in the relation between a man, his wife and mother. Men are expected to equally balance their loyalty between their mother and wife and if not this might be the cause of distress and tense family relations (Das, 1998: 208; Derné, 1994: 249-50 and Kakar, 1990: 17-23).

Thus, according to normative Hindu family beliefs, romantic love is seen as a threat as it on the one hand might undermine the functional character of arranged marriages and on the other hand could cause disloyalty within the joint family.

2.2 Love as the cornerstone of marriage

The concept of love - with which I here and throughout the rest of my argument refer to romantic love and not the kind of love one might for example feel for an idol or music style - has long been undervalued in anthropologic research as it was labelled as 'soft' and 'feminine' making it supposedly unfit as a tool for objective academic research (Lindholm, 2006:7). Consequently research related to this concept has mainly been located in other disciplines such as sociology and psychology, where it

was mostly researched by means of quantitative research methods (stressing the aim of objectivity and quantification). However, Lindholm (2006: 7-9), an ethnographer who has centred a lot of his research on the concept, argues that within that kind of research foremost the functional side of love has been emphasised. Consequently the individual experiences of love and the values and meanings attributed to it have long remained underexposed. Therefore he stresses the importance of anthropological, qualitative research in order to gain a better insight in the application of the concept. Padilla et. al. (2007: ix) also emphasize the significance of love as a concept for research, as it is 'a particularly useful lens for social analysis, providing as it does a glimpse onto the complex interconnections between cultural, economic, interpersonal and emotional realms of experience'. This even leads them to define love as a holistic concept.

Recently the importance of love has become more generally acknowledged within anthropology. This was partly influenced by the increased interest in emotions as 'embodied cognitions' within the discipline but also by the data provided in feminist analysis and cross-cultural studies which have indicated its relevance in academic research (Lindholm, 2006: 7-8 and Padilla et.al.: ix). More specifically since the past decade the number of ethnographies about love, and especially those looking at the intersection of the concept with concepts as globalization and modernity, has increased (Patico, 2010: 372-3).

The question of what it is exactly that the term 'love' refers to has been the cause for a lot of academic debate, as each discipline pinpoints its essential characteristics differently. Some researchers have stressed it as a biological impulse guaranteeing the survival of species (Jankowiak, 1992: 149-50) whereas others define it as a cultural construct (Giddens, 1992: 38). I do not wish to contribute too much to this debate here, as other researchers have already outlined the main arguments reasoned across disciplines and I do not believe it is essential to the argument of this thesis (see for example Hatfield and Rapson, 2005 and Lindholm, 1998: 243-6). Jankowiak (1992: 150-4) is one of those researchers who has emphasized the universality of love as a human experience, as according to him notions of it can be found across cultures worldwide. He based this argument on a cross-cultural study in which he compared ethnographic data on 166 societies, focussing on the presence of notions of romantic love, which he defined as 'any intense attraction that involves the idealization of the other, within an erotic context, with the expectation of enduring for some time into the future' (1992: 150).

Even though this element of idealization in a romantic and erotic context might be recurring across cultures in some form or the other, I prefer to look at love here in terms of a human experience which is not homogeneous as the meanings attributed to it vary according to cultural and historical contexts (Orsini, 2006: 1-2). This is precisely what I will look at throughout the following chapters, as I will focus on which meanings and assumptions are attributed to 'love' and 'love marriages' in the field and how these are linked to the specific historical, social and economic conditions of the area. I will not only look at how local meanings are shaped, but also at how these are interlinked with global

meanings and thus constantly transformed. While doing so I will argue that 'love' and 'love marriage' are not necessarily a complementary couple.

There is one more important characteristic of romantic love which deserves mentioning here as it is largely - though not generally- agreed upon, namely that it is primarily an individual emotion. More specifically this means that it has a crucial element of individual agency in it, as it implies the attraction and idealization perceived by two individuals towards each other. This causes it to be more highly valued in societies where individual goals are prioritized over those of the larger group or collective those individuals belong to. As in collective societies individuals have access to alternative senses of belonging, such as to a social network or a joint family, it is believed that there is less emphasis attributed to love between spouses. This does however not mean that romantic love is entirely absent in more collectivist societies, but rather that is not considered a prerequisite for the construction of a family. Conversely, in societies centred around individualistic world visions, the sense of mutual support which can be attained in romantic love and anchored by means of the institution of marriage based upon that love, is prioritized. As such societies are often characterized by high levels of social mobility and competition, the married couple is seen as its primary unit (Lindholm, 2006: 15-7 and Levine et. al., 1995: 554).

2.2.1 Global spread of the ideal of love marriages

Several social scientists, such as Hirsch (2007: 100-1) and Hatfield and Rapson (2005: 45-55) have pointed out that the ideal of romantic love as the basis for marriage is often used within a discourse of modernization, in which this kind of marriage is considered to be an expression of a modern, individualistic Western lifestyle. This is especially the case when the shift from arranged marriages towards love marriages is discussed, as in a love marriage the main input for the choice of a spouse comes from individuals themselves. However, despite the actual changes in marital ideologies, this does not necessarily lead to a homogeneous pattern of marriages, modelled by Western examples. In other words, there is no case of an evolutionist and linear model concerning the marital landscape, in which non-Western countries develop up to a level similar to that of the so-called 'Modern West'.

A number of reasons can be given for this. First of all the meaning given to a love marriage differs from location to location, which also means that the expectations and experiences connected to such marriages differ. Furthermore, the worldwide expansion and circulation of the ideology connected to love and love marriages, does not necessarily mean that this ideology is unquestionably adopted everywhere, as an ideology does often not correspond to the everyday realities people encounter. Instead, a combination of all kinds of context criteria, such as demographic composition, economic and material circumstances, are causally connected to the manner in which people relate to it (Hirsch and Wardlow, 2006: 11-2).

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the contemporary Western ideal of love as the main foundation to build a marriage on, is a rather recent invention. In previous times marriages in the West were in the first place about setting economic, political and military alliances. It is only since the past two centuries that new values such as freedom of choice, companionship and the satisfaction of individual psychological and social needs have seeped into the institution of marriage. Currently some of the most important values according to the historian Stephanie Coontz (2005: 20), who has researched the historical background of the institution, are that spouses should love each other and autonomously choose to marry, even in the case of pressure from outside. Moreover, the marital relation should be given priority over all other social relations, such as those with relatives and kin. Finally, the love between spouses should be expressed in their mutual intimacy and loyalty towards each other. However, as Coontz rightly remarks, the high expectations which are nowadays given to marriage are also the main cause for the increasing instability of the institution, reflected in the increasing amount of broken marriages and divorces (Coontz, 2005: 5-23).

Thus, love marriages have become highly idealized and imbibed with a number of values and assumptions, such as the ones mentioned above. A final presumption which deserves mention here is that love marriages are supposedly based upon the mutual respect of two individuals who value each other as equals. Therefore, it is presupposed that a love marriage equals gender equality. However, asymmetric gender relations within marriage are rather rule than exception when looking on a global scale. The global spread of the ideal of equality within marriages based on love, does not automatically effect the actual balancing of gender relations. Despite the rigidity of specific idealized images, reality is always more complex and never this black and white (Hirsch and Wardlow, 2006: 21-4 en Hirsch, 2007: 101-2).

2.3 Love in contemporary India

Keeping in mind the hegemonic family structure in North India with its ideal of arranged marriages, one can wonder if love between spouses as the basis for a marriage is compatible in the given situation. The expectations and assumptions connected to normative family relations on the one hand and love between spouses on the other, or between 'traditional' values and 'modern' ideologies seem to be contradictory and conflicting.

The ideas and ideals connected to love marriage have increasingly impacted India since the past two decades. This is because since the 1990s the Indian economic landscape has witnessed far-going changes, with the implementation of a policy of economic liberalization to replace the earlier protectionist economy. These economic reforms have led to a steady increase of the pace of globalization in India, as borders were opened for transnational investments and multinational corporations as well as products and ideas (Netting, 2010: 710-1).

Consequently, the global *ideoscape* of marriage as an institution springing out of a relationship marked by romantic love between two individuals has become increasingly present in India. Under the increased influence of this *ideoscapes* concerning marriage - and more specifically the expansion of foreign ideals of individualism and love - arranged marriages have become adapted to the changing socio-economic realities in the country. Firstly the average age at the time of marriage has increased, as parents have delayed the moment for arranging a marriage until children have graduated from school and found a job, albeit the latter being foremost reserved for boys (Netting, 2010: 709).

Moreover, with the growing autonomy of children, parents increasingly take the input and wishes of their children into consideration. Nowadays most parents will not arrange a marriage without first asking the children's consent. It has also become more common for parents to allow children to meet with a prospective partner prior to the marriage in order for the boy and girl to learn to know each other. However, the relation is expected to stay platonic before the marriage has taken place (Mody, 2008: 13).

Furthermore, a new system of marriages has arisen in which both autonomy on the part of the youngsters and parental assent are blended, and it is therefore generally known as a love-cum-arranged marriage. More specifically the term refers to those marriages in which a couple falls in love and decides to marry, but instead of announcing their engagement they inform their parents about their partner of preference and request them to arrange the match (Netting, 2010: 720-1 and Mody, 2002: 248-250).

Despite the adaptation of arranged marriages over the past decades, the number of what is locally labelled 'love marriages' is reportedly increasing. Given the suspicion held towards excessive spousal affection and love within the joint family, one can imagine that with the increase in these so-called love marriages individual family members have to invent new roles and manners of cohabitation. As love is primarily an individual emotion, the possibility might exist that with the increase in love marriages the emphasis will shift from family loyalty towards spousal loyalty and that this might simultaneously lead to an increase in nuclear families.

The apparent tensions between hegemonic family values and those related to spousal love give rise to a number of questions; Will an increase in so-called love marriages have an impact on gender relations and relations in the family and will it result in an increased preference for nuclear living? How individual is a love marriage? Do young people revolt against family/collective goals or do they instead try to combine both, by means of creating a hybrid form of love and love marriage? These are some of the questions I will explore in the next chapters.

First of all I will introduce my research field in more detail and suggest a number of reasons for the increase in love marriages which is taking place there. Then I will look at the meanings respondents give to 'love' and the assumptions they have with a marriage out of love.

CHAPTER III: Exploration of the field

3.1 Patriarchal family structure in Manali

At the beginning of the previous chapter I gave an outline of the structure and gender relations which are considered normative in the hegemonic Hindu family. I will now link the main aspects previously mentioned to the concrete situation amongst local Hindus in Manali, in order to give an insight into the area where I did my research and thus create a transparent image as to the specifications of the field and the manner this is connected to my further argumentation. However, it is necessary to point out that the aspects which I mention here are not absolute, as the field is always scattered with contradictions. This is especially the case with the aspects I will now discuss, as many of these concern norms and idealizations. Thus many of these are rather ideology than practice and the actual way people behave often diverges from it. I will however attempt to indicate these contradictions where relevant.

First of all let me recapture the elementary characteristics of my sample, which exists of middle-class high caste Hindus from Manali and its surrounding villages, with a majority of female respondents. A large majority of the people in my sample lives in a joint family formed along *virilocal* lines. If living nuclear this is never out of their own request to live separated from family elders, but rather out of necessity due to family expansion and usually requested by parents themselves. Thus, by time, when the size of a family increases beyond the point which makes living together and sharing a household manageable, families are divided into nuclear units. However, generally these nuclear units are located within a neighbourhood kin network, which in practice means that the normative behaviour related to joint living is maintained. For instance, three brothers from my sample were living in the same building, each occupying one floor with their wife and children and thus maintaining close contact with and control over one another.

All respondents have lived at least some years of their life in a joint family and without exception they claimed to prefer joint living over nuclear living. The main reason for this can be expressed by the adage that 'many hand make light work'. This does not only apply to the household, but also to childcare as senior family members have an important caring role towards their grandchildren. Another reason named for the preference of joint living was the ideology of obligation in which children are supposed to care for their elders in return for the many years parents have spent on childcare.

However, an element which also plays a role in this, albeit not explicitly named by respondents, is the economic benefits of joint living. This is connected to two interlinked elements. Firstly, the fact that in a joint family there are a larger number of productive individuals means that

more people can contribute to the family's wealth (Wadley, 2010: 11). Secondly, joint living entails that land does not need to be divided amongst heirs. As land and wealth are important indicators of a family's honour, joint living thus contributes to a higher status.

This is definitely an important element in my research sample, as all respondents are land-owners and the land is mainly used for commercial goals. The majority of families in my sample use their land for commercial horticulture and others in function of the tourist industry by constructing tourist-cottages on it.

The importance attributed to land and the preference to hold control over as much land as possible without having to splinter it, is also indicated by the fact that land rights are strongly held in the hands of men. Despite the fact that women are since 1956 legally entitled to property rights and inheritance, all female respondents were adamant about refraining from actually claiming that right. They all stated that they believe land belongs to their brothers, as they themselves have no need for it because they leave their natal home to live with their husband. Therefore, they usually signed a contract in which they assigned their rights to land to their brothers or other male kin. This is one instance in which women can be seen as active agents in the maintenance of asymmetric gender relations and of reconfirming their submissiveness to and dependence on male guardians. Women all stated that their share of the inheritance is given at the time of their marriage in the form of dowry.

The gender asymmetry in my field is also strongly connected to labour, as there exists a strong division of labour among men and women. Whereas men usually have a paid job in town, all female respondents were housewives, looking after the household, the cattle and doing some work on the orchards. Many women expressed that prior to their marriage they cherished the wish to have a paid job later in life, preferably as a teacher (which is in line with their role as a caregiver to children). However, none of them actually were professionally active, irrespective of their level of education. In my sample those women with a college degree also did not have a job. They all claimed that the reasons for this were that their in-laws discouraged it and that they themselves thought they would not be able to combine it with the household and childcare. However, they expressed the hope for their own daughters to get the opportunity to work once grown up and thus be able to 'stand on their own feet'. Women in the field thus are financially up to a large degree dependent on their husband as they do not have land nor an income.

The importance attributed to a woman's mother role is very high in the area and nearly all respondents had their first child within one year after their marriage. Their choice to soon become a mother after marriage had several causes. Most respondents mentioned this would result in the woman soon being 'free' [from childcare]. Moreover, the wish of in-laws for grandchildren played a role and the fact that they would then be able to assist in childcare before growing too old to be able to provide help. Women also expressed that they felt more at home once they had become a mother, and that it had improved the relation with their in-laws. One respondent moreover mentioned that, if a couple does not get children soon after their marriage, this might lead to gossip in the community as the

woman's fertility might be questioned. Thus the mother-role is one instance of the social obligations expected from a wife, which on the one hand might pressurize her (become a mother to avoid gossip) but on the other hand also contributes positively to her self-identity (becoming a mother improves her status in the joint family).

Homeliness is encouraged for women, and if they often go to town or to visit friends and relatives elsewhere, this is judged negatively by other women and the cause for gossip about the girl's behaviour. All respondents confirmed the existing hierarchy within the joint family, in which they are expected to not only heed their husband but also their in-laws. Everyone confirmed that, if they wanted to go somewhere outside the village, they first had to ask permission from their in-laws. However, I observed that in practice this rule was not always observed.

All respondents mentioned that the average age for marriage has significantly increased in the past few decade. Whereas some of my elder respondents had married at the age of only fourteen, the younger generation usually married in their early twenties. Also, the elder generation said that they were never consulted about their opinion at the time of their marriage, and that they had no choice but to accept the partner selected by parents and elder kin. However, all younger respondent from an arranged marriage had been asked for their consent and had met their husband prior to the marriage. Several women also mentioned that their parents had asked them to mention it if they had any preference for a partner, so that they could arrange the match (love-cum-arranged marriage).

A last element of the field which I want to mention here is its high degree of caste consciousness, which became clear for example from the fact that all respondents claimed that inter-caste marriage is highly inappropriate and dishonouring and that it therefore is sanctioned by excommunication from one's kin network (I will come back to this in chapter IV).

Thus, overall it can be said that the field can be characterized as conservative in its ideologies about family and gender structures. Women as well as men are expected to act according to normative role patterns. If they deviate from these roles, they can be confronted by social pressure from the community, for example in the guise of gossip and rumours. It appears that arranged marriages have transformed over the years in line with the changes I earlier mentioned (with higher age at marriage and increased input from youngsters). Still all respondents agreed that the number of love marriages (as they are locally labelled) is sharply increasing. I will first make a number of suggestions about the causes behind this increase, before turning in more detail to the characteristics of such marriages.

3.2 Reasons for the increase of love marriages

When I asked my respondents whether they believed the amount of love marriages in their region is increasing, they unanimously confirmed this to be the case. They all stated that love marriages were highly uncommon in the past, but that since the past ten to twenty years more and more youngsters

decide to choose their own life partner. Some respondents estimated the amount of love marriages in their location nowadays to be some fifty to seventy-five percent of all marriages. Of course these estimations are very rough, but the fact that my respondents estimated love marriages to account for at least half of all marriages today, whereas they hardly ever happened before, does suggest a sharp increase of such marriages.

It is difficult to retrieve exact data on the percentage of love marriages nowadays, which according to a group of local lawyers I interviewed can be attributed to the fact that there exists a large variation in actual marriage ceremonies. Some people have a civil marriage which they register at a local court, whereas others opt for a Hindu marriage in a local temple. As these marriages can be registered at different places, such as in court or with the *panchayat* (governing institution, usually at the village level), exact data related to them are scattered.

The majority of my respondents attributed this increase in love marriages to the changed attitude of youngsters who are less willing to heed their parents and elders, but demand a higher amount of autonomy. While interviewing parents, I was repeatedly told - usually with a tinge of regret and nostalgia in their voice - that nowadays 'children do not listen anymore, but act as they like'. This change in attitude is believed to be largely caused by higher level of education achieved by both boys and girls. However, I believe that the higher importance paid to education nowadays is only part of the answer, and that there are a number of other structural causes underlying the changing marital landscape which I will now elaborate.

3.2.1 Shifting economic activities

Kullu district has witnessed an important shift in its main economic activities since the past half century. For centuries the main economic activity in the region was agriculture, and at times nearly ninety percent of the total population was economically active in subsistence crop agriculture, including rice, maize, pulses and vegetables. However, this form of land use has witnessed a major shift, set in motion in the 1950s with the construction of the National Highway 21, which drastically improved the connectivity of this remote area to important urban centres situated southwards, such as Chandigarh and India's capital Delhi (the bus journey from Manali to Delhi nowadays takes approximately fourteen hours).

With the construction of the National Highway, transportation capacities increased which created the opportunity to engage in more commercial economic activities such as commercial trade. Due to its climate, with cool winters and warm and wet summers, the region is highly suited for the cultivation of specific kinds of fruit such as apples, pears and cherries. Triggered by these elements, there has been a shift in the major form of land use from a predominance of subsistence agriculture to commercial horticulture (Saczuk, 2011).

Another important shift in the main economic activities of the area took place from the 1980s onwards, with a large influx of tourists. The cause for this increase in tourism can be attributed to the unstable political situation of Kashmir at the time, which made tourists seeking refuge from the summer heat of the Indian plains or those interested in having a (often first) snow experience, avoid that area and travel *en masse* to Kullu district instead. As a result, since the past two to three decades the region has witnessed the mushrooming of all kinds of tourist-related facilities, such as the construction of hotels, cottages, restaurants and roads.

Several of my elder respondents, being in their fifties and sixties, informed me how the shift to horticulture has meant a sharp decrease in the amount of work to be done. Sangeeta for one, on a number of occasions told me about her childhood years and the initial years of her marriage.

> Sangeeta's marriage was arranged by her parents and relatives when she was approximately twenty years old. Her parents knew the boy and his parents well, as they possessed fields in the same area. Sangeeta had known her husband since childhood as they regularly played together and met whenever they accompanied their parents to the field. However, the thought never occurred to her that one day her parents would arrange her marriage with him. Sangeeta told me that 'in those days parents did not consult the children about their feelings concerning a marriage. It was entirely the parents' choice.'
>
> The initial years of her marriage were very hard and challenging for Sangeeta. As her in-laws had nine children and her husband was the eldest son, Sangeeta was the first daughter-in-law to join the family and therefore carried the main responsibility for the household work. Furthermore, the entire family was expected to help on the field, as the crops and grains they harvested were their main means of subsistence. Apart from the cold winter months spent mostly indoors, people had to toil every day on their lands, waking up at five in the morning to go to their fields, and returning home only around seven o'clock in the evening. Even after returning from the field Sangeeta did not get a moment of rest for herself, because she then immediately had to start preparing dinner for the entire family. 'In those days we had a lot of work on the field, but nowadays there is hardly any work to be done.'

It is a fact that horticulture is less labour-intensive than agriculture. Whereas in agriculture fields need to be ploughed, dressed with manure and sown before its crops can be harvested, the main activities connected to horticulture are to spray the trees with chemicals, cut their branches and pluck and pack the fruit in the harvest season. As my respondents told me, in previous times both men and women worked on the fields, whereas nowadays the work in the orchards is mainly done by paid labourers, foremost from the Nepali and Bihari communities. Women do go to the orchards to gather the branches which have been cut by labourers and carry them in bundles on their back to use them as fuel for the stove and men help with the spraying, but the actual harvesting is mostly done by paid

labourers. Only a very small portion of the harvest is kept aside to use for own consumption, but the majority of the yield is packed in boxes and sold at the nearby auction, from where it is transported and sold all over the country.

As people hardly grow any vegetables anymore, they have to purchase everything in town and thus depend on their monetary income. In the majority of families in my sample, this income mainly comes from three sources. First of all families depend on the profit made from the sales of their fruit harvest. Secondly, the majority of men have a job which gives them the guarantee of a regular salary. These jobs vary from government jobs to all kinds of jobs related to the local tourist industry, such as working as a taxi driver or a tour guide. Finally, more and more families who have enough capital decide to use part of their land for the construction of a hotel or a cottage, to generate income from the increasing demand for housing of tourists. This shift in the local economy from a subsistence economy to an economy based on commercial trade and tourism also has important consequences on local family relations as well as on marriage patterns.

In the past, with the family as the primary unit responsible for the production of agricultural crops, the control over that land and the means of production was crucial in order to guarantee the economic stability and well-being of the family as a whole, which in turn contributed to their status and power. Connected to this control of production is also the control of reproduction, which in practice is usually in the hands of family elders and done by arranging the marriages of younger family members.

However, simultaneously with the economic shift in the region, power relations within families have shifted. Even though in the majority of cases the family is still considered to be the main unit of production, which is reflected in the fact that most families up to today prefer joint living, the control of the productive process has become less strict. No longer do male family members and family elders decide which crops have to be grown and how the work will be divided, but individuals (mostly male) increasingly have the possibility to explore the job market and thus create their own source of income and achieve its corresponding autonomy. Even though most men choose to live on a joint basis and provide for their elders, if some severe conflict *would* occur, they would have the financial means to move out and start a nuclear family.

Furthermore, in the past one of the main criteria considered by parents when looking for a daughter-in-law was that she would be hard working and preferably would have experience with agricultural work. Nowadays however, though parents still claim to prefer a hard-working girl, they also recognize that it is no longer a necessity as her productive labour is limited as compared to previous times.

Thus, the majority of men, and more and more women, nowadays generate an income by taking up a job in town, starting a business or by working in the tourist industry. Not only youngsters themselves, but also parents increasingly recognize the importance of higher education in order to be able to have a strong position on the highly competitive job market. Therefore parents are willing to

invest in higher education for both their sons and daughters, hoping this will increase their chances of finding a well-paid job in the future. Together with the benefits of a regular income this might bring, to have a paid job is also a status signifier. As work on the fields is increasingly left in the hands of paid labourers from lower social standing it has also become associated with a lower status. The increase in the level of education does also have its impact on the increase of love marriages, as I will illustrate next.

3.2.2 Increased education levels

When I asked my respondents where they think couples usually get to know each other and fall in love, the majority thought this in most cases happens during the children's years of education, in secondary school or at college where they meet contemporaries from the opposite sex (note that all secondary schools in the area are mixed). As there is a tendency for children to study longer than in previous times, they continue to study well into their adolescence and early adulthood, which can be characterized as stages in life in which youngsters become more conscious about their sexuality. Therefore, it is not surprising that more people fall in love during their school years than in previous times, in which education for women was not considered a priority and girls were often withdrawn from school before they reached puberty.

In my sample of female respondents I can clearly see an increase in the years of education they have received according to the age group they belong to. Whereas the elder generation of women in their fifties and sixties usually stopped studying between the ages of fourteen to sixteen, those in their thirties and forties studied approximately two years longer. Nowadays to study up to plus two, which equals the final year of secondary education at which the average age is eighteen years, is considered the absolute minimum both for boys and girls.

However, more and more youngsters prolong their education by moving on to higher studies, either at a college or at university. As the nearest college to Manali is in Kullu, which is located at a distance of forty kilometres, to allow your child to do higher studies at the same time means that they have the permission to stay away from home and take a room in a hostel or as a paying guest. When staying away from home, children are out of sight and out of the direct control of their family elders. Therefore they experience more freedom to associate with people from the opposite sex. This mixing does happen, despite the efforts of college hostels to assure parents that their daughter's mobility will be controlled, by means of implementing strict house rules. Not only are colleges for boys and girls strictly separated and is entry prohibited for people from the opposite sex, but girls are also expected to be back at a specific time in the early evening, unless given prior notice of their absence and if not, their parents will be informed about the absence of their daughter. One girl also told me that the use of mobile phones was prohibited in her hostel, which complicated it for her to answer her boyfriend's

phone calls as she had to await unguarded moments to do so. This example does however not only illustrate the attempt made by hostel representatives to control girls by means of the implementation of various rules, but also that these rules are never absolute.

That these college years spent away occasionally result in love affairs and consequently marriages was also affirmed by the data in my sample. Several women from love marriages told me that they had met their husband during their college years. These women originally came from quite distant locations in Himachal Pradesh, between eighty and a hundred and twenty kilometres, and had married with a man from Kullu valley.

Parents are also aware of the risks of sending their girls away to study. Consider for example the following answer of a forty-two year old woman named Shila, belonging to the highest caste being a *pandit*, which she gave to me in a reply on the question what she believed to be the main cause of the increase in love marriages:

> 'According to me…which age have we arrived in? Now it is an educated age! Children go here and there in order to study, they study outside [away from home]. Nowadays it happens in this way. Before there was the conviction that girls should not go outside, that they had to come straightaway from school to home and go straightaway from home to school. Before people would not allow girls to study outside. Now times have changed. Boys and girls meet each other outside, they study together. Then this kind of thing [to fall in love] happens naturally.'

However, parents appear to be willing to take this risk and do not mind if their child has an affair (under specific conditions), as they recognize the importance of higher education and the prospects this brings for a job. When I asked Shila about her own daughter, she proudly informed me that she is doing her Bachelor in Science and planning to continue her studies in order to also get her Masters degree in this field. Shila hopes that this will guarantee a good job for her daughter.

Researchers have argued that higher levels of education might correlate with higher levels of autonomy, as it might result in women increasingly aspiring to have a job which generates an income and thus gives them a higher degree of (at least financial) independence (Mukhopadhyay and Seymour, 1994: 20).

However, in practice it turns out that women are often not allowed by their in-laws to actually have a job, as they are expected to look after the household. Shila also recognizes this reality and therefore told me that, if she were to arrange her daughter's marriage - which she does hope for - she would on beforehand make clear to the family interested in her daughter's hand that the condition for the arrangement is that they should allow her to have a job. 'Now that she is so educated, the girl will not [only] look after the household!'

This is an opinion given to me by a large number of women, regretfully stating that they themselves have not had the chance to do higher studies and find a job, but that they are willing to

invest in their children's future and will do anything necessary in order to create that opportunity for their own daughters. However, this is not merely about mothers wanting to compensate for their own missed opportunities. To allow a daughter to study longer also improves her chances on the marital market. Not only do most families nowadays prefer an educated daughter-in-law, but it also creates the chance that the girl herself will meet an educated boy during her study years with who she will later marry. Thus, even though parents during interviews claimed not to be supportive of premarital romantic affairs, at the same time they do not keep their daughters locked inside in order to prevent them from happening. There appears to be a certain ambiguity in the field between the normative ideal of parental guardianship over a daughter, and the everyday practice of making use of the opportunities brought by higher education. However, up to today to allow a woman to work remains an area of discussion and contestation, as once a woman is married, irrespective if it was a love or an arranged marriage, she obtains a submissive status in her new family and often has to bend herself to the wishes of her in-laws.

3.2.3 The impact of globalization

When looking at my field of research, the impact of globalization on the spread of the idea of romantic love, but also on the facilitation of its implementation, became visible from a number of areas. Globalization does of course have a very large impact and comes to expression in several spheres and with varying extents of visibility. I do realize that the aspects I will focus on here are only a tip of the iceberg, but the two examples I will discuss here were highly relevant in my field of research and therefore deserve mentioning here.

3.2.3.1 Popular media

Indian popular media are one medium in which the impact of the *ideoscape* of romantic love can clearly be seen as well as the manner in which this has led to a blending of often contradicting values, such as parental authority on the one hand and youthful ardour on the other, and thus led to a kind of hybridization (Uberoi, 2006: 218). Popular media, and foremost Bollywood movies, are immensely popular in India, and also in my research field it is given an important place in the everyday lives of people.

As many hours of my fieldwork comprised participatory observation, in which I spent time with local women doing what they do, it is anything but an understatement when I say that I have never before in my life spent so many hours a day watching television. The television is a central element in all the villagers' homes and, especially during winters, it is turned on nearly as many hours as the people themselves are awake. After waking up, one of the first things done in my host-family

was to switch on the television and it was only switched off right before going to sleep. Whenever one spends time in the room where the television is located it is on and as this rooms usually is the living room, which is the central area of the house, this means most of the time.

I have seen Nirmala not only cook and eat while keeping one eye on the television, but also while knitting, having a conversation with a guest, cleaning and even while helping her daughter do her homework. Moreover, whenever I went to the home of one of my female respondents, the chance would be very real that I would find her in her living room while watching her favourite soaps.

By far the most watched programmes by local women are the Hindi soaps, broadcast by a number of commercial networks such as Zee TV, Star Plus and Colors. These soaps, among which some of the most popular at the time of my research were *Is pyaar ko kya naam doon?* ("What shall I name this love?"), *Sasuraal Simar ka* ("Simar's in-laws' house") and *Saath nibhaana saathiya* ("Stay by my side, partner") invariably revolve around the lives of young women, and the difficulties they encounter in their joint family, usually because of a continuous flood of harassments they have to endure from their mother-in-law. However, there is one thing all these female protagonists had in common and that is that they deeply love their husband and find consolation with him. Thus, the romantic love between spouses is idealized in these soaps, whereas at the same time the message is given that this love can only come to full expression within the institution of marriage.

Those women idealized within these soaps are all obedient and docile, showing respect for their elders and refraining from openly contesting the injustice done to them by dominant in-laws, but instead submissively endure it all. Furthermore, the love between the spouses is portrayed as unbreakable, despite the challenges it has to face as in-laws do everything within their power to drive spouses apart.

Western influences have clearly seeped into these stories, such as the broadcast of special Valentine's Day episodes in the week of the fourteenth of February, in which the protagonists were shown expressing their love for each other by going out on a dinner, giving each other Valentine's Day gifts and cards, and quite often are reprimanded for this 'excessive' expression of intimacy by their family elders.

Thus, love is shown as accepted only within the boundaries of specific normative institutions, namely marriage and the joint family. Even though spouses do experience feelings of love for each other and it is the main reason for a marriage, this love cannot exist at the expense of the love for others within the family, and it thus remains subordinate to the fear of elders. This message concerning the idealization of patriarchal joint family living is not only given in most of the television soaps, but also in the majority of popular romantic Bollywood dramas. In many of these movies, heroes and heroines are depicted as falling in love with each other and expressing their wish to marry one another. However, only after the parents have given their consent does the couple decide to tie the knot (Uberoi, 2006: 180-216).

Moreover, an excessive expression of modernity is portrayed in a negative way. Thus, indiscriminately those girls wearing high heels, excessive make-up and short skirts who feel unrestricted in approaching people from the opposite sex are portrayed as bad characters. This does correspond to the findings of social scientists, who have argued that the economic liberalization and increased exposure to images of sexual liberalism and gender equality, does not necessarily lead to the alteration of, but rather to the reaffirmation of local gender values and their connected hierarchies (Abraham 2001: 134; Derné, 2002: 144-6 and 2005: 44-6).

That being said, it is clear that the images portrayed in soaps and movies do speak to the imagination of the local population. Local women are on a daily basis confronted with images idealizing love and love marriages, whereas at the same time the context of joint family living corresponds to the situation they themselves encounter. Therefore, women can relate to these images as they recognize the difficulties and joys of joint living from their own everyday experiences. The message is given that within this context, love is not only a possible, but a preferable basis for marriage despite the difficulties one might encounter as spouses have to safeguard the harmony within the family by equally dividing their loyalties among all family members.

Moreover, the soaps do not only find a loyal audience with married women, but also with local teenagers. More than once did the young cousins of my host-family come to pay us a visit and did they put me through a cross-examination, firing one question after the other about which was my favourite soap, which actor I found most attractive and how I hoped the plot would evolve.

3.2.3.2 Consumer goods

With the economic liberalization the markets for global goods have opened, increasing the demand for consumer items ranging from cars and motorbikes, mobile phones and computers to fridges and washing machines. This is also reflected in the items given to a girl as dowry. Whereas in the past dowries mainly consisted of golden jewellery, kitchen utensils and clothes, nowadays it becomes more and more common to give a fridge and a washing machine on the occasion of a daughter's marriage. This trend of increasing dowries has been recorded by several social scientists, often in relation to its causal relation with the increase of dowry related abuse and murder (Menski, 1998: 134-5).

My respondent were aware about dowry abuse through news reports on television, but they claimed that it is not something which happens in their area, but only on the plains. Whenever mentioning dowry, my respondents always stressed the fact that the boy's parents never demand a dowry. Instead, it is up to the girl's parents, and according to their financial capacity, how much they are willing to give to their daughter. This however is only partly true as, especially in arranged marriages, parents often feel pressured to spend large amounts of money on the dowry and the

wedding ceremony, as this is an act signalling the family's status (I will come back to this later, when discussing responsibilities in chapter V).

However, in order to be able to purchase these consumer goods, one needs to possess a minimum amount of capital and the more money a family earns, the larger their opportunity to lead a consumerist lifestyle. This brings me back to one of the reasons mentioned above, namely that with the increased diversification of economic activities in the area and the possibility to thus earn an income, a higher amount of importance is also paid to higher education since with higher education one can earn more.

Furthermore, the relation between the increase of consumer items and love marriages also finds its expression on a more practical level. Within the past five to ten years the region has witnessed a sharp increase in the use of mobile phones and nowadays the majority of local people, young and old, male as well as female, have a mobile device. These devices have become a crucial tool for the facilitation of love affairs.

As the sexuality of girls continues to be controlled by their family and elders out of fear that they might fall in love with a man who is not considered a proper wedding candidate and that they might thus damage their family's honour, it is very difficult for them to publicly meet with men whom they are not closely related to. Several of my respondents confirmed that it is difficult for youngsters of the opposite sex to openly meet, as this will unavoidably lead to gossip, which is foremost damaging for the girl's reputation.

Note that a certain ambiguity does however exist in the field as not only respondents from the younger generations, but also those from the elder ones seem to acknowledge that it has become quite common for youngsters to have romantic affair. Thus, the unwritten rule appears to be that, as long as the affair happens covert and intimacy is not publicly shown, it is more or less accepted.

When asking a highly educated male respondent whether people in the region can openly have affairs, he laughingly replied 'This is India, you know! It depends from state to state, in Haryana for example it does happen, but in Himachal they [family and kin elders] will kill you!'

However, male sexuality is viewed in much more liberal terms, which was also recognized by my respondents. They all acknowledged that for boys it does not matter if it becomes known that they have an affair, but for girls it does. Once the affair becomes public, the girl will be known for being promiscuous and people will gossip about her unchaste character. This might have severe repercussions, as it is difficult for a girl with a damaged reputation to find a prospective groom. Therefore, when an affair is discovered by others and becomes the fuel for gossip, the only option left for a girl in order to limit her reputation damage is to marry her lover.

A much safer way to have an affair therefore is to limit the moments actually spent together in public, and thus to decrease the chance at being caught. This is done by having long conversations over the phone with one's boyfriend or girlfriend, and thus learn to know each other. The importance of such 'phone relations' was stressed by many of my informants, and they told me that this nowadays

is the main manner to maintain an affair. First the boy and girl meet each other, at school or during some kind of festival, where they are usually introduced by peers and common friends. If there is a mutual liking, they exchange mobile numbers and have long conversations with each other in which they not only discuss their likes and dislikes, but also their family situations and the possibilities of a marriage.

Thus, with the increase of the use of mobile phones, youngsters have found a way to have affairs in all secrecy and to learn to know each other without running the risk of being found out. If, for some reason or the other, they at some point decide they do not want to marry each other, they can simply terminate the calls. If however they do decide to marry, they can at a later point either inform their parents about their preference or set a date to elope.

Furthermore, the younger generation is increasingly experimenting with other *technoscapes* (Appadurai, 2003: 45-6) such as the Internet and for instance Facebook is becoming another medium to connect to peers from the opposite sex while avoiding parental supervision.

3.3 What is love?

As I argued in the previous chapter, love has been defined in various and often diverging manners by researchers across disciplines, depending on their disciplinary focus (neurological, biological etc.). Now let me argue how the emotion of love, and more specifically love between spouses, becomes meaningful in my field. Which expectations and assumptions does it bring and what makes young individuals decide to have a love marriage? I will focus on these questions here.

Before outlining the different ideas and assumptions which respondents have about love and arranged marriages, it is important to indicate that these two terms are not merely theoretical concepts. Initially, while conducting interviews, I attempted to avoid direct reference to these terms in order to let respondents themselves define and label specific marital patters. However, I soon discovered that respondents themselves constantly make use of the labels of love, arranged and love-cum-arranged marriages when discussing related topics. What interests me here is what distinguishes each of these from each other. Why do respondent make use of different labels, and where are their differences located?

During my interviews, which were nearly all in Hindi, respondents interchangeably employed the English and the Hindi terms for the different kinds of marriages. However, I believe there is an important difference in connotation according to the language of medium. Whereas the English term ‘love’ has a number of associations such as reciprocal intimacy and affection, the Hindi expression for a love marriage is *apnī marzī se* which literally means ‘willingly’ or ‘in accordance with one’s own wish or choice’ and similarly for an arranged marriage the expression *mām-bāp kī marzī se* is used, which can be translated as ‘in accordance with the parents’ wish’. Thus, whereas in English the central

concept is ‘love’, in Hindi the central term is ‘wish or choice’ which can be associated with quite a different register of assumptions.

I believe the above mentioned distinction is important, as it indicates the existing nuances of emphasis, with ‘own choice’ as a central element when opting for a love marriage. Moreover, in some cases the Hindi term seemed more accurate to the actual experiences and assumptions of respondents, who do not only stress belonging and intimacy, but primarily (though not exclusively) individual choice. I will now illustrate this by means of some cases from the field.

Case 1: Nirmala

Nirmala, who, being the daughter-in-law in my host family, was one of my main respondents in the field told me in detail about her own marriage.

> Nirmala had not yet reached the legal age when she married, being only seventeen, and thus she was still going to secondary school. She knew Suresh liked her, as he had repeatedly mentioned it to her half-sister and asked her to pass it on to Nirmala. Suresh appeared to be very adamant in his intention to marry Nirmala as he also asked her parents for their consent. However, they refused as they thought Nirmala was still too young for marriage and should first finish her studies. Nirmala initially felt too shy to talk to Suresh, and therefore did not agree either.
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> However, one evening, while Nirmala was at the birthday party of a close relative, Suresh turned up and again asked her to agree to his wedding proposal. After some urging, Nirmala decided to agree and that same evening she was taken home by Suresh. When I asked Nirmala whether she loved him at that point, she said this was not the case, as she was still young and there were many misunderstandings between them shortly after the marriage.
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> However, at the beginning of the interview Nirmala had informed me that her marriage was a love marriage, thus I asked her if the term love marriage is applicable to her situation if there initially was a lack of love (at least from her side). However, Nirmala did not seem to understand my confusion and insisted that ‘this kind of marriage is just called a love marriage!’.

Case 2: Kamala

Kamala is a woman in her early thirties who eloped at the age of seventeen to have a love marriage. When I asked her about the circumstances of her marriage and more specifically how she met her husband and when they decided to marry, she gave me the following account:

> Kamala one day went to town to do some shopping with a group of friends. There she was introduced to a boy through a mutual friend and she developed an instant liking for him. This

feeling turned out to be mutual as a short while later she heard from a friend that the boy had expressed the wish to propose to her. As Kamala had only met the boy once, she wanted to first learn more about his background. Therefore she approached a friend who was familiar with the boy and his family situation, and who assured her of his suitability.

As Kamala's parents had repeatedly mentioned to her that they would arrange her marriage, she anticipated their refusal to marry someone of her own choice. She chose not to inform them and thus risk their rejection, but instead one day eloped with the boy and had a court marriage in Kullu. After the marriage she moved in with her husband and his close family members. Kamala had thus met her husband only once prior to their marriage, but readily labels it as a 'love marriage'.

Thus, both of these cases illustrate how love marriages are not merely about feeling in love with someone and therefore deciding to marry, but primarily about being able to make your own, individual choice for a partner. This choice appears to be based on a combination of traits, such as the first impressions related to physical appearance and character of the other, while also making some pragmatic considerations such as background compatibility (I will come back to this in chapter IV).

However, this does not mean that assumptions of love, care and affection are not relevant. When I asked my respondents why they preferred a love marriage, the answer was usually that, as spouses are expected to share the rest of their life together, it is important that they have mutual feelings of liking and support. That affection and support are also expected, became clear from one of the accounts of a female respondent in her late twenties who had herself had an arranged marriage. When I asked her however which kind of marriage she hoped her son would have in the future, she decidedly answered: 'A love marriage! Then your heart stays happy, you will not have tensions because it was in accordance with your own wish!'

I asked her what she then believed to be different in the relationship between husband and wife from a love marriage, which she phrased as follows:

'In the case of a love marriage, there are not so many tensions, it is like, okay, it is what we want. In an arranged marriage, it is a little more like, if I would have married someone from my own choice, then maybe it would not have had to be like this! Whenever there is some kind of discussion, then I think like this. But, there are discussions in every house, you have to think like that, right?'

Thus, to summarize, the main reason why young people opt for a love marriage seems to be that they increasingly associate marriage with individual choice, and all the associations this has with being modern as also idealized in popular media and confirmed by respondents in expressions as 'times have progressed' when mentioning the increase in love marriages. Furthermore, couples

assume that by making their own choice there will be more intimacy and mutual support in their relationship.

This element could also be reverted, as it means that the conviction is held that in an arranged marriage intimacy and support between the spouses is less. Does this make parents who insist on arranging their child's marriage responsible for the lack thereof? This is an issue which was not directly raised by respondents, but which one can imagine might become relevant in specific situations. If children are displeased with the partner their parents have selected for them, they might blame the latter for this.

However, there are also a lot of critical voices against love marriages. Not only were these voiced by the elder generations, but equally by women in their twenties and thirties who themselves had had an arranged marriage. Their main points of critique were that young people impulsively make a decision for a partner in a love marriage, whereas parents have more life experience and thus the knowledge about spousal compatibility. This compatibility is not primarily about the spouse's individual character and life visions, but rather about social background criteria as caste, class etc. Repeatedly statements were made that in love marriages, young people do not look at the boy's background, and that this can lead to severe problems later on in life. If, for example, a boy does not have a job and income, it is feared that he will not be able to provide for a family.

But is love really blind? I will explore this in the next chapter, where I will look in more detail to the actual practice of love marriage. First of all I will look at which traits respondents believe to be crucial in order to guarantee a successful marriage and then look at how these are of relevance in love marriages in the area. Are they overlooked, or do young people make use of existing normative notions about who is and who is not a suitable match? Then I will look at how love marriages actually are organized. Which steps do young people take in order to marry the person of their own choice and which role do parents play in the marriage arrangements? Do parents have a passive role to play in the wedding arrangements or not? These are some of the questions central to the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV: Love marriages in practice

4.1 Is love really blind?

As I discussed in the second chapter, marriages in India are bound to a number of rules and norms concerning who is allowed to marry who. I will explore the relevance of these rules and norms here by means of the ethnographic data I collected. I asked all my informants to sum up the characteristics which are considered crucial while selecting a spouse, and discovered that there was only a limited number of criteria, which returned in all given answers denoting that there is a general agreement as to which criteria are significant.

4.1.1 Caste endogamy

All respondents agreed that under no circumstances should people marry across caste-boundaries, with the only exception tolerated that the difference of castes is negligible. In practice this means that inter-caste marriages between the higher castes, namely between *pandits/sharma's* and *rajputs/thakurs*, is socially accepted, but as soon as the caste differences between two spouses is bigger it becomes an issue. Especially if someone from one of the higher castes were to marry an untouchable (*harijan*) this was described as highly problematic.

This was not only stated by all my male and female respondents, but also by a group of lawyers whom I interviewed at the local court in Manali. When I mentioned inter-caste marriages to them one of the female lawyers told me that she estimates parents would in ninety-nine percent of all cases reject such a marriage and she believes this to be the main cause for disapproval of a marriage by family and kin, as 'parents could accept anything else apart from a marriage outside one's *jati'*. Even inter-religious marriages could be accepted under specific circumstances, she further stated, but in the case of a marriage outside one's caste, parents would not maintain any contact with their own child and thus literally outcast them.

This was also confirmed in the interviews, as when I asked my research participants which kind of marriage they would under no circumstances be able to accept, they all told me that they could reconcile with almost anything apart from a marriage with someone from a low caste. In that case parents would have no choice but to excommunicate their own child, as they would not be able to allow entry into their home or accept food from a *harijan*.

During my stay with the host family I witnessed on several occasions that the discrimination of low caste people continues to thrive in the local community, despite its legal prohibition since 1949, the year in which the Indian constitution was adopted which outlawed the caste system. Not only did

the members in my host family repeatedly and disapprovingly inform me about the low caste status of passers-by or local artists shown on the regional television channel, but they also refused entry into their home to people from lower castes.

It became clear that the notion of pollution associated with lower castes is highly internalized by the local community, such as can be illustrated by the events on one sunny afternoon in March. A new regulation was passed by the state compelling all cattle to be earmarked, in order to link each animal with its owner and thus be able to fine those owners who mistreat their cattle (mainly bulls, as they do not give milk). That day the veterinary came with a local, female assistant in order to earmark the three cows of my host-family. I was asked to brew tea for everybody, while they helped the veterinary and his assistant to control the animals. After they were done with their work I carried the tray with cups outside, but was admonished by my host mother Sangeeta to pour the content of two cups into metal cups instead of the usual porcelain ones. Those two cups were presented to the veterinary and his assistant, as they were both from a lower caste and thus not allowed to eat or drink from the good crockery.

After having finished their tea while seated on a plastic chair outside the house, I wanted to clear everything away, but again I was stopped by Sangeeta, and she told me that the metal cups were polluted and therefore first needed to be rinsed under the water-tap outside before I could carry them back inside. On most similar occasions, when a low caste person had done some kind of labour for the family and were thanked with the usual cup of tea or a meal, the labourers themselves washed their dishes outside the tap after having finished with it. This in, what seemed to me, an acknowledgement and consequently affirmation of their marginal position in society.

These and similar instances indicate how strongly the local community distinguishes and discriminates on the basis of caste and how strong their abhorrence is to become polluted by breaching any of the caste boundaries. Therefore, it will be of no surprise that this feeling is expressed even stronger when it comes to one of the purest and holiest unions possible, that between husband and wife.

It is important to point out that caste and class are strongly interlinked and that conventional power relations between castes can change together with class changes. Thus, in the case someone from a low caste belongs to a well-off economic class, this also results in his upward mobility on the hierarchical ladder. Power relations are therefore not merely determined by caste background but also connected to other criteria and foremost to class. As the majority of my respondents belonged to the same caste and broadly speaking to the same economic class, I cannot name a specific example of such a case, but it is important to bear in mind that such upward mobility does occur (and increasingly so).

I asked all of my research participants whether they knew anyone who had married to a *harijan*, but they claimed not to know anyone in person having done so. However, they had sometimes heard others gossip about such cases, which proves it is not entirely unheard of. One elder woman told

me that a *rajput* girl from a nearby village had married a *harijan* in her village. When I asked her about the consequences this had for the girl and her family, this is what I was told:

> 'A girl here, named Purna, from our caste [*rajput*], has married a *harijan.* Now her parents will not invite her as long as they live. They do not maintain any kind of relation with her, nor do they invite her, nor do they visit her. They are ashamed, you know, that a *rajput* has married a *harijan*. She has dishonoured her parents, so why would anyone feel sorry for her, right? She now lives in her husband's home.'

I do not know whether the girl was actually punished this severely and entirely excommunicated from her natal kin network. However, the account does give an idea of the terms in which people think and talk about such inter-caste marriages. When I asked whether the girl faces a lot of difficulties and stigmatization since her marriage, I was told that there had been some severe gossiping going on about her, and that she is looked at disapprovingly, but she further said that there is no reason to feel pity for her:

> 'The girl has lost her mind! Her parents, relatives, brothers and sisters, everybody keeps their distance from her. Suppose anyone from our *rajput* caste were to enter the house of a *harijan,* and eat or drink there, people will gossip by saying; 'Look! She has married a *harijan*!' The girl has made a mistake and she should feel burdened by it. Now all her relatives feel ashamed and have to carry its burden!'

The girl now lives with her in-laws and does not speak to her natal kin anymore. According to my respondents this was the usual procedure with an inter-caste marriage, namely that the spouse from a higher caste is excommunicated from his community and in most cases all contact with the natal family is broken. Further repercussion this brings is that, as parents do not accept the marriage and feel shamed by the behaviour of their child, they refrain from supporting them financially by any means. Therefore the couple becomes largely dependent on the natal family of the spouse from a lower caste.

Such cases of inter-caste marriage do occur, but I believe they are rather rare as most of my respondents could not bring any concrete examples to mind. Everybody agreed on the unacceptability of such marriages and when choosing a partner youngsters usually make sure that that person will belong to the same or a similar caste as their own. During interviews this was also repeatedly stressed spontaneously by respondents. One of my male informants told me that his wife's caste is different from his own but he hastily added to this that they are on a similar level. He furthermore stated that it is accepted to marry someone from a slightly lower or higher caste, such as for a *thakur/rajput* to respectively marry a *neri/kapoor* or *sharma/pandit*. 'As long as it is not a *harijan*' he continued, which was a statement repeatedly made throughout my fieldwork. Thus the caste boundary is hardly ever crossed in love marriages, as everybody seems to be fully aware of the far-going consequences this might bring.

4.1.2 Secondary Criteria

Apart from the caste criterion, the criteria which are of importance for the selection of a spouse differed as to whether the spouse concerned was male or female. The majority of my respondents informed me that when looking for a wife or a daughter-in-law, people look whether the girl concerned has a good character, which usually means that she is obedient, docile and pays her respect to elders. Equally important for women is that they are hard-working and able to manage the household.

When looking for a husband or a son-in-law on the other hand, people in the first place look whether the boy in question has an income and the financial means to maintain a family, whether he belongs to a good family and has a comfortable and decent house and how much land he owns. The boy should also be of good character and should not have bad habits, such as drinking or smoking.

The fact that these criteria significantly differ along gender lines is perfectly understandable if one bears in mind that the customary family structure in the region is *virilocal*, which means that families are formed along the male bloodline, with sons living under the same roof and their wives moving in with them once they are married. Thus, sons continue to live in their natal family, and often in the same house where they grew up, while women leave their natal home after marriage in order to move in with the natal family of their husband.

Whereas the boy's family hopes for a good-natured girl who is hard working and can relieve her mother-in-law from the heavy household chores, the family of the girl is more interested in the material and familial situation their daughter will encounter after her marriage. In the first place they want to guarantee that her future husband will be able to maintain his wife and that she will have a decent home to move to, both in a material and a personal sense. Not only do they hope that the girl will have a well-furnished house to guarantee her comfort there, but it is also important to look at how many family members are living there and whether these people will be able to make the girl feel at home. The size of the family matters, as a man with a sizeable natal family is in some cases considered as a disadvantage, because this means that the girl will have many family members to look after.

All of my female respondents who had married with someone of their own choice, often without informing their own parents on beforehand, were through some medium or the other informed about their husband's financial and familial situation prior to their marriage. Even though they usually said that it was primarily the boy's character which made them decide to marry him, they all admitted that they had actively sought information about his family and his financial situation. In case the boy came from a nearby village, they usually personally knew the boy and his living conditions. Sometimes they had visited the boy's family and seen his house while attending a religious festival in his village, had questioned their peers about him or had done both.

However, in the case of a 'long-distance' affair, when the girl is not familiar with the boy's reputation and financial situation through her own personal experiences and knowledge, she needs to gather information from other sources. My informants who had experienced such a situation told me that they had done this by questioning a close friend or relative of the boy, either directly or through a mutual friend (such as in the case of Kamala, which I discussed in section 3.3). Furthermore, in these cases the boy himself was an important source of information. During dates and conversations over the phone, matters as family composition and professional occupations were thoroughly discussed. The initiative was not only taken by girls themselves, but also by boys, which indicates that men are aware of the general significance women attribute to these secondary criteria. Two of my respondents from a love marriage related to me that their husband had suggested to them to visit his village, have a look at his house and be introduced to his parents.

4.1.3 Religion and Ethnicity

When I asked my respondents about the importance of finding someone from the same religion and ethnicity, they told me that this was not considered an important criterion, and that marriages between different religions and ethnicities are tolerated. However, I have to remark here that I do suspect this to be a so-called politically correct answer and that when it actually occurs it is not as much tolerated as people claim it to be.

The reasons for my suspicion are first of all that Manali can be characterized as a region with a large diversity of communities. This diversity can be attributed to the fact that Manali is the last town reachable by road for most part of the year, as the national highway winding further north in the mountains is closed due to heavy snowfall from October until May. Therefore many people who originally come from areas on a higher altitude, mainly from Lahaul, have settled in Manali and its surrounding villages in order to be able to continue their businesses even during the colder months of the year. As the majority of Lahauli's are Buddhist their culture differs quite a lot from the local, Hindu culture. Furthermore, there is a rather large community of Tibetan refugees as well as a sizeable Nepali and Bihari (from the eastern Indian province of Bihar) community. These different communities live to a large extent segregated from each other, as becomes visible in various spheres. Not only do the various communities live in separate areas of town and thus form their separate ghettos, but their children also receive education in separate schools, and each community can be connected to a specific economic activity. Whereas Lahauli's can be labelled as mostly middle and upper-middle class and are active in business, Nepali's and Bihari's mostly belong to the lower social classes and work as low-paid labourers, both in construction works and in the orchards of the local land-owning classes.

Intercommunity marriages are very rare, and when they do occur it is mostly between local Hindus and Lahauli's who have been living in the area for a long time and therefore have been integrated quite well into the local community. Note that, regardless of the extent of integration, it does not appear to be possible to entirely shed one's community roots. Even in the case of long-time settlement in the area local people continue to label families in terms of their area of origin. In the village where I stayed I talked to several local women who had married into a Lahauli family. In these cases the local women continued to practice Hinduism and go to the local temple, even though one or several of the family members in their marital family were Buddhists. As the social class of these Lahauli's largely overlapped with the class of the local land-owning community, the marriages were accepted, even though prejudices did exist and the women did inform me that they experienced some difficulties adjusting to the cultural differences after their marriages.

Another element which might play a role here is the inclusive nature of Hinduism. Since approximately the fifth century A.D. the Buddha has been added to the Hindu pantheon, in which he is considered to be one of the *avatars* (incarnations) of Vishnu (Brockington, 1998: 66-8). Thus, instead of being seen as a completely distinct religion, Buddhism is believed to be a form of Hinduism by most Hindus. Therefore, for a local Hindu to marry a practicing Lahauli Buddhist might not be considered to be the cause for any major (religious) problems. Still, the fact that respondents did use the different labels of Hinduism/Hindu and Buddhism/Buddhist seems to indicate that they acknowledge that these do concern, at least up to a certain extent, different religions.

However, to marry a Nepali or a Bihari is seen as more problematic. The eldest daughter of Sangeeta, my 'host-mother', had eloped with a Nepali and it took the girl's family more than a year to accept the marriage (I will discuss this case in more detail in chapter V). Apart from the fact that the man in question belonged to a different ethnic community, his lower social class also played an important role in the initial rejection of the marriage. On another occasion a respondent disapprovingly remarked that at least one local girl had married a Bihari labourer, working at a nearby hydro-project.

It does then appear that social class is a more important criterion for a prospective spouse than his or her religion or ethnicity. However, as social class is strongly interlinked with one's ethnicity in the region, specific communities are to be avoided for marriage, such as Nepali's and Bihari's, whereas others who are known for their prosperity and business-mindedness such as Lahauli's are accepted under certain conditions, even if this means that the spouses will hold different religious beliefs. It needs notice however that the Muslim community in Manali is negligible and therefore no one could inform me about any instance of a marriage between a Muslim and a Hindu. Whereas the contentiousness of inter-religious marriages between these two communities has been reported in a number of academic sources, it does not appear to be of relevance in the region of my study (Chowdhry, 2007 and Mody, 2008).

Thus, inter-community marriages, in which spouses have a differing ethnic and/or religious background, are accepted if the social class of the spouses is similar. Such marriages can be both

arranged as well as out of love and I have interviewed women from both kinds. One of them is Anusha, a close relative of my host family.

> Anusha fell in love with a Buddhist Lahauli boy from her village, who had settled there with his parents. After having had an affair of some two to three years she informed her parents and brothers about her love and asked them to arrange the marriage for her, thus she had a so-called love-cum-arranged marriage. Initially Anusha's family and kin told her to wait a little longer before getting married, as she was still only eighteen years old, but the boy and his family insisted that the marriage would soon take place as the boy's mother needed a helping hand with the household. Anusha's kin agreed and shortly afterwards the couple got married. Anusha's in-laws are Buddhists, but she herself is a Hindu who frequents the local temple to pray to the village deity, Kartik Swami. When I asked Anusha how her parents thought about the difference in religion between her and her husband, she told me that they did not consider it to be a problem. They told her: 'It is your choice. The girl has to stay there [in her marital home], so if the boy is good, if he earns money, has a house and land, it is okay for us, then what can we say?'

Another instance are the neighbours of my host family. They come originally from Lahaul, but have been living in the village since long and are in the possession of a big house and a sizeable amount of land there. The eldest man in the family is married to a local woman, and his two sons have in their turn also married local women. All the marriages were arranged. I have interviewed both the daughters-in-law in the family, Jaya and Pratibha, whose marriages have respectively taken place six years and three months ago. Both the women claimed that their parents arranged their marriage in this family because of the nearness to their own village (within five to ten kilometres), which means that they were well aware about the family's reputation and their social standing.

This brings me to another important criterion in selecting a marriage candidate; the distance between the natal homes of the spouses.

4.1.4 Distance

When I asked my respondents whether they preferred to find a marriage candidate from nearby, the answers were mixed. Some decisively stated that distance was not an issue, whereas others asserted that it is better to look for a spouse in a nearby village. The main reasons given for the preference of a spouse from nearby was that this would guarantee a high level of cultural homogeneity, facilitating the process of adjustment for the girl in her marital family. Furthermore, the nearness of her natal network would enable the girl to maintain close contacts in her natal village with friends and kin, and enable

her to either give or receive support there in times of need, such as illness. Finally, when looking for a spouse nearby there is a higher liability that the information parents and kin receive about the marriage candidate is correct, as it can be verified by different informants within one's own network. In many cases the parents and close kin themselves personally know the spouse's family, and consequently they are acquainted with his or her character, educational and professional qualities, financial situation as well as the family's reputation. This can be illustrated by the story of Yamuna, Nirmala's mother.

Yamuna grew up in a village in Lahaul, and it was the wish of her widowed mother to arrange a good marriage for her daughter. Initially Yamuna declined all marriage requests, but when her mother's health deteriorated she decided that she no longer wanted to object. One day, a family from Shuru, a village near to Manali, came to ask for her hand. They talked to Yamuna's mother and informed her about the boy's character and home situation, saying that he would be a good husband to her daughter. That very evening it was decided that the wedding would take place and the next morning, Yamuna left her natal home to move to Shuru. On her arrival there, Yamuna's dreams were soon shattered, as she discovered that her husband and his kin had concealed a major secret from her and had created the false impression for her mother that she were to become his first wife. Instead Yamuna discovered that her husband had already been married three times before, having first married when he was only fourteen years old, and that each of his previous wives had left due to severe harassments by the dominant mother-in-law.

Yamuna felt deeply hurt by the fraud done to her and her natal family, but she decided that there was only a way forward and not a way back. As she had come to her husband's house, she could not return to her natal home because this would lead to reputation damage (something which her in-laws must have been aware of). Yamuna decided to fight for her marriage, and endure her mother-in-law's harassments.

After giving birth to her first child, Nirmala, Yamuna returned to her natal home for a while (as is common for women in India who have recently become a mother). As Yamuna later found out, on the day her husband decided to leave to pick her up there, his mother told him that he should leave her in Lahaul and not bring her back. However, Yamuna's husband did not heed his mother but went to bring back his wife and daughter. About a year later Yamuna and her husband decided to live separately and form a nuclear family. Up to her death Yamuna hardly talked or had contact with her mother-in-law.

Yamuna told me that she has had to endure a lot and that she believes it must have severely troubled her mother. However, there was nothing she could do, as the road to her hometown is blocked most time of the year and it is a long journey to reach there. 'What to do?' she asked me, 'It's all a matter of destiny!', which indicates her strong belief in predestination. However, she was adamant that her own daughter would marry nearby, which did eventually happen to her own relief.

Overall, the majority of marriages in which spouses originated from relatively distant areas were love marriages. Whenever marriages were arranged, parents and kin usually looked for a son or daughter-in-law from within a reach of approximately ten to forty kilometres from their home town. This is a logical consequence of the manner in which the majority of marriages are arranged in the region. When arranging a marriage, people use their existing networks of friends, kin and acquaintances in order to find a suitable match for their child. As people in the first place make use of word of mouth advertisement, suggestions usually concern a young man or woman from within the valley itself.

That distance is considered an issue can also be illustrated by the story of Pallavi, a twenty-six year old mother of one son whose marriage has been arranged in a village at some five to ten kilometres distance from the village where she grew up. When I asked Pallavi whether she had ever been in love with someone or planned to choose her own life partner, she told me that this had been the case.

> In secondary school Pallavi had liked one of her class mates, a boy who originally came from Sundernagar (which is located at some 130 kilometres from Manali) and asked her family for their consent to marry him. However, her family members declined as they said the boy's home was too far away. As Pallavi's mother was ailing, she told her daughter that she would not be able to visit her daughter if she were to marry at such a big distance. Pallavi decided that she did not want to contest the decision of her family elders and therefore did not elope with the boy but instead cancelled her marriage plans. When her mother and uncle later suggested a marriage candidate from a nearby village she reluctantly assented.

The fact that the majority of 'long-distance' marriages are love marriages is not surprising, as many of these marriages are rooted in the years spent away from home for higher education (as I discussed in the previous chapter). The nearest colleges to Manali are located in Kullu (at a distance of 40 km) and Mandi (at a distance of 110 km), and young people from all across Kullu district come to these towns to join the colleges, while staying in hostels. These college years, away from home, are often an occasion for youngsters to spend more time with people from the opposite sex and fall in love, safely beyond the reach of the control of one's kin and elders. As youngsters from different geographical regions cluster together in these colleges, the chance also increases that one falls in love with someone from the other side of the district.

However, as the distance between the birth place of spouses increases, the cultural differences between them also increase. These cultural differences can be the source of marital difficulties and complicate the adjustment process in the marital home. The differences named by respondents were often related to very practical issues, such as different weather conditions, but nonetheless led to difficulties in adjustment. Apart from the problems some women encountered due to the cold climate

in Manali, which makes some household chores such as washing clothes difficult, several women named the difference in language as an important cultural differences. They informed me that they do not master the local language and therefore have to talk in Hindi in their marital home.

4.1.5 Horoscope and pandit

When asked about the criteria which have to be taken into consideration for the selection of a spouse, none of my respondents spontaneously mentioned the relevance of matching horoscopes. Only when I explicitly asked them whether a *pandit* (Hindu priest) is invited to cast the horoscope prior to the wedding did they mention it. Informants told me that horoscopes are mainly of importance in arranged marriages as, after parents and kin are informed about a possible marriage candidate, one of the first things they do is to ask a *pandit* to cast their horoscopes. By doing so religious validation for the marriage is sought while at the same time the responsibility for the success or failure of the marriage is placed not merely in the hands of the parents but also with supernatural powers. If the horoscopes are matching and the *pandit* on the basis thereof informs the parents that the couple in all probability will have a happy and prosperous married life, parents can decide to set a meeting in order to discuss practical matters concerning the wedding. If, however, the horoscopes do not match, the parents will cancel the plans and will not meet each other, nor set a meeting for the girl and boy to meet one another, as in this case the marriage is believed to be doomed to fail and therefore should not be encouraged. This is based on the conviction that marriage is a sacred and religious union between two spouses, whose bond is predestined and that it should therefore only take place if it is religiously validated.

Especially the elder generation seems to attribute a lot of confidence to the authority and righteousness of *pandits*. My host-mother Sangeeta for one frequently seeks the advice of a *pandit* whenever there is some big decision to be taken or there is some cause of distress. She informed me that each year, around the time of the local new year celebration, she pays a *pandit* to cast the horoscope of all of the family members. The previous year the *pandit* had advised her to wear a specific kind of ring to cure her from her illness, and this year he gave an amulet to help her four-year old granddaughter Alka to control her temper. The *pandit* also mentioned that Sangeeta's eldest son Suresh had some abnormality in his horoscope, but that this could be corrected by means of performing a sort of ritual with a coconut. However, Sangeeta told me that she has little trust that Suresh would be willing to perform the ritual.

On one occasion I asked Sangeeta about the importance of a matching horoscope for a good marriage, and she told me that she believed it to be crucial, as spouses whose horoscopes do not match will have a lot of arguments and fights in their marriage and will not get along well. 'But', she disapprovingly continued, 'In a love marriage, the children do not think, they marry someone of their

own choice, elope, but when later on it is discovered that their horoscopes do not match, this will cause arguments [between the spouses].'

Several of my respondents confirmed that in the majority of love marriages the horoscopes are not consulted. However, it might as well be that horoscopes are actually drawn, but that they are not talked about in public, especially in the case of some kind of deviation. Sometimes it is decided to cast the horoscopes in a love marriage after the marriage has taken place or during the wedding ceremonies, such as in the case of Niru who has had a love marriage. After her marriage had taken place a *pandit* was invited at the request of her in-laws and he cast the horoscopes of the newly-weds. Niru informed me that according to her the horoscope does not have any value if it is consulted after the marriage, as only prior to the marriage it can lead to the cancellation thereof. However, she was happy to inform me that her horoscope matched well with that of her husband, which according to her was one of the reasons why their marriage has so far been free of arguments. However, suppose the horoscopes would not have been as positive, then maybe Niru would have refrained from mentioning it to me at all.

Niru's younger brother-in-law had also married recently. His marriage was a love-cum-arranged marriage, as he informed his parents about his preference for a girl named Pooja and they consequently approached the girl's parents to ask for her hand. Pooja told me that there was a period of one year between the time when her parents were asked to give her hand in marriage and the actual time of the marriage. This was due to the fact that there were some deviations found while calculating their astrological charts. Therefore the *pandit* advised them that it would not be auspicious if they would marry within that year. Pooja told me that she was displeased about the delay of the wedding, but that she could not counter the *pandit's* decision. It is possible to let a *pandit* correct minor deviations by means of reparation rituals but as these are usually quite costly families might refrain from having them done.

Apart from casting one's horoscope and their religious function in performing the wedding ceremonies, *pandits* thus are also requested to decide which day and date are auspicious for the wedding rituals to take place. Both in love marriages and in arranged marriages they are asked for their input concerning these data. Even when couples elope in order to have a court marriage in secret, they do often perform a religious ceremony afterwards in their local temple and the decision for the date of this ceremony is left in the hands of the *pandit.* Thus, it appears that divine confirmation for the auspiciousness of a marriage is always sought, irrespective of the type of marriage.

4.2 First elope, then arrange

When I looked at the strategies employed in the field by young people who want a love marriage, I discovered that there are some recurring and strikingly similar elements in all their accounts. These are

not only important in the sense that they illustrate the active role individuals who opt for a love marriage play in order to fulfill their wish, but also the way parents react and the strategies they develop to cope with the increased autonomy of children. Now let us look in more detail at this course of action involving love marriages.

As I argued in the previous section, young people do make use of existing normative lenses while choosing their prospective spouse and in general their partner is compatible concerning class, caste and other relevant domains. The main difference with an arranged marriage is that in a love marriage parents are not asked to look for a prospective spouse, but children themselves select someone of their own preference. However, this does not mean that parents do not have their input in the marriage at all.

First of all I want to point out a remarkable and important divergence of opinions which I encountered in the field. This is that I asked all respondents from the younger generation, more specifically being in their twenties and early thirties, which kind of marriage they think parents prefer. The large majority was convinced that parents prefer arranged marriages, as they can then themselves choose whom they believe to be suitable to marry their son or daughter.

However, when I asked the elder generation (over forty years old) which kind of marriage they actually preferred, there was only a small number of respondents who decisively argued against a love marriage. The large majority of parents said that they preferred a love-cum-arranged marriage in which they could arrange the marriage with someone of their child's own preference. However, an opinion which was also repeatedly expressed was that times now have progressed, and that it is no longer the parents' opinion which is of importance but rather the children's. As Sangeeta told one day, 'what value does my preference have? Nowadays the boy and girl themselves make the choice [for a spouse]. Whoever our son likes, we also like that person, isn't it?'

However, the fact that parents claimed that they would not contest their children's choice as long as he or she was socially compatible, was not merely triggered by their progressive attitudes, but foremost by the risk of losing the benefits of joint living, which is in the first place applicable to the boy's parents as I will argue in a little while. Moreover, another element which was repeatedly mentioned by respondents was the role of fear. They mentioned that they were afraid that a refusal from their side might result in an act of despair from their children's side. Apparently, together with the increase in love marriages, suicide amongst young people has also increased. This was confirmed to me by a local nurse, who had worked for a long time at the local Mission Hospital. She said that since the past ten to fifteen years a sharp increase in the number of suicides can be witnessed and that nowadays some five to six attempted suicide victims are admitted in hospital a year. She had repeatedly asked these young people, both boys and girls, for the reason of their suicide attempt and the majority claimed to have done it because of parental refusal to their love marriage. Thus, it seems that together with the *ideoscape* of romantic love, its association with predestination at no matter what price has also spread (Appadurai, 2003: 45-6).

Thus, returning to the divergence between perspectives given from different generations, it appears that the younger generation estimates the chance at discontentment and disapproval of their parents higher than the parents themselves state it to be. This is also reflected in the course of actions undertaken by young people once they have decided that they want to marry each other. One element which occurred in all love marriages and was invariably mentioned when discussing them was that at some point the youngsters decided to elope with their partner. In the majority of cases youngsters had not informed their parents at all about their affair and preference for a spouse. Thus, instead of asking their consent, they anticipated the parents' disapproval. These elopements can then be seen as a kind of pre-emptive strike, as youngsters would rather elope than to risk the disapproval of their parents.

In the majority of cases elopement entailed that the boy would take the girl to his home. Only in one case did they first go to court to legally get married before going to the boy's home but otherwise the girl was directly brought to her new home. However, even without the wedding being legally held, this act is usually a permanent move. Once the girl has gone to the boy's home and has been introduced by the boy to his parents as his 'chosen one', word will soon spread and to return to her natal home would result in severe reputation damage for her. I will illustrate this by elaborating one case of a young and educated woman named Niru, who met her husband during her years at college.

> Niru comes from a rather distant village at some eighty kilometers, but was staying away from home for her studies. There she met Ajay through a mutual friend and as they liked each other they exchanged phone numbers. The following year Ajay and Niru regularly talked to each other over the phone and on rare occasions they met in Kullu.
>
> One day Niru had some ailment and decided to visit a reputed doctor in Manali, accompanied by some of her close friends. On her way back to Kullu she coincidentally met Ajay and they stopped the car in order to have a conversation. As they were at that moment quite close to Ajay's home, Ajay suggested to Niru that he would show her his house which Niru at first refused. However, Ajay insisted and eventually convinced her by saying that he would only show her the outside of the house and not take her inside. Next Niru went along with Ajay, but eventually Ajay urged her to meet his parents and before Niru realized it she was inside. 'All at once he took me inside and I could not go back anymore' she said.
>
> When I asked her whether she thought her parents would not have consented to her marriage with Ajay, Niru told me that she did not believe this to be the case. Her parents were initially very angry about her marriage but not because they did not like Ajay. Their anger was mainly due to the fact that Niru had eloped without first informing them.

In the majority of these elopements, the boy had previously asked his parents for their consent to bring his soon-to-become-wife home. However, as this notice was usually given only a few hours

in advance, it can rather be considered a *pro forma* request for consent and parents did tell me that, even if they would have protested, their son would not have changed his mind. The girl's parents were never informed on beforehand, but only heard the news after their daughter had already been brought to her in-laws' home.

Thus, parents are rather suddenly confronted with the news of their children's marriage and the manner in which they react to this differs noticeably between the parents from the boy's side and those from the girl's side. Whereas both parties are initially displeased about the events, it is the boy's side who feels responsible to approach the girl's side and convince them to accept the marriage.

First let me discuss the manner in which the boy's parents cope with the given situation. In the majority of cases the boy's parents were initially displeased, especially if they had not been informed at all or only very shortly on beforehand. However, within a few days or weeks they decided that what had happened could not be reverted and that they would have to accept their son's choice. An important consideration for the acceptance of the marriage is that it is in their own benefit to do so, as was expressed by Nirmala's mother, who has three sons who are not yet married:

> 'They [the boy's parents] will have to accept her, no matter how the girl is, because she is the boy's choice, right? If we would say that we do not like her, then he will separate from us. I have three sons, once they are married my work will become light. Now I have to cook and clean, but then one will do this, I will do that…work will be less.'

Thus, parents realize that, if they would contest the marriage, they might risk that their son will leave them and start a nuclear family. This will not only mean that the parents will lose his contribution to the wealth of the family, as he will share the family expenses and help with labour on the land, but also that they will not have a daughter-in-law to relieve the boy's mother from her household chores. Moreover, the joint family in India serves as a security net, both in terms of finances and care. If parents do not have a son to live with them, this means that in their old day they will miss the financial support and care the son and his wife might provide.

The girl's parents on the other hand are usually enraged because of the elopement of their daughter and express this by refusing to talk to her or to let her return home for a visit. This reaction is directly connected to the normative role a girl's parents are expected to fulfil, which is one of guardianship up to the point where they arrange her marriage and pass the guardianship on to her husband. However, if parents cannot perform this role it is considered disgraceful and it might harm their reputation. The girl's elopement might not merely cause doubts about her chastity and thus dishonour her but also her close relatives as they were not able to guard her sexuality.

By means of excommunicating her, the girl's parents try to repair their damaged reputation as they thus indicate to their community that they do not approve of her behaviour and are therefore willing to sacrifice their personal bond with her in favour of their own reputation and that of their close kin. However, their public contestation is usually short-lived as after a while the parents accept the marriage and with the healing of time restore their relation with their daughter. Therefore, the anger portrayed by parents is more often a kind of formality than heartfelt.

Nevertheless, one prerogative for the girl's parents to reconcile with their daughter is that they are requested to do so by significant others. In practice this is mostly done by the boy's parents but sometimes also by close kin from the girl's side. In nearly all the cases of love marriages in my field, the boy's parents had decided to visit the girl's parents in order to convince them to accept the marriage. This was not always readily achieved and in some cases the boy's parents had to return several times together with a group of close relatives in order to discuss the situation. I have asked parents from both sides what they discussed on such occasions and they all said that first the girl's side had to be convinced that what had happened had happened and that the children's 'mistake' could not be reverted. Moreover, the boy's side attempted to reassure the girl's parents by telling them that their daughter was more than welcome in their home and that they would take proper care of her. Once the girl's side had been conciliated the conversations would move on to more practical topics, such as the choice for or against the organization of a wedding celebration.

It thus appears that love marriages do not have a dichotomous relation to arranged marriages, but rather that a form of hybridization has taken place. In a love marriage individuals do make an autonomous choice for a partner instead of leaving that decision with family elders, but at the same time the criteria which individuals use to choose their partner strongly correspond to those which their parents would take into consideration. Thus, in most cases, the children choose the kind of spouse their parents would also have selected for them. This is not only done unconsciously, but also out of the sense of duty perceived by children for their parents. Repeatedly youngsters mentioned that they did make the consideration of how their parents would feel about the person of their choice before taking the relationship a step further. It was thus not so much that they feared their parents dissent because of specific character traits of the partner, but rather because they themselves autonomously made the decision without the parents' input. Up to a certain level, the normative behaviour for children to respect and heed their elders is thus adhered to.

However, as the parents' role of kin-making by arranging a marriage is overstepped, they initially feel displeased. Nonetheless out of the desire to retain balance within the joint family, the boy's parents approach the girl's parents, much as they would have done if they would have been planning their son's marriage (then also the boy's side is expected to approach the girl's side to ask for her hand in marriage). However, this time they do not have to ask for her hand but rather reassure them of their good intentions, before discussing some more practical issues.

Does this mean a happy ending to this love story, or is reality slightly more complicated? There is one important concept which has not yet been mentioned but which was very often named by respondents when discussing the differences between marriage patterns. I will discuss this in more detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V: Consequences of the changing marital landscape

> 'In a love marriage the responsibility is the husband's, in an arranged marriage the parents'. If, in the case of an arranged marriage, some disorder will occur, then I can blame my parents: 'you have brought her [chosen my wife]!''

The above mentioned citation was the answer given to me on the question what the difference between a love and an arranged marriage is by a highly educated man in his late twenties, working as a lawyer at the local court in Manali. Moreover, it is an opinion which was repeatedly phrased during my interviews when I asked my respondents to tell me what they believed to be the main differences, advantages and disadvantages of arranged and love marriages. Thus, responsibility appears to be a central concept to respondents when discussing the changes in the marital landscape.

The majority of my respondents reported that parents carry the main responsibility for the success or failure of an arranged marriage, as their input is crucial for the selection of a marriage partner. If the couple encounters marital problems they can address their parents on the topic and ask them to intervene.

However, when the youngsters themselves choose their life partner, parents more often refuse to feel responsible for marital difficulties. A recurring statement was that in love marriages children make their own decision about a life partner without consulting and often even without previously informing their parents. Therefore parents felt that, as children have the autonomy to make their own decisions, they should also carry the consequences of those decisions themselves.

The shifting responsibilities connected with different marriage patterns can be perceived on several levels. There is a shift of responsibilities away from the parents and kin network, placing the main responsibilities with the married couple. As I will argue, these changes have far-reaching consequences for both men and women, but due to the asymmetrical gender relations which are characteristic for patriarchal North India, women are more vulnerable to the possible negative repercussions it brings.

In a love marriage the woman's natal kin does not have the mediating role to find a partner and arrange their daughter's wedding. Subsequently they feel less responsible for any possible marital distress their daughter might encounter. In an arranged marriage, the parents from both the boy's and the girl's side sign a metaphorical contract to recognise the wedding. They are active players in the creation of this new kinship bond and the responsibilities this entails. However, when parents are given only a passive role to play they are sometimes left with the feeling that an unnatural kinship tie is forced upon them, which might result in their opposition to the wedding (Mody, 2008: 8-9).

A more concrete manner in which this shift in responsibilities can be perceived is in the fact that in love marriages it is not common to organize a big wedding celebration or give a dowry. As parents

often feel left out in the decision process concerning the marriage, they do not feel responsible to pay the expenses of the wedding celebration.

Finally, with the main family structure of *virilocality*, women leave their natal family once they get married in order to start living with their husband and his close kin. In the case of joint families, this means that a woman will cohabit with her husband's parents, his unmarried sisters, his brothers and the latter's wife and children. Therefore, women are faced with a process of adjustment in a new family situation, which most of my respondents characterized as a challenging and at times difficult time immediately following their marriage. In the case of a love marriage parents are not always happy about their son's choice for a wife. This sometimes leads to a tense and hostile environment in which the wife has to negotiate her position and start a family.

I will now substantiate the above mentioned changes in familial relations of support and responsibility by means of a number of cases I encountered during my fieldwork in Manali.

5.1 Impact on natal support network

Case 1: Savita and Roshan

On one occasion at the end of February Nirmala introduced me to a woman in her village in order for me to take her interview. After being invited in and having been served tea the woman started to talk to Nirmala in the local Pahari language and I noticed that what was being said distressed Nirmala. I later asked her about the content of the conversation and Nirmala informed me that one of her aunts had been severely injured by her husband.

The woman concerned was one of my respondents whose interview I had conducted on an earlier occasion. She is named Savita and is a twenty-nine year old mother of one son and wife of the youngest brother-in-law of Sangeeta, Kishali. At the age of seventeen Savita's marriage was arranged by her mother and three elder brothers. Kishali is notorious in the village for his bad drinking habit and on several occasions during my stay in Simsa he visited my host family in a drunken condition, in search of a free drink and money. Everybody dreaded these visits and Nirmala complained to me how much she and her husband disliked it when he came over, as he is quarrelsome and accosts her and the other family members when drunk. She also told me how her husband on one occasion scolded Roshan and warned him not to visit them any more after having had a drink, but to no avail. As Roshan is a close relative and an elder he has to be respected and he cannot be refused entry into the house.

Soon after the violent incident Savita's distress turned out to be the talk of town and it led to some severe gossiping. Bit by bit I learned the pieces of the puzzle and found out what exactly had happened.

Roshan and Savita live in a nuclear family, occupying the ground floor of a building which has been built a few years earlier and in which Roshan and two of his elder brothers each occupy one storey. In a drunken fit Roshan had gone to Sanjeev, one of his elder brothers, and accused him of land theft. After a heated discussion Roshan and Sanjeev had started to beat each other and in an attempt to terminate the fighting Savita had thrown herself between the two quarrelling men. Before anyone realised it and could attempt to intervene, Roshan grabbed a sickle and vented his rage on his own wife. He severely hit her upper thigh with the tool. Savita attempted to staunch the bleeding with a shawl and early the next morning was taken to hospital for stitches.

Immediately afterwards Savita's brother came to the village to take his sister and her son to his home. I discussed the affair with my host family and both Nirmala and Sangeeta told me that Roshan is not a bad person *in se* but that alcohol brings out the worst in him. Apparently this was not the first incident in Savita's home, and Nirmala informed me that Savita at one time attempted to commit suicide by taking pills. Savita's parents are both deceased, but her three elder brothers are very worried about her wellbeing. Whenever there is a violent incident, they step into the breach for their sister and accommodate her and her child at their own place. However, this is not a permanent solution, and after Roshan has been cooled down and brought to his senses by both his own relatives as well as those of his wife, Savita returns home. This is also what happened this time, as Savita returned to Simsa after a stay of ten days with her brothers in her natal home.

This incident did not only affect Savita, but also her wider kin network. Both her natal and marital kin network felt responsible to do something about the situation and decided to take up responsibility. On the one hand Savita's close natal kin, more specifically her brothers, decided to give refuge to their sister and provide a place for her to recover from the physical and emotional distress she had suffered. On the other hand Savita's marital kin felt responsible for pointing out Roshan's wrongdoing and for convincing him to alter his behaviour and bring back his wife.

There are several motives for offering support and I will now discuss these in more detail. First of all let us focus on the support given to Savita by her natal kin. This support is rooted in the ideology of the brother-sister tie in India, which is considered to be very strong and inviolable (Uberoi, 2006: 31 and Aura, 2006: 175). This tie is not merely important because of the biological element of consanguinity but it is considered one's social and religious duty to maintain the bond. It is in other words a *dharmic* bond which has also become ritualized in the yearly celebrated festival of *raksha-bandhan* in which sisters tie a *rakhi* (sacred thread) around their brothers wrist. This act does not only symbolize the love of a sister for her brother and her prayers for his well-being, but also the brother's vow to protect her.

Moreover, central to an arranged marriage is the ideology of guardianship in which a woman is always under the protection of a male guardian. Before her marriage this guardianship is in the hands of her male kin and foremost her father and brothers. The reputation and honour of a sister is

closely connected to that of her brothers, as if a sister's chastity is questioned this will not only dishonour her but also her brothers. Therefore, a crucial element in the identity of being a brother is to safeguard a sister's chastity and purity up to the point she is given away in marriage and her guardianship is transferred to her husband.

This can however also be reverted, as in the case a woman autonomously chooses her life partner she circumvents this ideology of the transfer of guardianship. Therefore, as her native kin is not endowed with the role of giving away her hand and passing on the responsibility for her protection and wellbeing, they altogether do not feel responsible for the goods or ills of that marital bond (and it is directly linked to the responsibility perceived by in-laws for the guardianship of the wife, which I will elaborate in section 5.3). This was also expressed by one of my respondents from an arranged marriage, who said it in the following words:

> 'If you have a love marriage, of your own preference, or if you elope to marry, then parents will say: 'You have done your own wish, now it is up to you to look after your home!' If I would have a problem, or something would cause me distress, then my brothers and their wives will take care of me. Then my parents can also say: 'Our daughter has such and such a problem.' That is how it is in an arranged marriage. In a love marriage you receive less support. Your parents have no choice but to help you, but your brothers and their wives will not be able to help that much. They will say: 'You have married to someone of your own choice, so from now on take care of your own life!' Parents however do it [give support] up to their death, they cannot leave her behind, no matter which kind of marriage she had.'

Thus, whereas parents might still come to the rescue in times of need, it is said that brothers will no longer take up responsibility. I have not found a case of a love marriage in which support sought from brothers was not given, thus I cannot confirm whether such statements are merely normative or whether they also reflect actual practice. However, the fact that parents do sometimes, albeit usually reluctantly, support children even in the case they had not been given input in the wedding decision, will be discussed in one of the following cases.

First let us return to the case of Roshan and Savita and this time from the perspective of Savita's marital kin. Roshan's misbehaviour does not only harm his wife, but also affects his natal kin in the sense that it is injurious to their reputation. This became obvious to me on several occasions, which I will outline here. One occasion was when I decided to take the bus to town with Nirmala and in the bus a woman from a nearby village questioned her about what had happened to Savita. Later Nirmala confided in me that she felt ashamed for Roshan's behaviour, as he is a close relative of hers. On another occasion a lady from the village came to visit Sangeeta at home and informed her that she actually wanted to visit Savita but could not meet with her as she had not yet returned. The lady and Sangeeta talked for a while about Savita and Sangeeta asked her not to talk about the incident with any outsiders but instead to tell them that she was injured due to accidentally falling down and hitting a

sharp object. A final occasion which deserves mentioning here is that Nirmala informed me that Sangeeta disliked it when she talked to me about the exact circumstances of the incident and therefore she refrained from mentioning it to me in the presence of her mother-in-law.

All of these instances indicate that the incident is closely connected to the emotion of shame and thus honour-bound as it affects the family's reputation. Here again the ideology of male guardianship is crucial, as one way for a man to secure his honour is by guaranteeing the protection of the women in his family. However, instead of her protector Roshan became his wife's aggressor and his behaviour therefore is considered dishonourable in the community and does not only dishonour him but also his close kin. As the marriage was arranged and thus a kind of contract between Savita's marital and natal kin, all people partaking in the drafting and signing of the contract feel responsible for its observance.

Note moreover that Savita nor anyone in her network reported this case of domestic violence to the police. This can be understood from the Indian ideal of femininity and the wife-husband relation. The normative behaviour for a wife is to be obedient and submissive towards her husband and endure any distress caused by him. Furthermore she is not supposed to talk back to her husband nor should she discuss any of their private disagreements with outsiders. This perseverance and silence from the woman's side is aimed at maintaining the reputation of both her husband and his family, but also at preventing parents from feeling bad about the unsuccessfulness of the wedding which they have arranged. Therefore, only in cases of extreme sufferance do women seek refuge to their natal kin, and only very rarely to the police and the law (Vatuk, 2006: 213-4).

Case 2: Cousin of Sangeeta

One early morning in February Sangeeta left for a neighbouring village after breakfast. I asked Nirmala where and for what reason she had left and Nirmala informed me that one of the female cousins of her mother-in-law was facing marital problems. The previous evening a female relative of Sangeeta had informed her over the phone about the situation and asked her to join her and a number of other relatives the next day in order to discuss the situation together and look for a possible solution.

The cousin concerned has had an arranged marriage and is the mother of a son. However, after a few years of marriage the couple started to have marital problems as the husband became addicted to narcotics. When under the influence of drugs he becomes aggressive and on one such occasion, when having an argument with his wife, he has physically aggressed her by beating her. Not being able to bear the violence at home, the woman decided to return to her natal home.

However, the return to the natal homes in times of severe marital distress is considered to be only a temporary solution. The notion of marriage being for life is strongly held and recourse to divorce is only sought if there is no other way out. Therefore, the first step taken is to mobilize a

network of support from the woman's natal kin in order to talk to her husband and the woman's marital kin. The goal is to remind the woman's marital kin of their responsibility to safeguard her wellbeing, as has been agreed upon at the time of the wedding. They will urge the marital kin to take steps in order to improve the marital situation and guarantee the safety of the woman in her home.

The next day Nirmala informed me that Sangeeta and her relatives had talked to her cousin's mother-in-law and urged her to do anything within her powers to make her son cease his drug abuse and guard the safety of her daughter-in-law.

In both of the abovementioned cases the women concerned have had an arranged marriage. When these women are faced with marital difficulties, both their natal and marital kin feel responsible and attempt to intervene and find a solution for the couple's problems. In the case of the natal kin, this is done by providing temporary shelter to the woman as well as by addressing her marital kin and pressing them to do something in order to improve the woman's domestic environment.

Thus, both the parents and close kin from the man's and the woman's side feel responsible to intervene. Their motive for this intervention is however not merely altruistic and in the wellbeing of the women involved but also in order to save their own reputation. By arranging their children's marriage parents actively create an honour-bound kin relation with each other, and if anything dishonourable were to happen to any of the members within this kin network, this will reflect on the entire network.

But would women from a love marriage count equally on support when needed? Several respondents believed this would not be the case, such as was phrased by Damayanti, one of Sangeeta's cousins. She is a twenty-two year old, educated girl who is not yet married, even though her parents keep bringing up the subject by suggesting possible wedding candidates. However, Damayanti is adamant in her refusal, as she first wants to find a job and learn to stand on her own feet. When I asked her if she thinks it is more difficult for girls who have had a love marriage to adjust in their marital family, she told me that 'if there will be some [marital] problem, then it is difficult [for her]. If she informs her parents about it, they will scold her by telling her that it was her own choice to marry there.' But is this also what actually happens in practice? I will explore this by means of the following two cases.

Case 3: Lata and Pankaj

Lata is the eldest daughter of Sangeeta, and I have known her as well as her husband since I first came to Manali. I did not get a chance to meet them during the three months of my fieldwork but they have mentioned the circumstances of their marriage to me on previous occasions as well as shown me their wedding pictures. Lata and Pankaj have had a love marriage and they ran away together to get married

in Nepal. I asked Sangeeta about the details of the marriage of her eldest daughter, and this is what she had to say on this topic.

Lata is the eldest daughter of Sangeeta and therefore she was first in turn to get married. Several suitors had come to ask for her hand but Lata stubbornly refused as she said she did not feel ready yet to lead the life of a married woman. One day, when Lata was 17 or 18 years old, she did not return home after school. The sudden disappearance of the girl severely distressed her relatives and they started to search for the girl. All kinds of scenarios played in Sangeeta's mind about the cause of her daughter's sudden disappearance, and she feared that the girl was kidnapped or even worse, murdered.

After some fifteen to twenty days without any news about their daughter, Sangeeta was informed that Lata had ran away to Nepal in all secrecy and married there to Pankaj. Lata had met Pankaj in her hometown, Simsa, where he worked as a cook in one of the local hotels. Pankaj is Nepalese but had been living in Simsa for many years. Lata never informed any of her relatives about her love for Pankaj.

I asked Sangeeta for the reason why Lata decided to run away in all secrecy instead of informing her parents and asking for their approval. According to her both Lata and Pankaj anticipated the disapproval of the marriage, because Pankaj did not have a well-paid job and thus not the financial means to provide for a family. Furthermore, Pankaj's ethnicity could have been at his disadvantage, as parents prefer a suitor from nearby for their children (as I discussed earlier).

Pankaj's parents scolded their son when he brought Lata home to get married and they said he should have first informed the girl's parents about his plans and that he would be persevered and severely punished by the girl's relatives if anything were to happen to her. Therefore Pankaj decided it would be better to inform Lata's parents about their marriage in order to reassure them, express his regret for the mistake he had made and to ask for their forgiveness. Furthermore, he also feared a police investigation and therefore decided it would be in everyone's advantage to confess what had happened.

Sangeeta was relieved to hear her daughter was in good health but also angry as she could not comprehend her daughter's decision to marry the way she had. Sangeeta's husband, on hearing the news, was beside himself with anger. He refused to talk to his daughter or her husband and firmly stated that he 'would not allow them to return home as long as he lived'.

Shortly after their marriage Lata and Pankaj decided to move to Delhi and looked for accommodation and a job there. However, shortly after their arrival there Lata became seriously ill. Not knowing what to do, Pankaj called Sangeeta and informed her about her daughter's illness. 'But where could I go?' Sangeeta asked me. Her husband refused to reconcile and told his wife; 'If you go there, you will have to stay with them, I will not allow you to enter my house again!'. Sangeeta decided she had no choice but to call Pankaj and tell him to look after her daughter. She pointed out

his responsibility to him by saying; 'You took her with you, so now it is up to you to look after her, and make sure she gets the treatment she needs in order to get cured'.

Luckily Lata did recover from her illness and after a while she and Pankaj decided to return to Manali and rent a room there. In the meantime the marriage of Lata's younger, half-sister had been arranged and she was soon to be married. Sangeeta's brothers-in-law decided it was about time to forgive Lata and Pankaj for their secret marriage. They attempted to cool down the anger of Sangeeta's husband and convince him to accept it, to which they did succeed. Sangeeta's husband invited both Lata and her husband to attend the wedding party of her sister. This was not only the first time Sangeeta met her daughter as a married woman but also the first occasion on which she could hold her firstborn grandchild in her arms, as Lata has shortly before given birth to a daughter.

Case 4: Yamuna (Nirmala's mother)

When I asked Yamuna whether she thinks parents who have arranged their child's marriage feel more responsible for the success or failure of that marriage, she told me that she believes this to be the case. She informed me that 'when parents arrange a big marriage, they have more fear as they will think; we have arranged the wedding according to our own wishes. If our daughter will encounter any kind of difficulty, we will have to go [to her marital home]. We will have to ask them, why did you take her away and marry her that day if you do not like her today?'.

Yamuna furthermore gave me her version of her daughter's marriage. She told me that Suresh, her son-in-law, had on several occasions come to their home to ask for Nirmala's hand. However, both Yamuna and her husband thought the time was not yet ripe for Nirmala to marry, as she was only seventeen and thus still considered a minor. Furthermore, she wanted Nirmala to at least graduate from secondary school before marrying. Yamuna attempted to convince Suresh to wait a little longer. She told him that she believed her daughter was not ready to lead the life of a married woman, as she had not yet learned any domestic skills such as cooking or how to take care of a household.

However, after having voiced his request three times and having received an unsatisfying answer on all of these occasions, Suresh decided to take fate in his own hands and one evening he took Nirmala home with him.

Yamuna told me how this is considered a point of no return, as once the girl has ran away to stay at the boy's home, she has no other choice but to marry him. Yamuna's husband was furious when he heard the news of his daughter and spent the following days in a drunken fit, scolding his wife and threatening that he would report Suresh to the police. He could have had Suresh punished and possibly jailed as in India the legal age for marriage is eighteen years for girls (and for boys twenty-one). However, Yamuna tried by all means to keep her husband from doing so, as this would in the first place be disastrous for Nirmala herself;

'if Suresh goes to jail, where will we keep her? She will have no other option but to poison herself! How long will she be able to stay in her natal home? If she has ran away once to marry, her reputation will be ruined, how will she be able to marry someone else?'

After their elopement Suresh's close relatives came to visit Nirmala's parents on several occasions in order to convince them that there was no other option but to accept the children's wish, as what had happened had happened. After a while Yamuna and her husband became at peace with the situation, and agreed with their soon-to-be new kin members on the 'if' and 'when' of the wedding celebration.

Yamuna also told me that after Nirmala's elopement she advised her daughter that she should under no circumstances return to her natal home at times of marital distress. She would only be welcome in moments of joy, when there would be happiness in her marital home. Yamuna is currently happy about her daughter's marriage, as she believes Suresh to be a good husband and she enjoys being a grandmother. However, *if* someone in Nirmala's marital family were to complain about her daughter, she would have a ready answer; she *had* warned Suresh that her daughter was still young and inexperienced when it comes to household work, so she cannot be blamed.

The abovementioned two cases indicate how in a love marriage parents are not able to feel as responsible for the success of a marriage as in an arranged marriage. In the case of Lata and Pankaj, Lata's natal kin did not help her in times of ailment but instead pointed out to her husband that it was his responsibility. As this incident happened shortly after Lata's marriage, her natal kin was still angry with her. However, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, parents do reconcile after a while if significant others intervene. In this case these others were the close natal kin of Lata and they eventually convinced her father to forgive his daughter.

Since her sister's marriage Lata and her natal kin have restored their relationship of support but it is unsure whether they would also take responsibility in need. If we look at the case of Nirmala, whose marriage was similar in the sense that her parents also objected to her marriage and needed to be convinced by others before re-establishing the relationship with their daughter, it appears that responsibility can continue to play a role.

Moreover, there is also a more practical reason for the lesser amount of natal support received by women from a love marriage. This is connected to the fact that in love marriages there is a higher occurrence of long distance marriages, as I earlier discussed and which can be partly attributed to the fact that many love couples meet during their years of higher education away from home. The larger the distance between the woman's marital and natal home, the more difficult it is for her to maintain close contact with her natal network and count on their support in times of need.

A last note I want to make here is that in both cases parents refrained from seeking state support, as they did not contact the police. Even though Nirmala's father did threaten to report Suresh to the local police station, he did eventually refrain from doing so. Also in Lata's case her parents and kin

did not ask the police for support, even though the girl was missing and they did not have a trace of her. In this respect parents do employ different strategies from the ones reported by Prem Chowdhry (2007: esp. Chapter 4) in her ethnography about love marriages in Haryana, which is a neighbouring state of Himachal. Chowdhry presents a number of cases of runaway marriages in which the woman's male guardians filed a complaint with the police. Consequently, the couple was often chased down and if caught the man was prosecuted for abduction or even rape and sentenced to jail. The fact that parents in my sample did not ask the police to intervene and sanction seems to indicate that in the area of my research there is a higher degree of acceptance of such marriages as compared to other parts of North India.

5.2 Impact on dowry and wedding celebrations

As marriages are considered as one of the most - if not the most important - life-cycle rituals in India, they hardly ever pass unnoticed but are celebrated with a lot of pomp. This is also the case in Kullu district, where each wedding season – which covers a number of auspicious days and months for marriages to take place and is determined by means of astrological calculations – party tents line the streets and brass bands can be heard chiming all over the valley. On previous visits I repeatedly accompanied my host family to such weddings, and was always surprised by the large number of guests (usually well over two hundred), each and every one of them moreover being offered drinks and a meal.

In my sample women all stressed that a dowry is never demanded by in-laws in the region, but that parents are free to give as much as they can and are willing to give. However, it is also acknowledged that the giving of a dowry is a kind of social obligation. As Sangeeta on one occasion remarked to me, 'the parents-in-law do not say [ask] anything, but, facing the world [in front of the community], something has to be given to the girl.' All respondents furthermore confirmed that dowry is the woman's share to her inheritance, as she usually does not make a claim to land.

Furthermore, respondents stated that the amount of dowry is directly related to the wedding celebrations. Thus, in the case of a large party, the amount of dowry will also be large and vice versa. It can then be stated that the wedding of a child is the occasion for parents to display their wealth and thus mark their status. Furthermore, the amount they spend on the marriage of their daughter is a marker of how highly they value her.

However, not only the girl's parents are expected to dig into their pockets on the occasion of their children's marriage, but the boy's parents as well. Though they do not have to give a dowry, they do usually present some gifts (mostly golden jewellery) to the bride. Furthermore, wedding celebrations usually last between one to four days, in which a party is organized both in the girl's

home and in the boy's home. In Himachal the custom is to share expenses and each side is expected to pay for its own party (the one that takes place in their home).

I asked my respondents whether they think there is a difference in the finances spent by parents on the occasion of the marriage, depending on the kind of marriage. These finances refer primarily to the decision to either do or do not organize a large wedding celebration for the marriage and to the amount of dowry given to the girl. The answers given to me differed among respondents, as some claimed that there is no difference to be seen, whereas others stated that in a love marriage parents more often refuse to spend a large amount of money as they were not consulted in the decision-making process of the marriage. However, overall the majority agreed that a wedding ceremony is almost always given on the occasion of an arranged marriage, but that for a love marriage parents more often decide not to organize a party at all or to organize a smaller party and thus save expenses. As a recently married respondent stated 'in an arranged marriage parents choose someone according to their own happiness, and they therefore willingly organize a wedding party. Only if it is according to their happiness.'

In several interviews participants stressed the obligation parents have to organize a party on the occasion of their children's marriage in expressions as 'they have no choice but to give it [a party]'. The obligatory character of this was however more pronounced in arranged marriages, as for instance one respondent in her late twenties from an arranged marriage stated:

> 'They [parents] will give it [a wedding celebration] because, you know, it are their children, but they will not really have pleasure in their heart. It does happen that, a month or so after the wedding, in case the couple had eloped, a party is organized. Parents are not that pleased then, but they have no choice but to organize it.'

This was also confirmed in my sample, as all but one of the women who had had an arranged marriage had celebrated the occasion with a large party. Those women who had a love marriage however had either not given a party at all, or stated that their wedding party was only small and in the presence of a limited number of only the closest relatives and friends. I will further illustrate this by means of two cases of love marriages, those of Nirmala and Niru and will discuss them by means of presenting different interpretations voiced by different respondents on their marriages.

Case 1: Nirmala

When I asked Nirmala whether the financial support of parents is less in a love marriage, she told me that this is not the case and that parents spend equal amounts on dowries and wedding parties irrespective of the marriage type. She proved her point by giving the example of her own marriage, which had been a love marriage and which was celebrated with a large wedding party.

However, when I interviewed Nirmala's mother Yamuna on her daughter's marriage, she gave me another perspective on the case:

'We have only one daughter and three sons. Her [Nirmala's] father said: 'I have filled my pockets [earned money] so when my daughter marries I will organize a big celebration', but later…. Once you have eloped, there is never a big marriage. We have organized a small party. For those who have a love marriage, the wedding party is smaller, for one day or so.'

Nirmala's mother-in-law also confirmed to me that the party organized in Nirmala's natal home, and thus paid by her parents, was rather small as only few guests were invited. However, no expenses were saved for the party which was organized in her marital home, which lasted for three days and was a cut in the family's savings as the total expenses ran up to some five to six *lakhs* (one hundred thousand) of rupees. Sangeeta estimated that some five to six hundred guests were invited, who were all served food and drinks.

Case 2: Niru

Niru has had a love marriage with Ajay whom she met in Kullu, while studying there. As Ajay on day brought Niru to his home in order for her to become his wife, without informing his parents on beforehand, the latter decided not to organize a party. When I asked Niru who decided not to celebrate the marriage, she told me it was entirely the decision of her parents-in-law.

When asking Ajay's parents about their motives for the decision, they both said it was because they had shortly before spent large amounts of money on the marriage of their daughter and as they still had two younger sons they preferred to save money to celebrate their marriages.

I questioned Niru whether she ever regretted not having had a wedding celebration but she told me that she did not mind it and understood the reasons behind it. Her parents-in-law had told her that, as she and Ajay had not informed them on beforehand, they would not organize a party.

However, on a later occasion Nirmala told me that Niru had repeatedly complained to her about the fact that her parents-in-law had shown only limited generosity for her marriage. Some four months before Ajay's younger brother had married (a love-cum-arranged marriage) and Niru had complained to Nirmala that, whereas the new daughter in law had been given a sizeable amount of golden jewellery, she had herself 'only' received a small necklace and one set of earrings at the time of her marriage.

Niru furthermore confirmed that in an arranged marriage parents will almost always organize a party. 'In an arranged marriage a party has to be given, as the parents [of the boy] go to bring the girl [from her natal to her marital home].

Note that in both of these cases the women's perspectives on the financial aspects of their marriage diverged slightly from the one's given to me by others from their close kin network. Nirmala was firm

in her denial of the possibility of a difference and she seemed to be eager to convince me of the general acceptance of love marriages nowadays. On other occasions as well, she endeavoured to minimize criticism connected to it, as if she needed to justify her choice for a love marriage to me. Niru also seems to have camouflaged some of her actual thoughts concerning her marriage, more specifically about the amount of wedding presents. In the interview she claimed that she had no bad feelings whatsoever about the fact that her marriage was not celebrated with a big celebration and that she did not receive a sizeable dowry though, assuming that Nirmala's stories are truthful, this turned out to be not entirely true.

Now let us turn to the motives of parents to refrain from paying marriage related expenses. As mentioned before, according to the patriarchal ideology parents have the obligation to arrange their children's marriage by seeking an alliance with a family which is compatible concerning caste, class and lifestyle. At the time of her marriage, the girl's parents transfer their guardianship over her in the hands of her husband and his kin and metaphorically give their daughter as a gift to them. This act can be seen as a kind of sacrifice, as parents surrender their daughter to her marital family (Uberoi, 2006: 33). This is also ritualized in the actual wedding ceremony, in which the groom and his relatives go to the bride's home in order to take her with them to her new home.

However, in a love marriage parents are not given the role of choosing a prospective marriage partner. Thus, they do not fulfil their normative role as alliance-makers in which the gift and sacrifice of a daughter and the receiving and vow for guardianship of a daughter-in-law are central themes. Therefore, the need to ritualize this transferral is no longer considered crucial, making a wedding celebration superfluous.

Nonetheless, all respondents from a love marriage had had some sort of - mostly small - religious ceremony in a local temple. Thus, it appears that the religious valorisation of the marriage by means of a set of religious rites performed in the attendance of a priest is a crucial element for all marriages. Marriages are therefore not merely about personal gratification, but about performing one's religious duty (*dharma).* By means of ritualizing the spousal bond in the marriage ritual, the creation and increase of auspiciousness for the marriage is sought.

However, apart from the religious function of marriage, as ritualized in the temple ceremony, a marriage also has an important social function which comes foremost to the front in the wedding celebrations organized in the house of the bride and the groom. The latter are in the first place social rituals, as in them the alliance between the spouses' families is ritualized and their social status is affirmed and possibly improved. As in a love marriage the families are not themselves alliance makers, but instead they are 'forced' to form a relationship with each other, they usually choose not to perform these social rituals, but only the religious ones.

Moreover, as parents are denied the possibility to perform their normative social role in a love marriage, they might feel put aside and dishonoured by this act of autonomy on the part of their children. Therefore, to not organize a large celebration might be an attempt at reparation of their

honour as by doing so they show to the larger community that their parental authority cannot be this easily overstepped and that children will have to feel its repercussions.

Finally let me remark that, despite their portrayal of dissatisfaction, parents might also feel relieved when their children opt for a love marriage, as this provides them with the opportunity of avoiding the heavy expenditure connected to a marriage. Especially in the case of larger families, with more than one child, it is more common to decide against a big wedding on the occasion of a love marriage of one of the children, as this means that parents can save the money for the wedding of their other children.

A consequence however is that women in a love-marriage receive less dowry, which might displease their marital family as many of the consumer items such as a television and refrigerator are meant for common use. This might be a cause for tensions in her marital home and complicate her process of adjustment there. Moreover, as I already argued the dowry is considered the girl's share of the inheritance. As, when a girl opts for a love marriage she might entirely lose this share or receive only a fraction of it, this also deprives her of her financial capacity and safety net, decreasing her autonomy.

5.3 Impact on relations in the joint family

As the majority of my respondents and all women from a love marriage in my sample live in a joint family, one can imagine that the relations of care and responsibility could differ according to the marriage a couple has had. As I have discussed in the second chapter, love is foremost an individual emotion and therefore it could be considered as a threat in communities stressing the importance of collective wellbeing. According to the normative Hindu family ethos, affection and intimacy between spouses should be curtailed as no preferential treatments within the family are permitted. Instead, the husband is required to equally divide his loyalty between his mother and wife, in order to guarantee family harmony.

That these normative beliefs are also strongly held by my respondents, can be confirmed by the fact that all of them referred to it in some way or the other when asked whose side a husband from respectively an arranged or a love marriage will take in case of an argument between his wife and parents. One of my male respondents in his late twenties had actually experienced such a situation and was willing to share it with me.

Case 1: Ravi and Priyanka

Ravi and Priyanka met each other at Kullu college, where Priyanka stayed in a girl's hostel as her natal home is located in Mandi and thus rather far away from Kullu (approximately thirty kilometres, which

equals a bus journey of about one hour). The couple was introduced through a mutual friend and soon developed a liking for each other. They exchanged phone numbers and started to talk over the phone on a daily basis, which was not always easy as Priyanka did not have her own mobile phone at the time and the use of mobile phones was prohibited in her hostel. Therefore, Priyanka had to make use of her friend's mobile phone and they had to carefully select the right moments to talk, when no one from the hostel staff was around.

These phone calls were their main source of information about each other, as they did not date nor meet separately in public apart from one Sunday on which they planned a trip to a temple. They had already been having a phone affair for some months at that point and decided to go to a local temple to pray for the consent of their parents in marriage. Afterwards Ravi decided to introduce Priyanka to his parents as a college friend and show her his home situation. 'But, they were not stupid. They knew what I meant with a 'friend'', Ravi later said about this introduction.

However, a short while later Priyanka discovered that her parents were arranging her marriage to a police man from her hometown. The man came to Kullu in order to meet with Priyanka prior to their marriage but instead of spending the afternoon while having introductory conversations with his soon-to-be-wife, Priyanka informed him about her love for someone else. As their 'affair' was now made public, Ravi and Priyanka decided that they had to act as quickly as possible if they were serious about their love. They anticipated that if they would not elope that same day, Priyanka's parents would withdraw her from college and might pressurize her to consent to a marriage with someone she did not love. Therefore, Ravi called his father and asked for his approval of the marriage. The latter said that, if this was also what the girl wanted, he would consent to it. That same evening Ravi took Priyanka to his home and the next morning they got married in court.

After the marriage had taken place Priyanka informed her parents over the phone that she was a married woman, news to which they reacted with outrage. The day afterwards they came to Ravi's home and scolded both Priyanka and him. They tried to convince Priyanka to return home with them, promising that they would organize her wedding with Ravi and that after the religious ceremony had taken place she could move to his home. However, both Priyanka and Ravi were doubtful about the actual motives behind this suggestion as they feared that they would instead force Priyanka to marry the other man and not allow her to return to Ravi.

However, with the healing of time Priyanka's parents accepted the fact that Priyanka had made her decision and was resolved about staying with Ravi. One month after the court marriage a religious ceremony and small wedding celebration were held at Ravi's house followed after another month by a similarly small celebration at the house of Priyanka's parents. They also gave her a dowry on the occasion.

However, within one year after their marriage tensions started to arise in the family, where apart from Ravi's parents his elder brother, whose marriage had previously been arranged, also lived with his wife and children. Regular arguments started to occur in the family, mostly between Priyanka,

her mother-in-law and her brother-in-law's wife and they were triggered by various issues. The main reason according to Ravi was that Priyanka continued her studies after marriage, which meant that she helped less in the household than the other women. However, the other women were not only dissatisfied about the amount of work Priyanka did, but also about her limited knowledge concerning household chores, 'they [other family members] want to expect many things, like she [Priyanka] have to do this, she have to this...also because she is studying, still studying, so she don't know about cultural things, also she don't know about our work or about our atmosphere, it's new for her.'

Ravi experienced this period as very challenging as he constantly had the impression that he had the main responsibility in solving the problems: 'Basically, the husband has to balance between parents and wife'. Whenever an argument arose, Ravi was approached to intervene by both sides. Not only did his wife complain to him about his parents' behaviour, but also vice versa. Ravi thinks this would not have been the case if he had had an arranged marriage, because 'in an arranged marriage, then they can't blame on the girl, because they want that girl. If love marriage, there's some problem with girl, so they have to just point out it's your choice, so...'. When I asked if his parents ever complained about their eldest son's wife, he said 'no, they don't want to complain about [her], because they choose that girl...'. Throughout the interview Ravi repeatedly stressed that he believes arguments are never one-sided and that it is therefore the husband's responsibility not to choose sides but rather to mediate between the fighting family members.

As the relation in Ravi's family continued to be tense, his father at one point suggested that he and his brother would each be given a share of the land so they could start to live separately. Ravi's brother did accept this offer and now lives in a nuclear family, but Ravi refused despite Priyanka's insistence in favour of it. When I asked Ravi why he refused, he said that he believes children have the obligation to look after their parents as parents have also looked after them.

This case indicates how Ravi, despite his choice for a love marriage, is supportive of the normative family code of behaviour, in which children are expected to heed their elders and look after them in their old days. Ravi does not want to start a nuclear family, despite the strain he claims joint living has put on his wife's happiness and on his own relationship with her. When on a later occasion I visited the two of them at their home, I asked them whether, if they could turn back time, they would again choose for each other and decide to have a love marriage. Both of them did not give a ready reply to this, but exchanged meaningful glances. Then they answered evasively that they now have the feeling that they were too young at the time to make such a big decision and that they acted impulsively. However, they quickly added to this that they cannot claim to regret their marriage now, as they are happy to have a child together.

Moreover, Ravi believes that he had to carry the main responsibilities in maintaining family harmony and that in the case of an arranged marriage this would have been different. He does acknowledge that arguments and tensions happen in every family, but believes that it happens more in

the case of love marriages: ‘always parents complained about the wife, wife complained about the parents...so, it’s naturally, every love marriage, every home. Also in an arranged marriage..., sometimes, but not that much.’

All respondents agreed that no differences can be perceived between the way in which spouses treat each other in public according to the type of marriage they have had. They attributed this to the fact that on the one hand, in arranged marriages, the love between the spouses will grow with time. In love marriages on the other hand, open affection and intimacy is tempered when in the presence of others. Thus, love between the spouses is not an emotion which respondents merely associated with so-called love marriages. The main difference is that the emotion, with all its local meanings and assumptions, is the main reason to tie the knot in a love marriage whereas this is not the case in an arranged marriage. However, once the couple is married, the emotions shared by the spouses and the manner in which they behave towards each other are similar irrespective of marriage type. As one respondent who had recently had a love-cum-arranged said:

> ‘Those things [expressions of intimacy between the couple] which are before the marriage, they do not continue afterwards. Their thinking changes. The way a boy and girl are before marriage…, they do not talk like that afterwards. In a family you behave differently.’ The majority of respondents confirmed that the normative rule for spouses is to avoid open affection in the presence of family elders.

Sandhya, a clinical psychologist who has studied contemporary challenges faced by middle-class Indian couples, has introduced the term ‘culture wars’ in her recent monograph (2009: 73-8). With this term she refers to what she believes to be the main cause of marital problems Indian couples face today, which are the conflicts arising because of significant others and social changes. Social changes give origin to new assumptions and expectations about marriage, such as an increased demand for intimacy. However, at the same time there is a strong ideology in society, stressing the submissive position of women in relation to men. Moreover, significant others - mainly parents and close relatives – have specific assumptions about what is proper behaviour for a couple. All these elements together create a mix of often conflicting norms, ideas and assumptions which might cause marital problems.

Sandhya also stresses the importance of a good relation between a wife and her in-laws for the success of a marriage Not only are conflicts in the wife-mother-in-law relationship an important marker in how satisfied a wife is about her marriage, but also in how positively a husband judges his marriage (Ibid.: 87-90).

The relationship wife-mother-in-law is the source of inspiration for many Bollywood dramas and television soaps. However stereotypical it may be, in the field it also proved very important. This is understandable as women on average spend more time with their mother-in-law than with their husband, which makes their relationship very intense and casual annoyances and disagreements perfectly understandable.

One issue which I myself repeatedly observed and which was raised by all my respondent - male and female, young and old - is that a mother-in-law will always complain to others about the imperfections of her daughter-in-law, irrespective of the kind of marriage she has had. Usually these complaints concern the work done in the household by the daughter-in-law, in terms of how, when and most importantly how much (or rather how much not). The only difference is that, in the case of a love marriage, the in-laws cannot claim responsibility for the 'shortcomings' they believe the wife has. As they have not chosen their daughter-in-law themselves, parents-in-law will not feel responsible for having selected an 'imperfect' girl. Instead, the husband is believed to carry the main responsibility to ensure his wife adapts in the family and if tensions were to arise he might be addressed by his parents.

Hardly ever did actual conflict situations arise between the wife and her in-laws in my sample and respondents claimed that the variable causing them was rather the girl's character than the kind of marriage she had. The fact that they foremost mentioned the character of the girl and not that of the mother-in-law is in line with the hierarchical family structure in which the wife is expected to adapt and compromise rather than her mother-in-law. I was told about only two severe conflict situations, but both were from hearsay and therefore in all probability had an added dramatic element to them.

Moreover, it needs to be reminded that the wife-mother-in-law relation is not merely one of dependence, but one of interdependence. In this case of severe conflicts between a wife and her in-laws the most plausible outcomes might be either that the husband decides to leave his parents and start a nuclear family, which means that the parents will not only lose an important source of income but also the guarantee at social security and care in their old age and the helping hand of a daughter-in-law in the household. Another scenario is that the husband decides to stay in the joint family, but if he is constantly addressed to solve tensions this might jeopardize his relation with his wife and his satisfaction with the marriage. Thus, both the in-laws and the wife herself risk to lose a lot if they do not find a way to tolerably live together. Therefore, in the majority of cases they develop a dynamic of compromise and support, finding a way to accept each other's imperfections.

CHAPTER VI: Conclusions

At the beginning of this thesis I argued how love has been defined as being primarily an individual emotion by social scientists. I discussed how the ideal-image of love as the only valid basis for a marriage, with its idealized assumptions of spousal loyalty, equality and affection, is gaining more and more ground as it is an *ideoscape* which is rapidly spreading due to the process of globalization. Furthermore, changing socio-economic conditions have played an important role in creating a context in which this ideal can become relevant and meaningful and I have linked this to the concrete situation in Himachal Pradesh. I discussed that love marriages are increasing due to the interlinked processes of economic liberalization, globalization, the shift in economic activities and the increased emphasis on education.

I have argued how the ideals of love and love marriage at first sight appear to be dichotomous to hegemonic family ideals of patriarchal North India. However, as I have indicated in each of the chapters, this dichotomy turns out to be less rigid than one would initially expect.

First of all the meanings and assumptions attributed to love and love marriages in the field deviates from its Western ideal, as there is a higher emphasis placed on personal choice and less on feelings of mutual affection and idealization. Whereas an increase in love marriages is often associated with an increase in contested marriages in which the spouses are not considered compatible by their community, this did not appear to be the case from my sample. Instead love marriages have become adopted and embraced in the community by means of a process of adaptation, in which elements of traditional arranged marriages are creatively selected and implemented by both the spouses, their parents and kin.

Instead of deviating from social norms about who is considered a proper wedding candidate, youngsters make use of those very norms when selecting a partner. Thus in the majority of cases they select a spouse who is compatible in terms of caste, class, religious and ethnic background. Apart from a higher incidence of long-distance relations, the partner chosen by youngsters is usually someone who their parents themselves might have selected if they would have arranged the marriage.

Still, in most cases youngsters did not consult their parents but rather autonomously chose their partner and eloped once they decided to tie the knot. To this act of autonomy parents initially reacted with anger but after a while they accepted their children's choice and reconciled. The process of reconciliation strongly overlaps with that of arranging a marriage, as the boy's parents approach the girl's parents. On that occasion they not only try to convince the girl's parents to accept the marriage but also discuss a number of practical issues concerning the wedding celebration, dowry etc.. At this point parents furthermore seek to obtain, though belatedly, religious validation for the marriage as they might ask for a *pandit* to cast the horoscope at this point and request him to select an auspicious day

for the marriage rituals (religious ceremony) to take place. In a love marriage parents thus are seen as arranging the marriage, albeit not when it comes to the actual selection of a son or daughter-in-law.

The girl's parents at first display anger as their role of guarding the sexuality of their daughter is overstepped and attempt to repair their reputation which is thus damaged by openly contesting the marriage. Only once significant others – mostly the boy's parents and close kin - convince them of the need for acceptance do they seek to reconcile with their daughter. Thus, the maintenance, reparation and confirmation of one's honour and reputation is a central instigator behind the strategies adopted by parents to deal with the love marriage of their child.

There continues to be a preference for joint living. This preference is not only rooted in normative views in which young people consider it their 'duty' to look after their elders but also in economic benefits as both for the younger and the elder generation joint living equals economic benefits. At the same time the hegemonic family ethos continues to play a crucial role, in which open affection between spouses is to be avoided and asymmetrical gender roles continue to exist. More specifically, women are supposed to look after the household and thus are mainly associated with the private domain, whereas men work 'outside' and thus are active in the public domain. This means that women hold a strongly dependent position of their marital family. However, the majority of respondents expressed the expectation and hope for change as girls are increasingly encouraged to do higher studies and become active in the professional sphere.

Despite the hybridization of marriages, lending love marriages a lot of overlapping characteristics with arranged marriages, there are some significant differences as well. The central concept in this is responsibility which was frequently named by respondents during interviews and thus indicates the relevance of the concept in relation to the changes which are central to this thesis. Together with the changing marital landscape responsibilities and familial networks of support change. Whereas in an arranged marriage parents carry the main responsibility for the success or failure of the marriage, in a love marriage this responsibility shifts to the spouses themselves. I have argued how these changing responsibilities can be perceived on different levels.

First of all the support a girl receives from het natal network becomes less as her parents and close kin do not feel the main responsibility to mediate in the case she would encounter marital difficulties. Secondly, parents are less willing to carry the financial expenses connected to a marriage when the marriage concerned is not arranged by them. Not only are wedding ceremonies in general smaller, but also the amount of dowry given to a girl by her parents is much less. This decision by parents is partly caused by their dissatisfaction about not being asked for input in the marriage. By means of refraining from spending large amounts on a wedding they do not only show their dissatisfaction towards their child but also indicate to their community that to deny them their normative parental role as arrangers is met with repercussions. By doing so they aim at upholding their reputation. Furthermore, the occasion might also be welcomed by parents as it frees them from the social obligation of large expenditure.

Finally, these shifting responsibilities have an impact on familial relations within the joint family. If problems arise, the husband is expected to mediate and repair the familial balance whereas in an arranged marriage this responsibility would primarily befall his parents. This might put a strain on the husband and could affect his satisfaction with his marriage. With the continued preference for joint living and its corresponding family ethos, husbands are expected to equally balance their loyalty between their wife and parents irrespective of the kind of wedding they have had.

Thus, women from a love marriage cannot rely on their natal support network for social and financial support to the same extent as a woman from an arranged marriage can. Combined with the fact that the girl from a love marriage might encounter more difficulties adjusting in her marital family while at the same time she cannot count on the unconditional support of her husband, one can see how the dependence of women from a love marriage on their husband and marital family rather increases than decreases and thus might negatively impact their empowerment. However, as I already mentioned, women seem to acknowledge this and the majority therefore stressed the importance of guaranteeing educational and professional opportunities for their own daughters.

However, as I have argued, love marriages are associated with a number of advantages by local young people, such as the expectation for intimacy and mutual support between the spouses. Another important and much named element is that to choose for a love marriage indicates one's modern lifestyle, in which a higher degree of autonomy and individualism, albeit within accepted limits, is achieved. The fact that the popularity of love marriages seems to be increasing rather than decreasing indicates that for young people the benefits associated with a love marriage outweigh its possible downsides.

Moreover, female sexuality and the restriction thereof is surrounded by ambiguity. On the one hand claims were made against romantic affairs prior to marriage and against love marriages in general, but on the other hand everybody seems to be aware of the existence of such affairs and they have become up to some degree accepted. If parents *would* vehemently oppose pre-marital affairs, they *would* do everything within their power to prevent them from happening. However, this is not what parents in the area do. Instead, they allow and even encourage their children to do higher studies despite the 'risk' they know this brings for affairs and possibly a love marriage. Moreover, as I already mentioned, the dissatisfaction they show when their child announces its decision for a love marriage appears to be more of a formality than to be heartfelt. Parents – and especially those from the elder generations - in interviews usually stressed their objections to love marriages, whereas in practice their behaviour does not indicate this.

The idea of guardianship and protection of daughters is thus not a rigid prescription, but rather a flexible ideal image. In practice parents appear to be well aware about the benefits which coincide the changing socio-economic conditions, and they embrace the opportunities which go hand in hand with this. Not only do they welcome the possibility to a job and increased financial independence which higher education can bring, but also the chance for their children to meet with peers from the

opposite sex. Even though they did not readily mention it, when their child opts for a love marriage this might actually please parents up to some extent as it does not only relieve them from the responsibility of the marital success or failure, but also from the heavy expenditures of the marriage ceremony.

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