

HS2.302 Gender, Kinship and State Law

Final Exam

Q:

For your final exam, you should submit a review of a Web Series, Anthology, or Film. You can focus on a few episodes and segments or the whole series, anthology or films. You are not reviewing the text for its artistic or aesthetic merits. The text should highlight and analyze themes discussed in class (gender, sexuality, marriage, family, kinship, caste, state, law, and race). Please check out the article, *Modern Girl in India*, by Priti Ramamurthy to identify relevant themes related to cinematic plot lines, actors, stars, race, class etc.

The review should address the following:

1. Why is the text relevant to the themes explored in this class? Briefly summarize the plotlines and relevant extra-textual themes (for example, OTT platforms, decriminalizing homosexuality, trans rights, sexual assaults and pre/post-Nirbhaya campaigns) and explain the connections you were able to establish. *(15 points)*
2. Analyse plotlines, character developments, and dialogues: In your analysis of the text, you should use (with proper citations) at least four articles from the course outline and one that has not been covered as part of the course. *(25 points)*
3. In what ways does the text signal a continuation/perpetuation of hierarchies and oppression based on gender, caste, sexuality, religion, geographic location, and race? In what ways, if any, do they show a gradual improvement or even a radical break from the past? *(10 points)*
4. Bonus question: In what ways did the text surprise or disappoint you? Did it go far enough in questioning norms and customs? Did it go too far? What do you think was missing in its treatment of issues connected to gender, kinship, and state law?

Word Limit: 1500 words

Made in Heaven Review:

'Made in Heaven' is a 2019 web series developed by Reema Kagti and Zoya Akhtar that explores the dynamics of marriage in modern Indian society, where numerous age-old beliefs and customs hold a significant place. While the series revolves around the lives of Karan Mehra and Tara Khanna, who run a Delhi-based wedding planning company named 'Made in Heaven', it also explores the roles of different participants in a marriage, where marriage is not limited to a sacrament of two individuals. However, it becomes an economic or political deal for two individuals or families. The series explores the meaning of marriage in modern upper-class Indian societies, with the protagonists searching for love, acceptance, and dignity for being a homosexual and the other being a woman from a lower economic background.

Karan is an upper-middle-class homosexual man hiding his sexual orientation because of his teenage traumas and the pre-existing social stigma around homosexuality in Indian society, where homosexuality was not decriminalized then. He is trying to run the company by taking a loan from his father and a local shark. Karan portrays the lives of countless Indian homosexuals who pose as straight individuals to fit in society and make ends meet without getting discriminated against or socially excluded.

Tara is a complex and layered character who navigates her way through the ups and downs of her professional and personal life. Although she hails from an economically unstable family, she is now married to Adil Khanna, a wealthy industrialist. Despite being married to a modern family, she is often considered an outsider because of her past economic background. Moreover, she faces infidelity when Adil cheats on her with her best friend, Faiza.

One of the text's major themes is the underlying compromises various individuals go through in marriage for various reasons. The "Mrs Gill Competition" in episode 5, "A Marriage of convenience", is an apt example of this, where an NRI family holds a competition to find a bride for their family. Shocking, this is common in the region where the NRI families try to find a bride with traditional values and the local girls consider it a gateway to their American dream. In episode 5, the groom accuses the bride of satisfying him in bed. However, his ex-wife reveals to the bride that the groom is impotent. And rather than opting for divorce on these grounds, the bride chose to stay with him to accomplish her dream of settling in a foreign land. Another set of compromises was seen when brides followed irrational traditions even though they were educated to satisfy their elders. And the last kind of compromise resides with the coupling of families for better socio-economic and political influence. In the last episode, "The Great Escape", the Yadav and Singh family decided to marry their children for political gains without asking for the bride's consent. Nuthan wanted to elope, now the bride, but she was ready to marry the prospected groom to save her boyfriend, John, from honour killing.

These compromises are often based on society's hierarchies, and L Samuel explains, "Cultural traditions work to renew and re-affirm patriarchal structures, which can limit respondents' choice in the marriage process."

Although the marriages shown in 'Made in Heaven' showcase the different aspects of the definition of a modern elite Indian family, the deeply rooted patriarchy still affects modern-day societal norms even in modern families. We saw how the Roshans wanted to check if Aaliya was a virgin or not to maintain the purity in their blood. Tara, who faced infidelity as Adil cheated on her with Faiza, tried her best to reignite the spark in their marriage and continued to stay with him, Writing desire in Nepali love letters. Language & Communication (2003), LM Ahearn mentions a similar incident by quoting how the 'ideas about love are tied up with ... social institutions and everyday practices such as gender ideologies'. Moreover, it is

also notable how it is expected to be a woman's responsibility to be a homemaker and a reason if her husband cheats on her. Adil cheated on her ex-fiancee with Tara, and then he cheated on Tara with her best friend Faiza, but nobody cared to call him out; instead, his fiancée and Faiza faced social exclusion and mental trauma.

One of the central premises of 'Made in Heaven' is that marriage is a once-in-a-lifetime event where most of Karan and Tara's clients can go miles and spend crores to have a grand wedding. Not only the elite upper classes, we saw Khalil in episode 8, who takes a loan of 6 lacs for his daughter's marriage and mentions how "The father must give his daughter a good wedding." In 'Marriage and Family in Mysore' (1942)', MN Srinivas mentions how the different sections of society can go beyond any extent for a wedding and take up big loans without trying to find an alternative. And therefore, "The most frequent excuse for asking for loans from cooperative societies is "son's or daughter's marriage".

One of the significant developments of the text is handling societal homophobia in India. The homosexual characters in the series face discrimination and violence from their families and society. Karan's mother beat him to save him from societal exclusion by finding he was gay. Although his landlord installed a camera in his room while invading his privacy, he was reported to the police by his landlords for having sex with a man. However, he came out as a representative of the gay community, and he filed a PIL against the criminalization of section 377 in India. Section 377 criminalizes sexual activities between same-sex individuals, due to which many opt for living a fake life while struggling with themselves. The last episode showed that the supreme court decriminalized section 377 and allowed homosexuality in India, which was celebrated by the entire LGBTQ+ community. And various argued that India was never a homophobic state by showing ancient Indian sculptures. Instead, criminalizing homosexuality was a step taken by the British colonial government. In Democratizing Marriage: Consent, Custom and the Law, in Law like Love, Ruth Vanita talks about how Indian priests argue that Hindu customs include same-sex marriages as marriage is a sacrament between two souls, not the bodies.

Although the marriages in 'Made in Heaven' showcase various customs carried on for years and various social prejudices, the series also showcases the changing hierarchies in society with time. Karan and his landlord, Ramesh Gupta, were homosexuals who tried to hide their sexual orientation from the world for various reasons. All his life, Ramesh denied his sexual orientation and acted as a straight man happily married to a woman. On the other hand, Karan was open about his sexuality to the close ones he could trust. It represents how society is gradually accepting and including homosexuals rather than discriminating against them.

In episode 3, "It's never too late", Gayatri Mathur finds love in old age and decides to marry Bijoy Chatterjee despite the various social objections, including her children. In episode 4, "The Price of Love", Priyanka stands against the deeply rooted patriarchy evident in various marriage ceremonies and kinship laws. Priyanka, who was about to marry Vishal, an IAS officer, called off her wedding moments before the pheras when she learned that Vishal had consented to his parents' demands for dowry from her parents. Similarly, in episode 7, "A Royal Affair", Devyani Singh stood for her passion for being an air force pilot, even though she was married in a royal household where all the women were homemakers. In the same episode, we saw how various individuals who fight the hierarchies could also come forward to protect the same for various personal gains. Devyani stood straight before everyone to follow her passion. Still, she also agreed to pay Rs 5 lacs to Pooja, whom her father-in-law molested at her wedding, only to protect the social image of her in-laws' family.

In the last episode, "The Great Escape", Nuthan Yadav was forced to marry the boy of her parent's choice for their political collaboration instead of her lover for fear of her father's political influence, which he used

to kill her elder sister and her lover, and later faked the instance as suicide. However, towards the end, Nuthan got the courage to stand against the dominance. She married John in a church against her family's wishes after eloping from her marriage with Vishal Singh.

No doubt Devyani, Gayatri and Priyanka stood against the different societal hierarchies, which may be social, economic, or political. But, there were instances where Aaliyah and Tara faced the unavoidable wrath of hierarchies where they were considered gold diggers for marrying someone with higher economic wealth. Throughout the series, there are numerous instances where Tara is seen as an outsider in the Khanna family, and Tara, too, tries her best to avoid meeting her mother, who is still living a humble life. Tara's mother, on the other hand, comments how a woman can only possess beauty to rule the world, and her mother-in-law never considers her a severe businesswoman. The company was just a time pass for her and a way to waste Adil's hard-earned money.

References:

1. Samuel, Lina. (2010) Mating, Dating and Marriage: Intergenerational Cultural Retention and the Construction of Diasporic Identities among South Asian Immigrants in Canada: Journal of Intercultural Studies: Vol 31, No 1
2. Ahearn, L. M. (2003). Writing desire in Nepali love letters – ScienceDirect
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4. SC Verdict on Section 377 won't end the fight against inequality: Love is as much about Caste, Class and Religious struggle | Akhil Kang
5. Srinivasan, M N (1961), Marriage and Family in Mysore