

## **“What’s Love Got To Do With It?” – Social Networking through Marriage in Andhra Pradesh, India<sup>1</sup>**

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### **1. Introduction**

Families in India are extended units of social reproduction. However, it is also possible to regard extended families, i.e. families with a greater geographical dispersion and membership than the ‘Western’ type of core families, as social networks meant for the appropriation of various resources.<sup>2</sup> This paper tries to pinpoint those appropriation strategies in a social networking approach. Social networking refers in the following example to the process of carefully arranged expansion of a family social network through marriage.

The paper suggests that the importance of the family in India has not diminished over time in the course of assumed processes of ‘modernisation’<sup>3</sup> and the expected erosion of the ‘traditional’. This is in line with recent empirical studies which show that the number of extended families is also increasing in an urban environment (Shah 1996). The formal structure of the family organisation in South India remains patrilocal and patrilineal (Karve 1996: 67). The general model of family organisation represents a patriviral set-up: a woman joins her husband’s, and his parents’ home (Shah 1996: 540). Having said this, it seems clear that any story and any tale of a given family, as in our case, is mostly a tale of male dominance, and male agency.

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<sup>2</sup> Emerson 1962; Powell/Smith-Doerr 1994

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Coleman 1960: 532; Apter 1987: 16; Eisenstadt 1966: 3; Smelser 1964: 259ff.; Pye 1966: 377.

Starting from these assumptions, the paper discusses empirically the elaborate matchmaking procedures for one member of a family social network. For the convenience of the reader, the empirical part of the paper is subdivided into four parts. These include the initial information gathering, that is the activation of the complete family social network in order to receive information about potential matches. After this initial step, the required qualities and qualifications of the proposed family *as a whole* are weighted and considered. In a third step, the individual qualities of the proposed bride are given consideration. The matchmaking concludes in our case with the arranged marriage. Eventually, the event of a possible refusal by either bride or her family are discussed.

This family social network was researched during a period of eleven months between 1995 and 1996 in Andhra Pradesh, South India. The purpose of the study was to identify and analyse various local group strategies of appropriation in South India (Merz 1998). The empirical findings are based upon numerous interviews with one key informant within the extended family. Personal relationships between interviewee and researcher were established some five years prior to the interview. The informant is a civil contractor and landlord operating from Hyderabad. Since the researcher had daily contact with the extended family over a period of eleven months between 1995 and 1996, it is believed that a sufficient level of trust and reliability has been established. It was asked that the information relayed was made anonymously, hence all the relevant names (apart from public figures such as politicians) have been altered. The interview was conducted in English and recorded by a tape recorder. Grammatical errors in the conversation by both researcher and interviewee are not corrected.

## 2. Selecting a Wife for Ravi Kumar

The empirical section begins with various comments towards the general outline of successful matchmaking. In this case, a potential wife for the interviewee's cousin Ravi Kumar, his wife's brother, is to be identified. The cousin himself works for the Andhra Pradesh State Police in Hyderabad. His age at the time of the interview was 28. His father is the principal of a college in Hyderabad. His mother is a housewife. They live together with their son in a middle-class environment in Habsiguda, Hyderabad. He has two elder sisters, both married to businessmen and live in Hyderabad, and one unmarried brother.

## **2.1 Information gathering: Activating the family's own social network**

Firstly, the decision to get married was taken not by the bridegroom, but by his parents:

Q: And who made the decision, finally, to get Ravi Kumar a bride?

A: Naturally the parents.

Q: And he's quite happy with that?

A: Yes, naturally.

We can see the general outline of the expansion of a family social network through marriage. The prospective bridegroom is relegated to an inferior position. He might express his desire or refusal as far as his marriage is concerned, but the decision rests with the parents. The parents, then, play the crucial role of determining the right point of time when, and how, to proceed in the expansion of the network.

We can now move on to the question of how prospective brides are sought out initially, and which further elaborations take place thereafter. Once the decision to marry a member of the family has been taken by the parents, the vast family social network is activated for this purpose. The message will be conveyed to various crucial network nodes of non-redundant character who in turn will look for promising marriage partners either within their respective network group or clique, or will expand the search outside the original family network for this purpose. Here again, other crucial network nodes come into action if the first node cannot come up with prospective brides.

What we seem to have here is a general structuring of the family network towards one specific goal. And this structuring requires some crucial action prior to the selection, or recruitment, process. This initial action refers to the memorising of prospective matches, or brides, on suitable occasions. It seems as if the network contains several functions, or rather several prospective avenues of appropriation, and that these avenues must be kept in good order all the time, just in case some requirements, like the proposed marriage, make it necessary to relay the necessary information back to the parents quickly and reliably. The information gathering, which is part of the 'avenue maintenance', takes place on suitable social occasions and get-togethers of the expanded family social network. It is here that the information is gathered, and always stored and memorised as our respondent tells us:

A: It's a matter of politeness to ask about the relations, what they are doing, where they are married to, and always references are memorised, remembered for further references, and if it's really a good match, then it will be much more reported, much more valucy (...).

This procedure precedes the actual negotiations and match making processes for quite a time. Those relations, assembled and taken together on numerous social occasions when the members of the family meet, are memorised, and ordered in a hierarchical way.

Once the message is conveyed to the family network that a member of the family is ready to get married, and hence the family network to be expanded, reports come into the core family in question indicating the availability of specific marriage partners, and their detailed background:

A: First, it starts like this. Someone comes and tells that there is a so and so girl, and she is related to so and so, and a brief biography is given, bio-data, then these people meet first casually, I mean not senior people, but someone will represent from the close family, one or two people. And they just go and see.

This is the first action to be taken after the reports have been relayed to the core family members. The persons reporting to the core family members have to take the responsibility for the quality of the information they are relaying. They in turn are held accountable if they produce false information, or if the information they relayed in good faith proved to be wrong.

The core family members select someone from the family network to cross-check and validate the information relayed so far, and its specific compatibility with the prospective bridegroom. We note here that the interviewee tells us that it is important that 'senior people' do not visit the bride's family in the first instance, for two reasons: Firstly, the 'senior people', and we will establish their identity later, try to reduce the opportunity costs related to visiting numerous families, and put the burden on some other, inferior members of the family. Secondly, and more importantly, it is necessary for them to convey the impression that they are in no haste whatsoever to check and see a prospective bride and her family. This is meant to indicate that they have numerous offers to choose from, that their son is indeed a very good match, and that they ultimately do not have to rush into any offer which comes to them. Hence, it amounts to an exercise of face-saving.

The interviewee then moves on to describe the various cross-checking procedures. Strong emphasis is placed on matters of 'compatibility'. This 'compatibility' is exactly what is meant by a similar amount of social and cultural capital which is regarded as a most important factor for successful match making strategies. The compatibility issue starts with the physical appearance of the proposed bride. But this is only the starting point to much more complex and elaborate considerations:

A: If the girl is just plain and ugly, and if there is no compatibility, it finishes. Nothing goes beyond. If it is okay, or beyond okay, then next party will go and look into their family background. They will come into this

family background. Like how is the compatibility for the girl and boy, like, though belonging to same middle class, still they see whether they have the same kind of compatibility.

Here we have a first indication that the question of physical appearance is just the starting point. We might even assume that questions of beautiful physical features or ugliness are balanced and weighed up against the number and quality of family social links the bride and her family have to offer.

A: So in these 3, 4 time negotiations they slowly, subtly enquire what are the brothers doing, what are the sisters doing, and if they are married: to whom, if the brothers are married, from where, kind of social links. That's more important. The family connections.

The detailed questioning of the *social* capital the bride's family has to offer begins. It is here that the cross-checking procedures have already entered a very advanced stage. After all, the bride and her family were not rejected at the outset, after the first meeting with the bridegroom's family's inferior negotiators. Instead, the bridegroom's family shows some interest in the proposed match because the information acquired so far indicates that the bride and her family seem to have the desired 'compatibility' in terms of the amount of social and cultural capital available.

## 2.2 'Compatibility': Research into the required qualities of the bride's extended family

We must now proceed to the more detailed questions about the exact amount of social and cultural capital. We must distinguish, at least in theory, between the family social network links the bride's family has to offer (its social capital), and the cultural capital in terms of its habitus, life-style and education. More often we may find that these two varieties of capital are intermingled and not easily distinguishable from each other. I started a probe into this subject by enquiring about what a 'good' family might represent:

Q: What is considered a very good family?

A: Like, old families, particularly, the ones who had some kind of reputations since generations, quite well-off, highly cultured and refined. I mean, neo-rich people are just looked down. The people who made money, they are very crude, they don't have any, they are still very rough and compatibility will be missing. So they give much more importance to such family ties, and whom they are related to. Even political, politicians, businessmen, successful businessmen, business relations are plus points. Like official bureaucrat positions, close links to them, and business people, political links, and apart from that how the family is. Such connections, just one, two, three steps away from the high, from the top. They are much valued. These people

are money wise, business wise, political wise, they have all three. And every factor is given individual weight. And the education, naturally. The girl (the recently what we have seen some eight or ten days ago), and almost thought we had a very good match, her grandparents themselves were graduates from Madras University, which was under British Administration and considered very good education. They studied in Madras. Her grandmother and her grandfather, and even her mother is a first class graduate, her father is a PG, but though, in those days it was looked down if you took a government job, that's why they never took a job. And her grandparents were so well educated, you know, they conducted marriage of one of the CMs of our state. Bhana Venkat Ram and his wife, Jayapradha. Even they were classmates of these people and they performed the marriage of our former CM who was CM in the 1980s. And her grandfather was one who produced some pictures with social messages, like "SC girl", he dared to produce such movies in the 1940s and 50s. Also, one mythological movie which actually launched NT Rama Rao into the film den, and after that people started believing he's the living god. So he was responsible for that. Of course, he never made any money and he lost all whatever he had in the film career. Eight days ago we saw the girl and the girl was pretty to look at.

The rather innocent question produced a lengthy tale about various qualities a bride's family should have. We must attempt to identify the important variables in this tale. Firstly, great emphasis is laid upon a suitable combination of various factors. The interviewee names a few: the complete capital of a family, that is its endowment with social and cultural capital, should consist of successful business enterprises, political alliances and linkages, and last but not least a family history traceable back for at least several generations. 'Neo-rich' people are looked down upon, and this is not surprising: given the high caste family background of the group under discussion here, it can be assumed that such neo-rich families usually do not come from the same caste background as our family anyway. Hence, those neo-rich people maybe belong to lower caste groups, such as Backward Castes, and are 'naturally' 'looked down' upon because of their caste habits, and their lack of 'refinement', i.e. their amount of cultural capital is too low, and their habitus too different, to count as a serious match in the first place.

In the last section of the above tale the interviewee mentions one specific match proposal which he himself considered very promising. It is here again that the desired and required habitus, the cultural capital, comes into play: while this family has a traceable background and history going well back into colonial times, they never were 'crude' enough to make a lot of money, or worldly wealth, out of it. Instead, the grandfather labels himself as a reformist prior to all other caste reformist movements because he had produced some caste-conscious movies. And it was he who brought the (then) present Chief Minister into the movie business: another indication of the second factor required, the valuable political links right to the top. And

on top of that, they even conducted the marriage of one of Andhra Pradesh's Chief Ministers in the 1980s, because the grandparents of the proposed match were *classmates* of his.

We now seem to have established exactly what Ravi Kumar's family was looking for in terms of a 'compatible' match. Such a 'compatible' match should have the best available resource combination in terms of social capital (the family links and relations), and the cultural capital (old family, dating back centuries, with high education over several generations, and certainly not neo-rich). Apart from that, his family naturally welcomes any successful business enterprises. But we will see later that monetary matters are actually less important than the other two. While the stage now seems to be set for entering the detailed phases of the girl's rejecting, and finally accepting a match, we must mention one more factor, which is quite obvious and to be expected: the match has to belong to the same caste group. We note that our interviewee tells us of three major sub-castes within his caste<sup>4</sup>:

A: The caste of course is non-negotiable, so no one asked the caste. So naturally you expect, you know, that's almost accepted.

Q: But the same sub-caste is not necessary?

A: No, you see, I think, that means I have to go into a little bit specifics.

Q: Please do so.

A: Like Reddys are, major castes are accepted. Three of them. Like Mothati, Pakanati, and Guddati. They are the majority. I mean there might be very minor, say, a hundred Reddy people are there, a population of Reddys is taken as hundred, so these three constitute 90 or 95 per cent.

Q: Is there a hierarchy within these three sub-castes?

A: Mothati is supposed to be top.

Q: What comes next?

A: Pakanati. (...) So now it's accepted, people, you know, they don't mind, it's only imaginary now. Now at least they are accepted, the equality of the outfit.

Q: So the Reddy caste is not negotiable but within the three sub-castes it's okay.

A: Okay, yes. That's what at least in my social status happens.

Finally, we have established the expectations and requirements of our family in the whole exercise of finding a bride. The expectations are of course quite high, but we will see now how various matches got rejected due to some more qualifications which they weren't able to meet.

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<sup>4</sup> There is at least one more sub-caste, Chirragatla. Since this sub-caste allows widow re-marriage it faces social exclusion and is not mentioned by the interviewee.

Having set the necessary *general* expectations and requirements, we can now move on to regard the *individual* qualities of the proposed match as well. It is here that we enter into the inherent, and underlying, male bias of the whole process. First of all, it is always expected in our group under discussion that the proposed girl not only comes from a family which can offer the required social and cultural capital, but has also some exemplary personal record both in terms of educational achievement *and* 'clean record'. We shall see now what is meant by such a 'clean record':

Q: If Ravi Kumar gets married, his wife is supposed to be a virgin?

A: Naturally, that's non negotiable and unquestionable. Virgin same caste Reddy girl.

Q: And how do you actually prove in modern times that she is still a virgin?

A: No it's not that. You, somehow, in our society, there being so many people, it's filled, stacked with so many people and various inter-connected, even before you are related, going in the same caste, same sub-caste, that's the advantage of it, you know you get the information from it, the time you take to consider a proposal, involves all that. But people don't know. But all this information will come out. If there is any flaw in the girl, that's the first thing to reach. Money, dowry, family status doesn't matter. But if the character is loose, that's the first thing. It will be spread. Whether you are going to make a relationship or not. That precedes the match. So even the fellow who brings the proposal is at a great risk. He will have the wrath.

This is a clear indication that the actual matchmaking is preceded not only by detailed investigations into the family background of the proposed match, but also that some investigations take place into the individual character of the proposed bride. It might even remind us of Foucault's interrogation without limits. After all, it is assumed that the vast expansion of the family's own social network is able to produce reliable information about the 'character' of the bride, and it is further assumed that the 'character' can be valued and ascertained in that way even without meeting the bride face to face. This is really astonishing information! The vast social network is supposed to be able to relay reliable qualitative information about the individual 'character' of the proposed girl: whether she led a 'loose' life prior to the match proposal, whether she had some contacts with the opposite sex which might cast a shadow on her, and of course her whole family. A situation can easily be imagined where the amount of gossiping and spreading of false information by ill-wishers is only cross-checked by the extent to which strict moral limits, rules and regulations are followed. We also note that the requirements for leading a 'loose' life are rather easy to meet:

A: Girls having friends as girls, and boys having friends with boys, are considered as normal. Very close friendships. That's normal. Considered as normal. Which is otherwise in any advanced Western society. As far as my personal experience goes. Males keeping male company all the time is ap-



preciated and desired. If you are too close, and if you are spending your time 24 hours a day, weeks, months, years, spending your time with your own sex, it is considered very normal and healthy. Very healthy. And otherwise, you are a social outcast.

Q: That leads us to the relationship between the two opposite genders. Before marriage, that's supposed to be very indecent? Like if a girl goes out with a fellow, he takes her to a restaurant or whatever, what's the image of the boy and of the girl?

A: You know, boy might escape. Again I tell you this is male dominated society. Boy at the most he will not be considered as virtuous, but that's not a crime at all. I mean, it's not that much severe. But with the girl, it's finished. It's as good, she is on terms with a professional, loose. And that will work not only against herself, if she has any sisters or brothers, even their career is finished.

Hence, even if it is just reported that the girl entertained some male company prior to her marriage, maybe even such an 'innocent' occasion as going out together to watch a movie, not only her marriage 'career' is finished, but so are those of her brothers and sisters. In fact, such behaviour even puts the girl on a par with a prostitute.

### **2.3 Genes, Colours, Voices: Individual qualities of prospective brides**

We now move on to regard the detailed, and individual, match proposals which the various network nodes reported and offered to the core family. It is here that we must test the already elaborated set of preferences which go along with the term 'compatibility', or what we have termed the same amount of social and cultural capital. Otherwise, we would have to expect a match which supplements some specific features lacking in our family under investigation, like business success in India.

Q: So when did the whole procedure kick off? This week?

A: Actually, the really serious, very hectic is since one week. But they had one match one month ago, which was ultimately got to the level of approval. Shall I go into detail or what?

Here again we can note that various proposals reached the core family, but not all of them received serious consideration. One, however, got to the level of approval, and we will look more deeply into this first match in order to establish reasons and considerations which prevented the successful completion of the expansion of the family network. This seems to be important because we have already established qualitative criteria which enable a match proposal to reach a very advanced, if not the final, stage of consideration, and ultimately, approval. We might then ask: if all the expectations seem to have been met, why was the match refused? Of course, we can not expect the bridegroom to have any say at all.

A: (Shall I go into detail or what?)

Q: Yes, yes. Sure, sure.

A: One month ago a proposal came. The girl was an insurance officer, and quite fair by Indian standards, like 24 years old, good to look at, blue eyes, vary rare, ...

Q: Blue eyes? Oh, from Kashmir origin?

A: No, but they are quite fair, like ...

Q: From Andhra Pradesh? That's something very special.

A: Blue eyes, and quite fair by Indian standards, and she was an insurance officer, and her father has died long back. And she had a brother, I think he is some engineer with some firm. You know, the day we gave the party, that evening I had to rush, we all went, and sort of gave the final approval, but these people negotiated like, first the girl is important, naturally along with that the caste, the family. The caste of course is non-negotiable, so no one asked the caste.

The interviewee jumps right into the middle of the process. I wanted to enquire more deeply about the unusual physical appearance of the proposed bride, but he didn't want to go into those details right now. First of all he wanted to give the impression that the match was already considered to be favourable for Ravi Kumar and his family, and that it had already reached the level of ultimate approval. He mentioned twice that the girl had a good employment background herself, and that her brother worked as an engineer.

We note here that it is our interviewee himself who played a major role in this process: it is not only the parents, but the inner circle of the extended family which has the responsibility of approving a match. Hence, the responsibility rests on many shoulders, and a lot of people from the inner circle cannot refuse responsibility. In fact it is an inclusionary tactic meant to prevent opposition against the match (and the newly incorporated family networks) from the inner circle. We might ask about the composition of this inner circle: starting from the core family, we can expect Ravi Kumar's parents to be a part of it, and also his sisters and his sisters' husbands. But not only them:

A: During this process this fellow will have no mind of his. It's part of the system, it's no strategy, but it works out like this. Everyone has to give the opinion, even the small child, like 13 year old (his daughter, RM) is asked about her opinion, and even (his 9 year old son, RM). And the bridegroom is in a suspended state. (...)all the members of the family, it's like Mafia. Everyone has a vote. So pros and cons. (...) No one has the complete say, no one has any, all close relations like bridegroom's parents, sisters, brother, and brothers-in-law. Since it is a male dominated society, instead of sisters mostly the brothers-in-law play a much larger role.

The inner circle seems to be composed of the parents, the brothers and sisters of the bridegroom, their husbands and wives, and ultimately even the bridegroom's nieces and nephews. They all have a say and an opinion to express during the complex elaborations, and we shall soon see how conflicting interests overshadow and overrule the pre-existing 'compatibility' of the various match proposals.

Q: Okay, so what happened with that first girl?

A: First girl, what happened, everything matched, and in fact they and some distant relations, many times since they were in the vicinity of the city, relations, so, the girl was pretty good, the educational background, the family background, compatibility, everything was fine. And they offered like, the money, the dowry, that need not be forced, you know, they offer, like 4 or 5 lakh<sup>5</sup> rupees, with some gold, some cash. Partly some of that goes to (his wife, RM) and Sunnita (Ravi Kumar's sister, RM). That's only normal limits. It's neither forced nor extracted, exploited, it's every Reddy expects to pay and expects to be paid. It's the same. It's a kind of, like you're going for a small party, you are offered tea, if you are going for a bigger occasion, then naturally you will be offered lunch or dinner. Something like that. Depending on your social status, you are offered and you are accepted.

Here again the interviewee tells us that the compatibility was quite perfect for all involved. He is reciting once more the requirements which were met by this match proposal: the social links offered by the family were acceptable, the girl's physical appearance and her education as well. He also tells us that the girl's family had lived in Hyderabad for quite some time, which is an indication of the same cultural capital available. The interviewee also starts elaborating on the question of dowry, and he makes it quite clear that to his family the monetary matters were not important at all.

We note that these dowry payments are neither 'forced nor extracted', but just offered and accepted in a 'customary' way. In fact, our interviewee tries to downgrade the whole issue by comparing it to a social occasion where one is either offered tea or dinner, depending on the circumstances. We might then ask what distinguishes the offering of tea or dinner: what are the reasons some brides' families only have to offer tea, whereas others have to present a full menu?

Q: Is there a trade-off between beauty and dowry?

A: Naturally. If you are beautiful you give less dowry. If you are plain and average you have to give much more dowry. Naturally, with the family also. If you come from a good family, then the dowry, if you have highly placed relations, and your family has a long tradition, very good history, then people are after you.

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<sup>5</sup> One lakh rupees equal 100,000 rupees.

The interviewee ascertains here that the amount of dowry to be paid does rest upon the social and cultural capital of the bride's family. He also mentions the question of beauty. While beauty is a subjective criterion we should lay more emphasis on the 'tradition' and background of the family, and its social networks.

A: Dowry is always, they come up with the figures. The moment any match is considered, bride side people, they always say we are going to, we are able to afford this much of dowry, and they come up with the family references and the education. That's the basic stuff you start with. Still they see whether they have the same kind of compatibility. And then they will come up with the figures, like five lakhs, 20 lakhs, 25 lakhs. Since Ravi Kumar received one match in between, they offered straight away 25 lakhs, and that's negotiable, that's not fixed. I mean if they select the girl and they want more money, they would come up with 10, 12, I mean that would come up to 30, 40 lakhs. So money is no matter. Some people try to tempt you with the money if the girl is very plain looking or ugly looking or whatever. If the girl is not compatible to the boy.

There are of course conflicting interests within the decision-making inner circle of the bridegroom's family. We will see that the bridegroom's father's main emphasis, apart from the cultural and social capital, is a matching horoscope. The mother, however, puts more emphasis on the amount of dowry:

A: In between some matches came, like the ones who offered 25 lakhs and said that's not the limit. If you like the girl, we are ready to give 10 to 15 plus the property. But we never went, because I refused to see the girl. I said you know if it reaches the 4<sup>th</sup> stage or 5<sup>th</sup> stage, final, I'll come. So I refused to go, and other people looked, and said she was very plain, short, not compatible for Ravi Kumar. Though the money was tempting to my mother-in-law, shall I say that?

We must now try to pinpoint other reasons why prospective matches were rejected. And it is here that certain considerations play an important part.

A: So all the while this elder brother was not there. You know, the elder brother of the girl. Since the father is not there, mother is there, and the girl was always shown her uncle's place. Elder brother was always not there. That was strange, a bit. We asked and they said he's off to tours or something like that. And when the finalisation, that day when we went, before that you know at least five, six times meetings and negotiations, between the bride and bridegroom, and with all the relations around would have taken place to arrive at such place. You know if it has reached that stage it means the girl has passed and boy has passed. They are like mutual relations, individual relations. Ultimately it came to be known that brother has an albino condition, a skin condition, and he too got that late, maybe in his 15 or 16 year. So now he's as fair as a European, so it was genetically considered not a good match, once they came to know of the brother. In no way it affects

any system, just some people, biologically, technically, they fail to manufacture enough albino pigment to make them black. So the girl was refused on these grounds.

Despite his being an engineer, the girl with the blue eyes working as an insurance officer was refused. She was refused because the brother has an albino condition. While our interviewee says that it does not affect the mental capacity, the girl was refused because it was thought she might develop the same condition – resulting in a stigma for Ravi Kumar's family. And even more importantly, it was also feared that any children resulting from the marriage might suffer from the same defect.

The second girl under serious consideration was the one mentioned earlier, whose father produced reformist movies in the 1950s and grandparents arranged the marriage of one of Andhra Pradesh's Chief Ministers. The negotiations reached a very advanced stage, but again some interests developed which prevented the match from being finalised:

A: But this girl, the one which we now eight days ago, they selected the girl, and later took the date of births, since my father-in-law is very particular about horoscopes, and of course even a bit of everyone in their family. I don't care anything about this. So it was found, every animal represents a symbolic value, with its own effects, if there is a cobra in the horoscope, that means the cobra what it is famous for, it's very deadly, venomous, poisonous snake, so their life in a symbolic way will be affected that way. So it will not be a happy life, if you believe in horoscope. It was such a deadly horoscope, at least for the believers. Had it been little bit less severe predictions, or some horoscope outcome, probably they would have gone, since that's the best match considered, socially, though money wise it's the least. They were offering only 6 or 7 lakhs, but the education background, family background, social position, that was very good, and even the girl was very compatible. So that was given up. Just plainly because the horoscopes did not match. Now yesterday we went to see this girl, third stage I would call.

Q: Another girl.

A: Yes. Third stage. First some people would go and see, casually; next, another meeting with a little bit more presence, and third this was final okay like, so all of us went and saw the girl, and kept it under suspension. That means it's okay. And since even the horoscope is also okay, the money is also okay, nothing exemplary, neither the girl or any other thing. And social position also, okay. I mean, better than average.

Here we have already entered the scenario where a third girl is considered a compatible match, and negotiations have advanced. First we note that the second girl, the one with the prestigious family, was refused simply on the grounds that their horoscopes did not match. We note that Ravi Kumar's father's individual preferences are such that he puts a lot of emphasis on matching horoscopes.

A: But he is very rigid on horoscope. He doesn't mind about caste but he's very rigid on horoscope.

From the above section, we note that the interviewee does not consider the third match to be outstanding or exemplary. He tells us thrice that her various qualifications are (just) 'okay'. Here we can already detect some fissures and cracks indicative of his individual preferences. We remind ourselves that the second match was considered to be very favourable in our interviewee's eyes, but he had to accept the fact that a non-matching horoscope was not acceptable to Ravi Kumar's father. I then enquired for more information regarding the third match proposal:

A: She is a BA Literature, and doing Hotel Management now, looks intelligent, above average, though (his wife's, RM) colour. Would you call her brown or what?

Q: Well, I don't know, yes.

A: By Indian standards she is not fair, but I think that doesn't matter if you look at the girl, you don't feel whether she is fair or not. She had such an appeal, sensitive features, tall, quite tall, like 5"5 plus, slim, and pleasant smile, but the voice was very much bass, baritone. Even if you are sitting across fifteen feet, and if she is speaking in a little above a whisper, you can hear it. Loud and clear. So I think these people will, though they asked few questions to see if the tone is just a maladjustment in the wind chords or something, but it's for real. They said some cold or something. But that will be ascertained, confirmed.

It is striking to note that once the formal qualifications are all met, some individual racist preferences come into play. First of all, our respondent tells us that the colour of the skin plays a very important part. He says it so lightly and off-hand that one cannot disregard the assumption that this issue is so deeply rooted in the complex process of match-making that it does not require elaborate explanations. Our interviewee merely tries to illustrate for us, the outsiders, that the colour of the skin also merits consideration. And while he remarks on her physical appearance, he also tells us that some suspicion is already present because of her deep voice. But, 'that will be ascertained, confirmed'! It means nothing less than the activation of the large family network simply for the task of finding out whether the deep voice is a constant feature, or just a temporary maladjustment. Since the network produced the required information, the third girl was rejected:

Q: And what was the final reason for rejecting. Was it her voice, or was it her family, or..

A: No, no. Family was exemplary. Family was very good. Family was good, but it's only her colour and voice. Both. She was darker shade. You know, though all people are dark, the colour of the skin plays a major role. That settles the issue for future, about your children. If they are fair, it's valued very much. If they are darker, no. No chance.

Genetic reasons were again most important for the rejection of the third match proposal: it was supposed, under-current and unmentioned, that her deep voice was a signal that the third match under consideration had some endowment problems as far as her hormones was concerned. It was feared that an overabundance of male hormones, as indicated by her deep voice, would in turn endanger the correct hormone composition, and hence the general appearance, features and qualities of the offspring. Similarly, the darker skin colour worked to the disadvantage of the third match proposal. Since it is still believed in India that a darker skin is an indicator for lower caste membership, it was feared that the children would suffer from a disadvantage, or, as our interviewee told us: the colour of the skin settles the future of the offspring. The future, in this case, again lies in the hope of finding suitable marriage matches for them – hence, the question of the expansion of the family network in the ‘future’ is already a point under consideration when the main actors of this expansion, the children, are not even yet born.

The next match proposal came forward, or was already under consideration. Detailed negotiations were entered only after the third match proposal was finally rejected due to the reasons elaborated above.

Q: And, then came the next girl. Who was she?

A: Shall I give you specific details, or what?

Q: Please.

A: Very old relations of my mother’s side. Very old, maybe three, four generations old. And even then they were considered to be good family, third generations, four generations back.

Here again we have an indication that the main emphasis of the expansion of the network is towards knitting families closer together. The interviewee tells us that this proposed match in fact already has some links and nodes with the closer family network of our respondent. This is certainly thought to be a positive factor because their family history, and references, can be checked much more easily. Also, the exact value and amount of the social and cultural capital can be assessed with ease, and its functionality evaluated more easily. I then enquired about the background of the family:

Q: Landed background?

A: Naturally! All of us, no-one among us is a poor man. Everyone in this family was supreme in the village, until our generation. Supreme in the sense, top. Not only in one village, but in three, four villages. And most of us own lands in at least three or five villages, at least up to my father and grandfather level. So even like these people they were, and some forty, fifty years ago, these people used to have automobiles. Personal automobiles. That was considered, by Indian standards, rare. So the relation which came now. They are old families. And the girl is well educated, and well con-

nected, I mean all their relations are well placed. Well placed in the sense that in all good families. That's an asset, too.

Here again the interviewee tells us about the glorious past of his family in terms of agricultural land holdings, links to royalty (in the sense that they were responsible for tax collection and police duties in various villages), and in general, supreme social status in the past. The family under consideration, then, had the same landed background and family history. This is not surprising since some relational links already existed prior to the recent marriage proposal. The respondent also tells us that the girl meets the formal criteria of being well educated, and another interesting reference is made: again, the social and cultural capital is mentioned. We could even emphasise once again that it is the same amount and value of social capital which is required to guarantee success, or at least to reach the advanced stages of negotiations in the match-making. We can also find in the last two sentences an interesting combination of social and cultural capital: the social capital points to well connected family links and relations, whereas the cultural capital *values* those links in the sense that the connections extend to 'good' families: good families are those with the same refinement, style, code of conduct and so on.

It is still important to drive the argument to a conclusion as far as cultural capital is concerned. We have argued at the beginning of this section that *habitus* contains certain values and codes of conduct, namely the do's and don'ts of the core family here under discussion, and also some clan system traceable back for generations: the *gotra*<sup>6</sup>. It is here that the most striking observation was made during the interview: the girl under very serious consideration stemmed from the same *gotra* as the core family:

A: Yes. It's strange, you know, we find out my mother comes from a very widely spread gotra, it's very difficult for these people to find a bride, since their gotra is spread out inter-state, inter-district, the districts which are far off like thousands of kilometres away.

The reason why it is sometimes hard to find corresponding matches for people who have the *gotra* of the mother of our respondent is because people from the same *gotra* are not supposed to marry each other: cross-cousin marriages from people with the same *gotra* are strictly forbidden. The mother, of course, would shed her original *gotra* after marrying her husband. And now comes the very interesting part:

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<sup>6</sup> *Gotra* refers to a clan system in ethnic terms. "This *gotra* system was written down and made into a system which applied to all Brahmins and was copied by many other castes. The castes which claim to be Kshatriyas or Vaishyas (traders) have social divisions possessing *gotras*. There is however no caste in India besides Brahmins which possesses the elaborate *pravaras* included in the *gotra* organisation. Many lower castes also have *gotras* and even primitive people talk of their clans as *gotta* or *gotra*" (Karve 1996, 52).



Q: But that doesn't have any importance now, since she has the new one from your father.

A: Exactly. You see, it's strange, if the girl, the new match, who is going to be married to Ravi Kumar, if it works out, she is of same gotra.

Q: Of your mother's side?

A: Yes. And my cousin, he married a girl from Medak District, and their family name is different, and we never knew they existed, and they have the same gotra. It's strange. Like you finding your family roots somewhere. You are living in Germany, and you find someone else in Scandinavia or Italy or somewhere.

The last girl under serious consideration was found to have the same *gotra* as the mother of our respondent and hence some family linkages and relations already existed well before the current match-making. This was one of the strongest assets in favour of the match-making because it corresponded so neatly with the overall desire to expand the network on the lines of corresponding cultural capital. One last point working in favour of the match included the same amount of cultural capital when it came to the refusal to engage in unruly, hasty profiteering activities. We have noted already that the core family basically lives on its glorious past, and that only members within the *expanded* network are having considerable economic success. But the core family members regard anything like profiteering activities not related to a prestigious academic profession as below their dignity, and simply not their style – or *habitus*. The father of the proposed bride, now, had apparently sustained some minor business failure which most certainly worked to his advantage:

A: I think father is an agricultural officer, and now in charge of Mandal Development Officer, and he was in construction business on the side, and he trusted some fellow who was his partner or so, and they built a complex of 20, 25 lakhs of each share, which was not built according to the taste and present tradition of *Vasthu* etc. Some defective. It had to be dismantled. So his share of the loss was about from 15 to 20 lakhs. So this was a very recent set-back.

We are completely convinced at this stage that the failure of the father in his latest enterprise corresponded so neatly with the required cultural capital that it worked in favour of the match proposal. The last girl under consideration seems to have all the necessary requirements as far as her endowment with social and cultural capital is concerned, and the very last hurdle to be taken must be her individual qualifications:

Q: What's her education like?

A. She studied in one of the best convents in AP, St. Anthony's convent in Secunderabad, then Stanley Intermediate, and she had always 80 per cent plus (Grades, RM), and then, now she's doing her graduation in microbiology with tough combination, with exemplary academic record. And what we

observed in our conversation that she, though you cannot call her beautiful, but above average, by Indian standards fair, above average height, but she has very good personality, presentational.

Apart from the fact that the formal qualifications seem to have been met (educationwise), it is interesting to note how much our interviewee has appropriated the formal qualifications for his own family, in the sense that he himself values, and qualifies, her educational background. This might be surprising since he cannot be expected to give a qualified opinion on either the school and college she was educated in, or the combination she chose. Rather, we may assume that our respondent has only very little knowledge about what might be considered a 'tough' combination in microbiology, or what might be regarded as an 'exemplary' academic record. In fact, we might assume that these qualitative statements stem from the bride's family or herself. The clear applauding, and the subsequent integration of these qualifications into the mindset of our interviewee is an indication that the match proposal was not only considered to be valuable, but it is most likely that this proposal will reach the final stage of marriage.

### 3.4 Can the bride refuse?

We might leave the issue of match proposals now by stating that it was this last girl who was accepted eventually, and the marriage took place some months afterwards. There are some points which still need to be discussed before summarising the section, and they point towards the unequal bargaining relationship between bride and bridegroom, and their respective families. First of all, I enquired about the number of match proposals a bridegroom's family usually has to 'process' before entering a marriage agreement.

Q: So how many girls had been checked?

A: Ah, I think only two girls seriously checked. Four girls came into later stage, final rejection stage.

First of all, we note that the complete amount of seriously checked matches was just four – not too many really, and we might ask ourselves why. There seem to be considerable opportunity costs to be encountered in the course of the activation of the family network for the marriage: references have to be appropriated, visitors entertained, travels to be made. Also, it is expected that the activation of the family network enables other cliques of the network to draw on the resources of the core family on some future occasion. Hence, the trade-off between seriously checking many match proposals and the related increased obligation towards engaged nodes of the family network for this purpose is always under consideration.

Q: And the amount of girls who have been rejected, is it uncommon or usual?

A: Girls rejected? That's pretty much common. I know a few people who have rejected 30, 40, maybe some people reach 60 plus, 100. Nothing unusual about. It's actually below average for Ravi Kumar.

More important than the amount of brides and their families 'checked' is the question about the unequal relationships within all these strategies of expansion. Would there be a chance for a bride or a family to reject a proposed match? Would the prospective bride have the right to call off the match-making because she does not like the bridegroom, does not want to get married at all, or is already secretly in love with another man, maybe even from another caste?

Q: And is it also possible that the bride's family, parents, finally reject?

A. It's unheard of and rarely does happen.

Our interviewee tells us that the bargaining relationship is so unequal that a rejection from the bride's family is complete unthinkable. But I enquired further, and some more interesting information could be obtained:

Q: And coming back to this marriage procedure, if everything is fine, as in Ravi Kumar's case, if finally the girl herself has some objections. Will she be able to say that I'm sorry and it's not going to work out?

A: Yes, that's happening in these days. That was unthinkable till recent, but it's happening. If that happens then in the market she has to go with a stigma, like she has spoken out, she has rejected, so next time all the relations won't be ready to consider her proposal. She starts with a disadvantage.

Q: And the dowry will also go up?

A: Not only dowry, everyone will be wary, this girl, she has refused, and the word will spread like the character is loose like, if not same, then next to that. In that degree. Next time she won't get the decent matches. They would refuse. Why take a risk of getting rejection? That's the loss of a lot of prestige for the bridegroom. Like the husband is the last to know of wife's infidelity. He becomes a ridiculous man. He would like to hide his face after getting rejected.

Here we have a fine indication of the unequal relationship. Our interviewee tells us (grudgingly) that the rejection by the bride or her family does happen nowadays, in 'these days'. Clearly he indicates that this did not happen in the good old days when wives were supposed to be confined to the household, and did not have a voice of their own. That is at least his own re-writing of history, and since we do not know the gender roles in the past for sure, we must stick to this reconstruction of his own version of male-dominated history. More interesting is the reaction to the rejection by the bride or her family: it is immediately linked and related to her bargaining position in the next match. Since she spent a lot of her (already diminished)

bargaining power by rejecting a match proposal, she and her family have to offset this unheard of rejection by increasing the amount of dowry to be paid. It is as if a rejection is not supposed to be a part of an expected habitus. If such an action is undertaken nevertheless, the penalty for doing so is severe: the dowry will go up, and also the whole core family network will suffer from a loss of acquired cultural capital. The total amount of cultural capital of the core family will be reduced or even diminished, and hence the dowry must go up to counter this process. But since dowry cannot regain the lost amount of cultural capital completely, the initial disadvantage in match-making can never ever be eradicated completely.

Just to make sure the point is driven home to all prospective rejecters, the process of rejection is eventually even linked to infidelity of the woman. Rejecting in this sense means the refusal to have intercourse, so it is linked to the sexual sphere: the man wants to hide his face because the woman rejected him: not only in the match, but she refused to allow him to take advantage of her body.

Elaborate processes work to prevent rejection: the loss of cultural capital for the family is drastic. The image of the girl rejecting places her on a par with a wife having an illicit affair. These are strict and harsh, threatening measures, and deterrents. The rejection of this option is meant to safeguard and secure the habitus and cultural capital completely, and to prevent *any* loss of it, be it ever so small.

#### 4. Conclusion

The paper started with the assumption that families in India are extended units of social reproduction. They can also be regarded as social networks which carry with them certain amounts of social capital, the links available within the family network, and cultural capital, common codes of behaviour, styles of life, and habitus. Networking in this sense includes match-making, i.e. the controlled and arranged expansion of the family social network through marriage.

After restating the increasing importance of family organisation in India in general, the paper discusses in its empirical section the case of match-making processes for a member of a family social network in Andhra Pradesh. This family social network, residing partly in the state capital of Hyderabad and partly in rural districts, consists basically of middle class and upper caste members with a strong historical background of large land holdings. The paper discusses empirically the elaborate matchmaking procedures for one male member of that member, an employee of the Andhra

Pradesh State Police. The marriage arrangement is described in four phases: firstly, the complete family social network is activated for the purpose of gathering information about prospective marriage partners, and their respective family social networks. This activation occurs after the parents of the prospective bridegroom-to made the decision to marry their son. Secondly, after scrutinising the reports brought to the inner family circle from various network members, the general qualities of the proposed family network come under investigation. It is here that the issue of 'compatibility' receives consideration. Compatibility in this sense means similar amounts of social and cultural capital available to the proposed family network. A good match then includes important political links with a record of landed ownership going back at least several generations, combined with 'modern' business links in promising fields such as engineering and medicine – but probably increasingly also links to the United States and the software industry. Until now, the individual qualities of the proposed bride have not played a major role.

This happens in the third stage only after the compatibility issue has been approved by the members of the inner circle who have voting rights: the parents, the brother and sisters with their respective husbands, and close cousins and children. These individual qualities, which include the educational record, but also the physical complexion, are weighted against the amounts of dowry which is on offer, but more importantly against the compatible factors of social and cultural capital. The complete factors of social and cultural capital, dowry, and the individual qualities of the proposed bride (in diminishing order of importance) have to be accepted by the members of the core family for the marriage to take place.

These are basically networking procedures with a clear male bias and agency. The paper shows how the proposed bride and her family have no real exit option once they enter the marriage negotiations. Underlying avenues of resistance might include the offering of dowry amounts which are regarded as too low, but nevertheless the clear agenda setting capacity of the male side remains unchallenged.

It is striking to note that matchmaking continues to play a major role in the social reproduction process of middle class South India, ever since the times of Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*<sup>7</sup>. We must ask ourselves why this seems to be the case. We should consider once again the descriptions of the family networks: once with a strong rural background, now equipped with vertical and horizontal linkages across India, across many sectors of the economy, and across and into the political field from local party cadres

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<sup>7</sup> Although written for a different part of India.

right up to Members of the Legislative Assembly and Parliament. This implies that such family social networks are important appropriation engines, and their many resources can be applied and tapped to the benefit of each individual member in many circumstances. Hence the importance to undertake so much consideration and effort to arrange the marriage for a single member. In modern times, the importance of doing so seems to be even greater, and maybe this is the most surprising finding. One explanation which comes to mind is that much more and different resources are available through different sources *and* for different castes and classes, and each one of these resources (i.e. urban enterprises, rural subsidies, contracts and political power, to name the obvious) requires a successfully operating appropriation network. The expanded family social network remains its foundation stone and core element.

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