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Faculty of Education

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DIPLOMA THESIS

Indian Marriage as Seen from the Female Perspective in the
Novels by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Arundhati Roy

Indické manželství nazírané z ženské perspektivy
v románech Chitry Banerjee Divakaruni a Arundhati Roy

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Declaration

I hereby declare that I worked on this thesis, titled “Indian Marriage as Seen from the Female Perspective in the Novels by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Arundhati Roy” on my own and that I used only sources cited in the References section. I also declare that I have not previously used this work to gain any other academic degree than the one applied for.

Smiřice, 24th June 2016

Jana Dusová

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this diploma thesis is to analyse the conception of marriage in the works of two Indian female authors, namely Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels *Sister of My Heart* and its sequel *The Vine of Desire* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*.

The thesis consists of two parts. The objective of the theoretical part is to portray the position of marriage within Indian society and to introduce two female authors and their novels where the theme of Indian marriage plays a significant role.

The practical part of the work focuses on a thorough analysis of three chosen female characters. Their roles within the marriage and the influence of marriage on their lives will be further discussed. The result of this part will be an overall comparison of how the chosen authors approach the theme of traditional Indian marriage in their works.

KEY WORDS

Indian society, arranged marriage, marriage of one's own will, Indian vs. American marriage, social roles related to marriage, transgressions of marital laws, divorces

ABSTRAKT

Cílem této diplomové práce je analýza pojetí manželství v tvorbě dvou indických autorek, konkrétně Chitry Banerjee Divakaruni a jejích románů *Sister of My Heart* a jeho pokračování *The Vine of Desire* a románu Arundhati Roy *The God of Small Things*.

Práce se skládá ze dvou částí. Smyslem teoretické části je popsat postavení manželství v indické společnosti a představit tvorbu dvou autorek, v jejichž románech hraje tematika indického manželství významnou roli.

Praktická část práce se zaměřuje na podrobnou analýzu tří vybraných ženských hrdinek z pohledu jejich rolí spojených se sňatkem. Tato část se také zabývá tím, do jaké míry sňatek ovlivnil jejich osobní život. Výsledkem této části je celkové porovnání toho, jak vybrané autorky ve své tvorbě přistupují k tematice manželství.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Indická společnost, domluvený sňatek, sňatek z vlastní vůle, Indický vs. Americký sňatek, společenské role spojené se sňatkem, porušení pravidel sňatku, rozvody

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INTRODUCTION

Indian society has traditionally undervalued the work of Indian female writers based on a generally held view that men are superior to women. This discouraging social background has therefore divided contemporary Indian female writers dealing with the theme of traditional Indian marriage into two categories.

On the one hand, there are authors such as Anita Desai, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee who, in spite of their Indian origin, left their home country to find a new life in Britain or in America. Influenced by their migration experience, their works usually discuss various dilemmas in the lives of Indians or Indian immigrants such as marital difficulties, family issues, cultural clashes and social hostility. Their main characters are usually women trapped between two different worlds who find themselves not fitting into either of them. These characters, as well as the authors themselves, are exposed to social ostracism and misunderstanding because of their cross-cultural background and have to struggle to be tolerated and accepted by the majority.

On the other hand, there are still a few Indian authors including Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur and Sashi Desphande who stayed in their country of origin and managed to break through despite the unfavourable Indian social system. The works of these authors provide an authentic image of Indian society including women's discrimination, traditional arranged marriages and an impenetrable caste system. These authors can be taken as spokeswomen on behalf of all women who suffer in silence and who do not have enough opportunities to stand up for their rights and to assert their own identity.

The aim of this diploma thesis is thus to focus on one author from each category, namely the "entirely home-grown Indian author (Dhawan 11)" Arundhati Roy, whose monumental novel *The God of Small Things* helped Indian female writers gain recognition and enabled their voices to be heard, and "bicultural" Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, whose novels *Sister of My Heart* and its sequel *The Vine of Desire* combine both Indian and American perspectives, in order to show whether their different life experience and social background have had any impact on the way they perceive the concept of traditional Indian marriage. In other words, this work compares and contrasts the perspective of an Indian author who spent her whole life being surrounded by Indian traditions as well as restrictions and the perspective of an Indian migrant who decided to settle down in America to gain greater personal and professional autonomy.

The work is divided into two main parts. The theoretical part will firstly attempt to characterize two basic types of Indian marriages as well as their typical features. Next, social roles ascribed to women after entering into one of these marriages will be further discussed. As all of the chosen novels, *The God of Small Things*, *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire* are centred around female characters who refuse to comply with social expectations and conventions, the theoretical part will be concluded with a chapter focusing on transgressions of marital laws such as premarital romantic relationships, inter-caste marriage and divorce.

The main aim of the practical part is to analyse the issue of Indian marriage from the perspective of three selected female characters, namely Ammu from Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* and Sudha and Anju from Divakaruni's novels *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire*. These characters will be shown in various social roles that they gained by getting married, such as the role of a bride, wife, daughter-in-law, mother or marital transgressor. The objective of this analysis is to determine how the chosen authors approach the specific position of women within the institution of marriage and to reach a final comparison between their conceptions.

To sum up, this work will attempt to show whether Indian strict and deeply-rooted social conventions and traditions have prevented Arundhati Roy from providing a realistic and even critical image of Indian traditional marriage or, on the other hand, whether this discouraging background of discrimination has aroused in her the need to describe Indian marriage with all its possible problems. The thesis will also analyse whether Divakaruni's freedom and autonomy gained in America after being surrounded by Indian restrictions and norms has made her more critical in terms of Indian social issues such as relationships, marriage and divorce.

THEORETICAL PART

1 CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni was born in 1956 in Indian Calcutta where she also received her B.A degree in 1976. In the same year, at the age of nineteen, she immigrated to the United States. In an interview for Houston television, Divakaruni explains her reasons for coming to the United States. “I came here to resume my studies. I went to Ohio because my parents who were very nervous about sending me so far away insisted that I should live near my brother who was in Ohio at that time” (Houston PBS, Poet Connection Special – *Ch. B. Divakaruni*). In the United States, she earned her Master’s degree from Wright State University in Dayton and a Ph.D. in English from the University of California. She also got married to an Indian living in the United States and gave birth to two sons.

Divakaruni admits that perusing a writing career had not always been her dream. She studied English and Indian literature with the idea of becoming a college teacher like her mother. However, the turning point came when her grandfather in India died and, as she was living in the United States at the time, she was not able to go back for his funeral. In the interview, she explains, “It struck me that as I was living in the United States, I was losing important things and important people in my life and I realised I really needed to start writing about these special people, places and events so that I could keep them alive in my heart” (Houston PBS, Poet Connection Special – *Ch. B. Divakaruni*).

Divakaruni first published books of poetry, *Dark Like the River* (1987), *The Reason for Nasturtiums* (1990), and *Black Candle* (1991). Then, she decided to turn to fiction. As she says in the interview for Houston television, moving to fiction opened up the world for her. “It has allowed me to create a new world with my own characters and it has given me a possibility to talk about social issues that were important to me”. Her first work of fiction, a collection of short stories called *Arranged Marriage* (1995), was a great success. It was awarded the PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Prize for Fiction¹ and a 1996 American Book Award. As Divakaruni admits, the success of *Arranged Marriage* was a great surprise for her. Since all of the stories were about Indian immigrants who had come to the United States to find a new life, she was apprehensive whether this issue would be of interest to the larger American public.

¹ PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Literary Award is an award for United States multicultural writers that was founded in 1991 and named in honour of Josephine Miles, an American poet and literary critic.

This collection was followed by her first novel, *The Mistress of Spices*, in 1997, which was shortlisted for the Orange Prize² in England and was named one of the best books of 1997 by the Los Angeles Times. In 2005, this book was made into a film by an American director Paul M. Berges and a British director of Indian origin, Gurinder Chadha. In the TV interview, Patricia Gras, an American journalist and reporter, asks Divakaruni whether she did not mind that her book, focusing on traditional Indian social issues, had been made into a British film. Divakaruni answers, “Firstly, I was a little bit nervous. But I knew the directors had a great respect for the feminist issue of the book so I was happy to let them do it” (Houston PBS, Poet Connection Special – *Ch. B. Divakaruni*).

Her second novel, *Sister of My Heart*, was published in 1999 and its sequel, *The Vine of Desire*, in 2002. The inspiration for the plot of these two novels grew out of the short story *The Ultrasound* from the short-story collection, *Arranged Marriage*. *Sister of My Heart* was later released as a long television series in Tamil and aired in India.

After the success of these two books dealing with the topic of friendship between Indian women, Divakaruni published a succession of novels. Among her major works it is worth mentioning *Queen of Dreams* (2004), *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), a rendition of a Hindu epic, and *One Amazing Thing* (2010) narrating the story of a group of people trapped in an office after an earthquake who decide to tell each other stories of their lives while waiting to be rescued. Divakaruni’s latest novels are *Oleander Girl* (2013), which is centred around the story of a young woman who leaves India for America to find out more about her mysterious past, and *Before We Visit the Goddess* (2016), which focuses on the relationship between three generations of mothers and daughters.

Apart from her writing career, Divakaruni is a professor at the University of Houston, where she currently teaches creative writing. Moreover, she is one of the founders of the Maitri organisation that provides help for South Asian American women who have been subjected to domestic violence or abuse.

1.1.1 Major themes of Divakaruni’s writing

The main aim of Divakaruni’s novels is to challenge stereotypes and dissolve boundaries among people coming from different backgrounds. As Divakaruni says, “people need to embrace each other’s differences. A book is thus a wonderful, friendly and

²The Orange Prize for Fiction is one of the United Kingdom's most prestigious literary prizes that was established to recognise the literary achievements of female writers.

non-threatening way through which one can enter another culture” (Houston PBS, Poet Connection Special – *Ch. B. Divakaruni*).

Divakaruni’s novels reflect “her continuing concern with the situation of Indian immigrants in the United States, particularly Indian women torn between the values of the old world and those of the new” (Huang 66). However, the issue of immigration plays a central role not only in her works but also in her professional life. In the interview mentioned earlier, Divakaruni points out that had she not left India, she would never have become a writer. “Immigration has made me into a writer. It gave me a subject to write about; it gave me a different focus for looking back at my home culture as well as at this new world in which I found myself” (Houston PBS, Poet Connection Special – *Ch. B. Divakaruni*).

Divakaruni’s original culture is another theme in her works. In Patricia Gras’ show, Divakaruni says, “The Indian in me remembers Indian culture very well. What it was like to be brought up in Calcutta in an old marble mansion in a joint family; what kinds of things were expected of me” (Houston PBS, Poet Connection Special – *Ch. B. Divakaruni*). The social roles demanded of Indian women represent a frequent cause of her characters’ struggle. Divakaruni’s women live in a constant dilemma whether to respect strict social conventions or whether to break them and give free rein to their desires.

The last important feature of Divakaruni’s works is the incorporation of magical elements. As Divakaruni admits, she has always taken an interest in Indian folk tales and fairy tales. That is why she employs them in her writing. This tendency can be particularly observed in her novel *Sister of My Heart*, where the main characters, Anju and Sudha, try to explain some of the Indian traditions and conventions through fairy tales and magical stories narrated to them by their mothers.

1.1.2 Sister of My Heart and The Vine of Desire

Divakaruni’s novels, *Sister of My Heart* and its sequel *The Vine of Desire*, set in the two different worlds of India and America, introduce a story of two cousins, Anju and Sudha, who live in a non-standard Indian joint family being maintained by their widowed mothers. The central theme of these novels is the strength of friendship between the cousins who perceive themselves almost as sisters. In the interview for Houston television, Divakaruni says in relation to the novel, “it has always interested me to explore the ways in

which Indian women support each other and deal with challenges in their lives” (Houston PBS, Poet Connection Special – *Ch. B. Divakaruni*).

Nevertheless, it is the institution of Indian arranged marriage that shatters Anju and Sudha’s strong bond. Whereas Sudha is married to a man coming from an orthodox Indian family, Anju’s mother chooses an Indian living in America. Through the comparison between the Indian and American ways of life, Divakaruni tries to discover whether the girls’ strong relationship, set in such considerably different social backgrounds, has any chance to survive.

To conclude, Divakaruni’s “bicultural” writing can be summarized by a reaction to her novel *Sister of My Heart* published in *USA Today*. “Divakaruni’s literary voice is a sensual bridge between worlds. India and America. Men and women. Passion and pragmatism” (Divakaruni, *Sister of My Heart* 326). Divakaruni represents an author who provides her readers with a glimpse into the unique experience of an Indian migrant having found her new home in the United States. She is someone who writes about all the problems of her culture of origin; a culture which praises men over women and which takes marriage as a pragmatic commitment based on socioeconomic criteria rather than on love.

2 ARUNDHATI ROY

Arundhati Roy was born in Indian Kerala in 1961. In his volume *Arundhati Roy, The Novelist Extraordinary*, R.K. Dhawan, an Indian author and editor, labels Roy as an entirely home grown Indian author who has never lived or studied abroad. “She was born, brought up and educated in India and her writing style is thus intrinsically Indian” (11).

Roy’s childhood and coming of age were largely influenced by her parents’ divorce. Her parents separated and since Roy’s father was a Bengali Hindu tea planter and her mother a Syrian Christian teacher, their brief marriage violated India’s rigid caste system. Growing up in a small village of Ayamanan in Kerala, Roy, as a child born of an inter-caste marriage whose parents were divorced, was taken as a social outsider, a status that has never really left her.

To defuse family tensions, Roy decided to leave her home when she was sixteen and went to live in a squatters’ colony in Delhi. A year later, she enrolled in an architecture course and got married to a fellow student. Nevertheless, as Roy admits, she did not take their marriage seriously and the couple separated after several months. In 1984, she met an Indian film-maker, Pradip Krishen, who asked her if she would like to appear in his film. Despite initially refusing, she finally conceded and acted in his award-winning film, *Massey Sahib* (1985). Later, the couple got married.

Apart from her career as an actress, Arundhati Roy is also known as a screenplay writer. She wrote screenplays for two of her husband’s films, *In Which Annie Gives It To Those Ones* (1989), which is based on her personal experience as an architecture student, and *Electric Moon* (1992). For *In Which Annie Gives It To Those*, she won the National Film Award for Best Screenplay.

Although Roy never got officially divorced from her husband, they now live separately. When Roy was asked about the reasons for their split in an interview for *The Guardian* in 2011, she said, “My life is so crazy. There is so much idiosyncrasy. I do not have any establishment” (Moss). This implies that Roy values personal freedom and an unconventional way of life more than anything else.

The lack of establishment in her life is also the reason why Roy does not want to have any children of her own. She says that she is scared of their vulnerability. In the same interview for *The Guardian*, she explained, “For a long time I did not have the means to support them. And once I did I thought I was too unreliable to take care of them” (Moss).

Roy's life story thus shows that growing up as a social outcast within a society with such rigid social conventions and rules has made her integration into conventional society much more difficult. Not having a typical Indian family with traditional social roles, Roy's life is unconventional and transgressive in many aspects. However, her parents' divorce did not have an impact only on her personal life but also on her writing. The theme of an unhappy marriage became the central subject matter of her only novel *The God of Small Things* (1997).

2.1.1 *The God of Small Things*

The publication of *The God of Small Things*, a semi-autobiographical novel that took five years to complete, made Arundhati Roy an internationally acclaimed author. Thanks to this "authentically Indian novel" (Dhawan 11), Roy became the first Indian author to win the Booker Prize. In order to maintain the novel's distinct Indian quality, Roy even refused the offers to sell the film rights because she did not want anyone to interpret her book for the big screen.

The novel is set in the quiet village of Aymanam in Kerala, where Roy spent her mostly unhappy childhood. "Roy has taken the creative writer's liberty to change the name to Ayemenem" (Dhawan 14). The story, shifting back and forth between 1969 and 1993, introduces the life hardships of a pair of twins, Esthappen and Rahel, who are socially ostracised because of their divorced parents and inter-caste origin.

The novel mainly focuses on the importance of social environment of each individual and its role in determining his or her happiness. The novel thus indirectly criticizes the impenetrable Indian caste system, rigid marriage laws making divorce a social stigma and the strictly-determined social roles expected from both men and women. Moreover, the novel shows that any transgression of these rules can result in social oppression or even death.

Ever after the immense success of the novel, which has sold over six million copies, there have been many discussions whether Roy will continue with her fiction writing. In the article published in *The Guardian* in 2007, "Roy claimed to have started working on her second novel" (Pauli). However, nineteen years after the publication of her masterpiece, Arundhati Roy has still not published any other work of fiction.

Stephen Moss, a journalist writing for *The Guardian* says in one of his articles devoted to Arundhati Roy, "It is hard to judge whether there will be a second novel. *The*

God of Small Things drew so much on her own life – her charismatic but overbearing mother; a drunken tea-planter father whom her mother left when Roy was very young; her own departure from home in her late teens – that it may be a one-off, a book as much lived as written”.

2.1.2 Arundhati Roy as an activist

After the publication of her monumental novel, *The God of Small Things*, Roy turned to writing non-fiction and directed her considerable energies towards social and environmental activism in India. In many of her political essays, Arundhati Roy criticizes Indian policy towards Kashmir, the environmental destruction caused by rapid technical development, the country’s nuclear weapons programme, consumerism and corruption.

Moreover, Roy expresses solidarity with various Indian social groups such as Maoist guerrillas³ that are considered by many Indians as terrorists. Her collection of essays called *Broken Republic* published in 2007 focuses on the Maoist guerrilla movement that opposes the government’s efforts to destroy the land on which India’s indigenous people live. The book is written in a form of reportage recounting three weeks Roy spent with this movement in the forests of central India.

Stephen Moss characterizes Roy’s political efforts as follows: “As a prominent opponent of everything related to the process of globalisation, Roy is seeking to construct a “new modernity” based on sustainability and a defence of traditional ways of life”.

In her political and social engagement, Roy follows in the footsteps of her mother Mary Roy. One of the most celebrated Indian social activists, Mary Roy stood up for the rights of Indian women and was also famous for founding an informal school in Kerala that provided local children with primary education.

As Arundhati Roy stresses, her family background and non-standard upbringing have enabled her to be politically and socially engaged. “Because of my mother and the way I grew up without a father to look after me, I learnt to look out for myself. Much of what I can do and say now comes from being independent at an early age” (Moss).

However, as a result of her political involvement, Roy has become a controversial figure. Abroad, Roy is seen as a literary star and is praised for her monumental novel criticizing the rigidity of Indian traditions and the limited opportunities of Indian women,

³ Maoist Guerrillas are members of The Communist Party of India which aims to overthrow the Indian government.

whereas, on the other hand, in her home country, she is regarded as “vulnerable, isolated and unpopular” (Luke). Nevertheless, despite the social pressure she has to face, Roy continues to live in India, unlike most of her contemporaries that decided to emigrate to western countries in order to gain greater freedom in their personal and professional lives.

3 CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN MARRIAGE

Indian society distinguishes between two types of marriages. Firstly, there is traditional marriage, which is arranged by parents and other relatives where the partners are chosen according to a set of social criteria and conventions. Secondly, there is marriage of one's own will that is organised by partners themselves based on their mutual love and attraction without any intervention of other family members. This marriage is still seen as socially unacceptable. "Its low status can also be noted in Indian terminology. When Indians use a term "marriage" without any attributes, they always refer to the arranged marriage that is considered to be a norm and that does not require any further explanation" (Marková, *Zrcadlo* 54, as translated by Jana Dusová). On the contrary, the specific attribute "of one's own will" is usually added to the second type of Indian marriage to point out that this partial, non-standard marriage does not deserve to bear the term "marriage" in its pure sense.

3.1 Marriage arranged by parents

The most common form of Indian marriage is the traditional form of arranged marriage. In the title of her book, Dagmar Marková⁴ stresses that "Indian marriage is not a matter of two individuals but always a matter of two families" (*Zrcadlo* 50, as translated by Jana Dusová). "Various criteria such as wealth, education, appearance, age, and family background are used to evaluate the relative worth of the woman and the man and by extension their respective families" (Abraham 21). As long as all these criteria are taken into account, love and understanding are more likely to develop after the marriage.

It may seem surprising that in the third millennium the tradition of arranged marriage that deprive young people of their right to choose a partner according to their own wishes still survives and continues to be accepted as a legitimate way of finding a partner. Nevertheless, "the outcome of a survey carried out among Indian students in 2003 shows that over 80% of respondents are in favour of these marriages and consider them as leading to a satisfied and stable conjugal life" (Marková, *Zrcadlo* 50, as translated by Jana

⁴PhDr. Dagmar Marková, CSc. is an expert in Hindu and Urdu language and literature. She also deals with the current Indian society, the role of religion and the Muslim community. She is the author of tens of books written in several languages and the joint author of Hindu-Czech dictionary. In 2012, she gained an international award for her lifelong contribution to Hindu studies.

Dusová). These results can be confirmed by the findings of a similar survey and that is the preference poll conducted in 2012 by private television channel NDTV in which 74% of respondents voted for traditional arranged marriages.

The main reason for such a preference of traditional marriages is mostly the fear of autonomous decision over one's own life. This represents a typical trait of Asian mentality - that the individual is a part of a community in which he or she is not expected to take any individual actions without the approval of its members. That is why young Indian people prefer shifting their responsibility to their parents who brought them up and thus know best how to choose the most suitable match.

As A. M. Shah⁵ puts it, "for most young Indian people happiness in marriage means also the happiness of their parents and other relatives" (141). Mainly girls are aware of the fact that if they got married against their relatives' will, their lives in joint households with disapproving mothers-in-law would be unbearable. In addition, being sent back home by the groom's relatives would be viewed as shameful and scandalous and would stigmatize the girl's entire family. Furthermore, Marková points out that "the identity of each Indian is defined in terms of his or her family" (*Zrcadlo* 14, as translated by Jana Dusová). That might be another reason why some of the young people prefer a safe choice and let their parents find a convenient partner for them. In other words, marriage for love appears not to be worth the risk of setting all the family against each other and thus losing the only certainties an Indian individual has.

3.1.1 The process of matchmaking

To find the most appropriate match for their children, most parents, especially those living in bigger towns, make use of matrimonial advertisements. These are mostly sorted by community, caste, language, religion or even horoscope as Indians believe that wrongly matched stars can create a lifetime of trouble for the couple.

"Parents searching for a wife for their son are usually most interested in the age of the girl (traditionally, parents want a woman who is at least five years younger than their son), her appearance (the ideal wife is a good-looking woman of medium height (up to 170 centimetres) with fair or at least "wheatish" skin) and her skills in household chores. The desirable man, on the other hand, is primarily a good provider whose profession, salary

⁵ A.M.Shah, Professor of Department of Sociology at University in Delhi, has devoted a great part of his professional life to the depiction of the concept of the traditional Indian joint family.

details and family finances are of the utmost importance” (Divakaruni, *Uncertain Objects* 24-25).

These qualities considered as the most important ones by future in-laws show how traditional and rational the Indians still are in terms of choosing a partner for their children. The advertisements do not mention any hobbies or favourite pastime activities of the young people. They emphasize the fact that the Indians do not get married to have fun or to share the same hobbies and interests with the partner but to lead an orderly life and most importantly to ensure the continuation of the family lineage.

3.1.2 The process of bride-viewing

Even though the marriage negotiation seems to be a process in which both families are involved, the groom’s family is much more dominant determining the very progress of the negotiation as well as its outcome. Once, it was also the groom’s family that would come to the bride’s house for the so called bride-viewing. The purpose of this visit was to have a look at the girl and to make sure that her relatives had not overstated her qualities.

The girl was therefore supposed to do her best in order to show off in front of her potential in-laws. She could have been asked to make a speech or to sing so that all the speech impediments could have been detected or even to demonstrate her mastery of individual household chores. The groom’s presence was not required. The bride-viewing was usually also the moment when the sum of dowry was discussed. After the bride-viewing, it was the groom’s family that made a final decision whether the couple would get married or not. “Nowadays, the bride-viewing is not realised any more but the older generations still remember having been exposed to this tradition” (Marková, *Hrdinky* 35, as translated by Jana Dusová).

As Dagmar Marková mentions in one of her sociological articles, “the way of arranging a marriage has recently undergone many changes. Although there are still couples that see each other for the very first time on their wedding day, most of today’s families, especially those living in towns, give their children some time to get to know each other and decide whether they want to marry a particular person or not” (*Sňatek a manželství*, as translated by Jana Dusová). This implies that unlike in the past, both sides, not just the groom’s side, have the right to exercise the power of veto and turn down the partner that has been chosen for them.

3.2 Marriage of one's own will

A marriage which is decided upon by the couple based on physical attraction and understanding without consulting parents or other relatives is called a marriage of one's own will or a marriage of choice. "Indians do not like the English translation of such a marriage as 'love marriage' because the word love between two young people that have not been married yet implies something unacceptable" (Marková, *Zrcadlo* 47, as translated by Jana Dusová).

Although the number of these kinds of marriages is slowly increasing, they still have not attained the same level of respect and position in society as arranged marriages. The low popularity of a marriage of choice is also demonstrated in the results of a survey examining attitudes of young unmarried Indian people towards premarital romantic partnerships conducted in 2009. "Only 40% of women and 51% of men reported that they would like to marry their romantic partner one day" (Hindin 102).

The most significant reason for opposing these marriages is usually the transgression of caste, community and religious barriers. Moreover, marriages of one's own will tend to be seen as a dishonour of parental respectability. In such marriages, parents are deprived of their natural right to choose a partner for their child and thus fail to fulfil one of their primary life duties.

As far as the proportion of arranged marriages and marriages of choice within Indian society is concerned, the latest survey was conducted by an online matchmaking agency TrulyMadly.com and its outcomes were published in an article in *The Times of India* in September 2014. According to the questionnaire, "69% of Indian weddings are still arranged in comparison to 31% of weddings that are organised without any parental interventions. The results thus show that Indian couples still prefer considering their parents' choice for marriage rather than relying on their own decisions" (Ians).

Nevertheless, the number of marriages of choice is probably higher than it is officially stated because some Indian families might be trying to hide the premarital relationships of their children by passing their marriages of choice off as arranged in order to save their family reputation.

4 MARRIAGE AS A CONTRASTING ELEMENT BETWEEN INDIA AND AMERICA

The dichotomy between arranged marriages and marriages of one's own will within Indian society can be seen as the embodiment of social contradictions between India, bound by traditions, and independent and unrestrained America.

Unlike the individual-oriented Americans, who place great emphasis on the notion of romantic love and independence in one's choice of spouse, among Indians who perceive themselves as family or community oriented, marriage represents a serious and pragmatic commitment. It is not only a bond between two individuals; it is primarily an alliance between two families. "Such an alliance allows for greater long-term security and stability for families, because part of the choice of a spouse involves various rational criteria evaluated by families like economic worth, social status, education, appearance, and family background rather than emotional criterion of love or attraction between two individuals" (Abraham 19).

The Indian traditional attitude towards marriage is thus much more rational and practical. In their point of view, the institution of marriage does not serve to satisfy the individual's immediate desires and visions but represents a social commitment for the rest of one's life. This shows that "the Indian marriage appears to be much more future-oriented compared to the American love marriage, where interpersonal attraction, romantic love and passions create the primary basis for marital life" (Sastry 136).

In Indian society, love is not seen as a necessary precursor to marriage. Instead, love is expected to grow as the spouses learn more about each other as the years go by. According to Margaret Abraham⁶, "love within the Indian arranged marriage equals to negotiation" (19). Nonetheless, the question that arises from the comparison that has just been drawn is whether Indians with their partners completely chosen by their families can achieve the same satisfaction in their marital life as Americans whose future spouse selection is autonomous.

In order to provide the answer to this question, two studies on the issue will be further discussed. The objective of the first study that was carried out by the Department of

⁶ Dr. Margaret Abraham, Professor of Sociology at Hofstra University in New York and the President of the International Sociological Association, has been involved in research and activism in the field of domestic violence in South Asian immigrant communities for over twenty years.

Counselling and Educational Development of the University of North Carolina in 2005 is to examine possible differences in marital satisfaction between people living in India in arranged marriages and people living in the United States in marriages of choice. The measurement of marital satisfaction is based on three major factors: love, loyalty and shared values. First of all, the respondents were asked to determine how important these individual factors are for them in their marital life and then they assessed their satisfaction with the chosen factors.

The results show that the two groups differed in the importance that they ascribed to individual factors. In the United States, where marriages of choice predominate, individuals placed a high priority on both love as a necessary initiator of marriage and marriage satisfaction and on loyalty as an important characteristic of satisfaction in marriage. In India, however, love was found as the factor playing the least important role in their marriage and marriage satisfaction. The study thus confirms what has already been said. Love does not form the foundation of Indian marriage; it is expected to develop over time. Nevertheless, even though the two studied groups did not reach an agreement in factors which they considered important in marriage, their overall satisfaction in marriage was more or less the same.

The findings of this research therefore seem to suggest that the initial absence of love in arranged marriages does not affect future marital satisfaction. In other words, shared socioeconomic factors such as age, religion, appearance, education or family background, upon which the Indian partners are usually brought together, appear to be sufficient to ensure a satisfied marital life.

The second study, dealing with a similar issue, was conducted by the Department of Sociology of Duke University in Durham in 1999. It measured and compared the effect of three household factors, married-couple relationship, parent-children relationship and paid work on home satisfaction and psychological distress of Indian and American married couples. When the effect of married-couple relationship on home satisfaction is taken into consideration, the results of the research indicate that although the relationship between spouses is important for high home satisfaction in India, it is not the factor of primary importance, as it appears to be in the United States.

The reason for such a distinction stems from the different cultural and social environments. In America, the married-couple relationship represents the most supportive and rewarding of all the existing family bonds and is thus considered to have the most

important effect on higher home satisfaction. On the contrary, in India, where traditional self-subordination to family is valued, more satisfaction and personal well-being is derived from alternative family bonds, such as those between parents and children.

The evaluation of the parent-children relationship's effects on home satisfaction has shown interesting results. While the presence of children in the household has no effect on home satisfaction for neither American nor Indian men, it has a negative effect on satisfaction for American women and a positive effect on home satisfaction for Indian women. A possible explanation of such a discrepancy between Indian and American women could be seen in the different conception of social roles in the two countries. In India, due to more rigidly defined social roles, women, who are primarily expected to be mothers and reproducers, feel much more satisfaction from fulfilling these traditionally ascribed duties. In their point of view, children represent an integral part of what a traditional Indian household ought to be like and thereby increase their satisfaction. By contrast, in American society, where gender roles are poorly defined and women are expected to also manage duties traditionally attributed to men, children can be taken as too physically and emotionally taxing.

Finally, gender differences have also appeared in the comparison of the effects of paid work, or salary, on home satisfaction of American and Indian married couples. It seems to be logical that Indian men, expected to fulfil the role of workers and family providers, take work as a stronger predictor of home satisfaction than Indian women. Nevertheless, surprisingly, work represents a stronger predictor of psychological distress for Indian women than for Indian men. This shows that Indian women, regardless of the satisfaction that the fulfilment of their household duties brings them, feel frustrated for not having a chance to experience the economic independence and autonomy that paid work offers to their husbands. Being able to work and contribute to the household budget could therefore help these women decrease their mental distress. As for the American sample, no significant differences between sexes have been detected since cultural expectations for a man to be the main family provider are no longer so prominent.

The findings of both studies appear to disprove general theories questioning the existence of happiness and satisfaction in arranged marriages. Individual-oriented societies are usually not able to accept the fact that two people who enter into a marriage without actually getting to know each other could experience the feeling of marital satisfaction.

Nevertheless, as the results of both discussed studies show, such couples are able to lead the same satisfied marriage life as those whose partner selection was autonomous.

The distinction lies in the different concept of gender roles and social duties typical of community-oriented societies. It is not love, mutual attraction, intimacy or married-couple relationship as such that are perceived as principal indicators of marital satisfaction. It is primarily the fulfilment of what the society expects of each married person that brings Indian married couples happiness and satisfaction.

To sum up, the analysis of both studies focusing on the comparison of marital satisfaction between Indian and American marriages has proved that it is not true that Indians living in traditional arranged marriages are less satisfied with their conjugal life than Americans. The only contrast is that their satisfaction is measured according to culturally-specific and thus different factors.

4.1 Indian marriage within American context

The social contradictions between Indian arranged marriages and American marriages of choice analysed in both of the earlier mentioned studies lead us to imagine how complicated the life of Indian married couples living in America must be. As Abraham says, “When immigrants arrive in America, they carry with them a worldview grounded in their culture of origin. For South Asian immigrants, a part of this worldview involves notions of marriage and family as they exist in South Asia in contrast to the United States” (17). “Yet, more and more young Indians, especially men, keep immigrating to Europe or more frequently to America in order to study or to solve their existential problems” (Marková, *Zrcadlo* 212, as translated by Jana Dusová). This implies that America is still viewed as a land of opportunities and greater autonomy.

Nevertheless, life in a foreign country with such a different mentality places much greater demands on individuals, especially on women. Many Indian immigrants to America did not decide to leave their homeland of their own volition, but were married to an Indian living in America, which has always been taken as a sign of social prestige.

For such women, living in a traditional Indian marriage represents a double burden. They are not only separated from their family, which usually happens after a wedding in India anyway because women are expected to live with their in-laws, but they are also exposed to a great disconnect with their social background. In other words, women living in such cross-cultural marriages find themselves trapped on the border between two

different worlds. On the one hand, there is an Indian patriarchal social system the rules of which they have to respect; on the other hand, there is a view of all the possibilities and choices America offers.

Indian-American women usually wish to have the same autonomy as their American counterparts but the social constraints of their home culture prevent them from ever achieving it. This uneasy “liminality” or in-betweenness of Indian women living in traditional arranged marriages in America can thus result in the permanent sense of dissatisfaction, frustration and isolation.

5 INDIAN MARRIAGE IN TERMS OF TRADITIONAL ROLE EXPECTATIONS

In the Indian context, marriage is viewed as an essential institution that shapes a woman's identity through ascribing new social roles to her. This implies that after a wedding, the most prominent woman's role, the role of a daughter, is overshadowed and has to make room for new roles generally attributed to married women.

As Margaret Abraham states, "it is within the institution of marriage that patriarchal control is exercised over women on the basis of their multiple subordinate roles as brides, wives, daughters-in-law and mothers" (22). Although some of these social roles might be in contradiction with women's expectations, each Indian woman is supposed to accept them as a part of her newly-constructed identity as a married woman.

5.1 The role of a bride

A traditional Indian wedding takes place at the bride's house, lasts from three to seven days and can be attended by hundreds of guests. The exact date and time of the ceremony are determined by an astrologist. But, due to the hot Indian climate, most of the weddings are held in May or November.

Hindu weddings are conducted in front of a sacred fire lit by a priest. "This practice dates back to thousands of years to Vedic times when the God of Fire used to be called to serve as divine witness to the marriage vows. The most important ritual of the Hindu wedding is called the seven step ritual, in which the bride's and the groom's garments are tied together and they are supposed to take seven steps around the fire to symbolise the journey of life they will take. Moreover, they have to hold their hands near the fire to signify their union" (Bajpai 73-74). At the end of the ceremony, the groom puts red colour in his bride's hair to indicate her new status as a married woman and the bride touches his toe to acknowledge him as the head of the household.

After the ceremony, the bride usually returns to her parental house where she spends several days or even longer before moving to her in-laws' home. This tradition comes from the times when the underage girls used to be married and stayed with their parents until reaching sexual maturity.

5.1.1 The importance of dowry

Dowry, an amount of money or property brought by a bride to her husband for marriage, is a vital part of Indian marital traditions. Originally, dowry was meant as a wedding gift to the bride from her family. It served as a financial support for the girl in case of divorce or her husband's death. But, as Rahul Bedi, an Indian reporter writing for *the Irish Times*, says in one of his articles devoted to illegal demanding of dowries in India, "over the centuries, dowry has become the most comfortable and the quickest way for in-laws to get rich". Despite the Prohibition Dowry Act (1961) that made dowry demanding officially illegal, it still continues to be practised. What is more, husband's relatives do not feel any shame to demand higher sum of dowry than it was agreed on or even to harass their daughter-in-law in order to get more money from her family. "If the bride refuses to satisfy her in-laws' incessant demands for money and goods, she can be starved, beaten or even killed" (Bedi). The increasing number of mysterious kitchen tragedies where a young wife catches fire while cooking indicates how serious dowry demands have become in contemporary Indian society. Dagmar Marková also deals with the issue of illegal dowry demanding in one of her books where she states that "even though the law was modified in 1986, and any death of a wife by burning within seven years after her wedding is now considered as an authorized reason for investigating her in-laws on suspicion of murder, there are still hundreds of cases that go unreported" (*Zrcadlo* 73, as translated by Jana Dusová).

5.2 The role of a daughter-in-law

As the previous subchapter has implied, a new bride within a traditional extended Indian family has the lowest status. "She is expected to adjust to the functioning of the household and to hold her parents-in-law in higher esteem than her parents because she owes them for giving her their son and the place to live" (Marková, *Zrcadlo* 17, as translated by Jana Dusová).

Originally, the daughter-in-law did not have any rights in her husband's household. "The mother-in-law would decide what the young woman wore or if she could work outside the home. In addition, she was expected to cook for the entire family, clean and bear children. If a bride dared to object to the unfairness, her only choice was to return to

her parents” (Hamida) – who would often force her to return because they could not afford the scandal such behaviour would have provoked.

Although brides have more rights nowadays, their relationship with mothers-in-law tends to still be strained. There are various reasons why Indian mothers-in-law are not fond of their sons’ wives. Firstly, especially if there are no other daughters-in-law within the family, a mother-in-law feels threatened by the arrival of her son’s new wife. She views her as an intruder in the household she has always been in charge of and tries to assert her authoritarian and unshakeable position. Moreover, the daughter-in-law poses a threat also to the mother-in-law’s relationship with her son. As the bond between mother and son tends to be remarkably strong, the son’s wedding might frighten his mother that her beloved son will not need her any more. Such a jealous mother then tries to discredit her daughter-in-law in order to “win over her”. Finally, it is said that Indian mothers-in-law mistreat their daughters-in-law because they want to revenge on them for all the ordeals they had to experience when they were in the same position. Nevertheless, the status of daughters-in-law usually gets better once they give birth to a child, ideally a son. Their mothers-in-law then start to respect them as women that deserve the affection of their sons and the pressure between them gradually diminishes.

5.3 The role of a mother

As Abraham says, “a woman’s fertility is central in defining her status and identity” (22). The lack of children, mainly male descendants, is seen as a woman’s failure to fulfil her primary duty as a reproducer. It is therefore not until a married woman gives birth to a son that she starts to be socially respected. The importance of having sons is also involved in a traditional wedding congratulatory phrase “May you be the mother of a hundred sons”.

Apart from the continuation of the lineage, the preference of sons lies in financial reasons. Firstly, parents of sons do not have to save money for the payment of dowry. In addition, since men are expected to be family providers, parents with sons are more likely to be financially supported in their retirement. However, as Marková says, “there are also religious reasons. Traditionally, it is the son that is supposed to carry out a funeral service for his dead parents” (*Zrcadlo* 35, as translated by Jana Dusová).

To sum up, having a son is advantageous in many aspects and even in today’s society is still prioritised. The birth of a girl, on the contrary, brings only hardships. Her parents are obliged to save enough money to pay her dowry and usually do not get

anything in return. Since each Indian married woman is expected to take care of her in-laws, her parents cannot rely on her regular help or support.

5.3.1 Sex-selective abortion

The traditional duty of each woman to give birth to at least one son has led many Indian women to undergo an abortion when the unborn baby was revealed to be a girl. This is referred to as a sex-selective abortion.

“The law passed in 1994 put a legal end to the unnatural regulation of the number of girls within Indian society. Thanks to this law, it is illegal to have the unborn baby’s sex diagnosed, if it is not necessary for health’s sake” (Marková, *Hrdinky* 22, as translated by Jana Dusová). Although the law has helped to decrease the differences in Indian sex ratio, the findings presented in *The Economist* in 2012 show that “120 boys are still being born for every 100 girls” (Leaders). This suggests that Indian women, frequently pressured by their in-laws, still respect the ancient traditions and get rid of their unborn girls.

The analysis of social roles and duties traditionally demanded of Indian married women has underlined the persisting rigidity of the Indian social system. Indian wives are still perceived as inferior to their husbands being used only to attend to their needs and the needs of their relatives. They are supposed to be passive, obedient and adaptable. Since the primary female duty is reproduction, the only way for a woman to get a better position in her husband’s family is to give birth to a son. It is Divakaruni who says in her famous novel *Sister of My Heart*, “Pregnancy can save woman’s life. Otherwise, she could be sent home or even killed” (216).

This shows that any deviation from strictly-defined social roles is taken as a woman’s failure to carry out what society expects of her. As sociologist Abraham says, “Women who do not fit the ideal patriarchal image of caring mothers and devoted wives are often viewed as deviant and shameless” (21).

6 TRANSGRESSIONS OF INDIAN MARRIAGE LAWS

In her novel *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy portrays India as “a country where the Love Laws lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much” (177). Any crossing of these strictly determined boundaries can result in social ostracism or, as the chosen novel shows, even in death. Abraham describes deeply-rooted Indian rules as follows, “Since South Asian society is family-oriented, shame and guilt attain a different meaning whereby the failures of the individual result in the loss of face or loss of honour for the entire family” (19). That is why such societies are characterized by considerable pressure to maintain harmony and minimise any transgressive actions that could potentially threaten the social position of the family.

Apart from the already discussed marriages of choice, the most deplorable transgressive actions breaking Indian strict marriage laws and putting family reputations in danger are premarital romantic relationships, inter-caste marriages and divorces.

6.1 Premarital romantic relationships

Despite restrictive social norms, there is still increasing evidence that young Indian people take part in premarital romantic and sexual relationships. “The declining age of puberty and the increasing age of marriage have created a growing window of opportunity in which young people may engage in premarital romance and sexual relationships” (Hindin 97). As Marková highlights, “premarital relationships are not generally considered as a natural way of finding a life partner. Even though they exist, they are not expected to lead to a marriage” (*Zrcadlo* 33, as translated by Jana Dusová).

There are also significant gender disparities as far as the initiation of premarital relationships is concerned. Young women, especially those living in countryside, tend to be strictly supervised by their parents and are commonly prohibited from socialising with men outside of their families. It can thus happen that male relatives are the only men such girls get to know until their wedding day. On the contrary, young men, who enjoy much more freedom, find it easier to explore the area of premarital romance before their marriage.

As a result, it seems that fewer Indian women than men engage in premarital romantic and sexual behaviours. However, in order to find out the concrete ratio, a survey

that was carried out in 2009 by Michelle J. Hindin from the United Nations Population Fund will be further discussed. The main objective of this study was to examine general attitudes of young unmarried Indian men and women towards premarital romantic partnerships as well as their present sexual experiences.

As far as interaction with the opposite sex is concerned, the findings of the survey have shown that males were more likely to have friends of the opposite sex than females (62% vs.40%). Moreover, in comparison with females, a larger proportion of males also stated that they had ever liked someone of the opposite sex (67% vs. 47%). Among these respondents, 57% of men and 68% of women reported that they had spoken to a person they liked on a few occasions but only 39% of men and 15% of women admitted having ever touched one another. This indicates that physical contact is still taboo, especially for women. Interestingly, 65% of males and 53% of females stopped meeting the person they liked because they feared getting a bad reputation.

In addition, 62% of men and 53% of women admitted that somebody of the opposite sex had expressed interest in them. Nevertheless, the respondents differed in the way they reacted to such an expression of interest. Whereas 86% of males confessed positive feelings, 64% of females reported that they felt insulted when men expressed an interest in them.

When premarital sexual experiences are taken into consideration, the findings of the survey have shown that 32% of males and only 6% of females reported having had sex with someone of the opposite sex. In addition, women, as compared to men, were less likely to agree that if a male and female love one another, it is okay for them to have sex (14% vs. 33%).

The results of the discussed survey indicate that women still have more conservative attitudes towards premarital sexual as well as platonic relationships. In addition, they are more hesitant to make friends with the members of the opposite sex.

The explanation of such a distinction appears to be logical. According to *The Laws of Manu*, an ancient document presenting social and legal guidance that is still highly respected in Indian society, each woman should belong to only one man. The marriage chances of a woman known for having a premarital sexual relationship are therefore considerably lower than the chances of a woman that is still a virgin. As Dr. Madhvi, an Indian gynaecologist says in one of her articles, “virginity is still valued as the most precious gift Indian women can give to their husbands. It is a symbol of women’s self-

worth that most of the Indian men prize over everything else”. This is also demonstrated in the findings of the survey where 80% of men admitted not respecting a woman willing to have a sexual relationship before her marriage.

To sum up, the author of the survey classifies the social norms that Indian women and men are expected to respect in the area of premarital relationships and sexual experiences as a “double-standard” (Hindin 97). While women’s engaging in premarital sexual relationships is seen as socially unacceptable and condemnable, there are no particular premarital restrictions related to men. Their potential involvement in such relationships is either justified as a natural part of their coming of age or as a demonstration of their innate gender dominance. This implies that the real percentage of women having some sexual experiences before their marriage is likely to be higher. Young women might simply be afraid of disclosing their improper sexual history that could ruin their future life and rather pretend not to have had any experiences of this sort.

6.2 Inter-caste marriages

According to Marková, “love relationships transcending the barriers of the Indian caste system can have fatal consequences, especially in rural areas and smaller towns, where such a relationship has often been punished by so-called honour killing” (*Zrcadlo* 34, as translated by Jana Dusová). This term means “homicide of a family member, usually a girl or a woman, who is perceived to have brought dishonour on the family” (Oxford Dictionaries). Although this tradition might appear to be outdated, the number of newspaper articles talking about these murders gives evidence to the contrary.

The respect for endogamy, “marrying within the limits of a specific community” (Oxford Dictionaries), represents the basis for each traditional Indian marriage. However, it is socially acceptable for a man to get married to a woman coming from a lower caste. But, this rule can never be applied the other way round. Even though inter-caste marriages are not in conflict with the Indian constitution, any violation of the principle of endogamy is still considered as a serious social offence for which one can be either excommunicated from their caste or, as already mentioned, even killed. The number of inter-caste marriages within Indian society is thus quite low. “It is estimated that only about 5% of Indian couples might live in a marriage crossing the borderlines of Indian caste system” (Rukmini).

6.3 Divorces

In the original concept of Hindu marriage law, divorce was not permitted. “Although a man could abandon his wife, they were never officially separated and the man could call his wife back at any time. According to Manu, each woman belongs only to one man and should serve this man until her death. In addition, Manu stresses that a woman should not make any efforts to separate herself from her husband because such an act would be taken as honour-threatening for both families” (Marková, *Zrcadlo* 150 – 151, as translated by Jana Dusová).

Even though the principles of Manu are still respected by most Indians, “the law passed in 1955 gave women an official right to ask for divorce if their husband permanently cheated on them or if they were maltreated in their marriage. The amendment of this law from 1976 enabled the married couples to get divorced by mutual consent” (Marková, *Zrcadlo* 151, as translated by Jana Dusová).

Although divorce is no longer perceived as worse than death, women who decide to leave their husbands are still socially ostracized. As the sociologist Abraham claims, “such women are frequently labelled immoral, selfish and uncaring” (19). When a woman decides to abandon her husband and get divorced, the social stigma is extended to the whole family and can even threaten the marriage eligibility of unmarried female relatives. That is why most Indian women prefer to stay in their unsatisfying marriages rather than expose their families to such social pressure.

Apart from social hardships, divorced women in India also face financial insecurities. As the whole family property, a wedding dowry included, officially belongs to the husband and his family, divorced women are frequently left with insufficient finances to sustain themselves. As a result, they are forced to return, usually unwelcomed, to their parents bearing the burden of being financially dependent on them and in most cases also the burden of taking care of children alone. Their parents commonly try to get the daughters remarried in order to cover the family scandal as soon as possible. However, the chances of a divorced woman finding an appropriate partner tend to be low. As Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni says in her novel *Sister of My Heart*, “Not many divorced girls get a second chance (270)”. The fear of social and financial uncertainties related to divorce is also portrayed in the Indian divorce rate that ranks lowest among all the countries of the world. “Only one in hundred Indian marriages ends up by a divorce” (Jones and Ramdas 111).

The low rate of Indian premarital relationships, inter-caste marriages and divorces shows that due to the community orientation of the Indian society, where the interests of an individual are subordinate to the benefits of a community, most Indians still try to avoid taking any actions that could violate rigorous Indian regulations and thus shatter their family reputation. In other words, the fear of transgressing the deeply-rooted social rules and conventions is still so strong that most Indians would rather sacrifice their personal happiness than put their family honour in danger.

PRACTICAL PART

7 THE ANALYSIS OF MARRIAGE FROM THE FEMALE PERSPECTIVE IN SELECTED INDIAN NOVELS

The practical part of this thesis focuses on the thorough analysis of the marital lives and difficulties of three selected female characters, namely Sudha and Anju from Divakaruni's novel *Sister of My Heart* and its sequel *The Vine of Desire* and Ammu, one of the main characters of the novel *The God of Small Things* written by Arundhati Roy. Firstly, their marriages will be classified according to the way they were initiated; then, the fulfilment of the expected social roles related to their marital status will be further discussed. Finally, in order to emphasize the continued conservatism of Indian marriage, transgressions of marital laws and their subsequent consequences will be shown.

7.1 *Sister of My Heart*

Moving back and forth between Indian Calcutta and American California, Divakaruni's novel *Sister of My Heart* introduces a story of two cousins, Anju and Sudha, who were born on the same night after their mothers found out that both girls' fathers had died during their adventurous quest for gems. So, Anju and Sudha are brought up in a non-standard upper-caste Indian joint family being kept by their widowed mothers. The central theme of the novel is the strength of the bond between the cousins who regard themselves almost as sisters. Not only their fates, but also their hearts have merged together. The girls are inseparable, self-sufficient and entirely devoted to one another. Nonetheless, the powerful bond between the cousins is torn apart by the institution of arranged marriage into which both girls are forced. Whereas Sudha is married into a rigid small-town Indian joint household, Anju is supposed to marry an Indian living in America.

The theme of marriage divides the novel into two parts. The first part, *The Princess in the Palace of Snakes*, depicts the childhood and coming of age of Anju and Sudha and ends with the choice of partners and the organisation of two weddings. The second part called *The Queen of Swords* describes their new social roles as wives and the difficulties of their conjugal lives. The symbolism of both titles is quite significant and straightforward. In the first part, girls are perceived as innocent and naive creatures that dream, usually quite foolishly, of being saved from their social isolation and ever-present monitoring by their mothers by an ideal and handsome man that will love them for the rest of their lives.

In the second part, in which they are much more down to earth, they represent mature married women who have to stand up for themselves in order to protect their own rights. So, it is no longer the authority of a mother that represents the major threat but society and marriage in particular that put their lives in danger. Moreover, the division of the book highlights that the institution of an Indian arranged marriage deprives young girls of all their dreams and ambitions.

The sequel of the novel *Sister of My Heart, The Vine of Desire*, brings the two main characters, Anju and Sudha, together again after being separated by their arranged marriages. This novel describes their lives in a joint Californian household after Sudha comes to America to live with Anju and her husband. She comes as a divorced single mother in search of freedom and independence hoping that America could be an ideal place to start her life over. However, their life together appears to be much more intricate than they expected, straining their extraordinarily strong bonds and resulting in another, but this time final, separation.

7.1.1 Sudha and Anju

Sudha is a beautiful, obedient and sensitive girl who, in contrast to her defiant cousin, tries to do her best to comply with standards expected and required of a girl her age. However, it is her docility and submissiveness that cause much of her unhappiness. Sudha is not able to stand up for herself. She would rather enter into a marriage with a stranger and give up the man she truly loves than to blemish her family's reputation. In essence, Sudha sacrifices her personal happiness in order not to ruin the social standing of the people she loves.

Nevertheless, Sudha is the character that undergoes the greatest mental transformation throughout the book. The hardships she has to face in her husband's family, such as being controlled by her tyrannical mother-in-law, teach her to stand up for herself and to fight for her rights, if not for her life. At the end of the book, Sudha changes into an emancipated woman who plucks up the courage to leave her in-laws that want to kill her unborn baby and head to America to stand on her own feet.

Compared to her obedient cousin, Anju represents a sharp-witted and outspoken girl. She is whip-smart, defiant and impulsive. She is not ashamed of making fun of strict and rigid Indian social conventions and finding various ways to get around them. Sudha describes Anju as "a girl that has never learnt to bend with the wind" (Divakaruni, *Sister of*

My Heart 114)⁷. In addition, Anju is much more ambitious. Whereas Sudha's dream is to have a happy family, Anju, an admirer of Virginia Woolf, dreams of studying English literature at college. To sum up, Anju is definitely not the kind of girl who dreams of having a husband to feel complete. Nonetheless, after her mother's heart disease gets worse, even Anju, an ambitious and rebellious girl, is forced to enter into an arranged marriage so that her mother would not have to worry about her financial and social security. Anju is totally devastated by the idea of getting married. She compares marriage for a women to "being yoked to a man like a cart to a buffalo" (*SMH* 113).

Anju's negative and even mocking attitude towards marriage might stem from fear. "To think I will have to live with a stranger. That I'm supposed to belong to some man I haven't even met" (*SMH* 113). Her fear could be the result of the fact that she was brought up in a female world with no man to look after her. "Perhaps because we had no fathers, that other world seemed distant and full of mystery" (*SMH* 51). In simple terms, living with a man represents a kind of mystery full of the unexpected, which, quite logically, frightens her. Fortunately, her mother chooses a man Anju falls in love with at first sight.

7.1.1.1 Classification of Sudha's and Anju's marriages

Sudha's marriage represents a typical Indian marriage that has been arranged by parents. As Sudha reaches the age of 18, which is the minimal age enacted by law for getting married in India, her mother decides it is the high time she found an appropriate husband for her. Furthermore, her mother's decision is rushed by finding out that Sudha spoke to a young man at the cinema, which is considered reputation-ruining. It is important to point out that Sudha comes from a traditionally-minded family believing that girls should be strictly isolated from men until their wedding day. That is why both girls are driven to and from school by a family chauffeur being supervised during the whole journey by one of the family servants so that any potential contact with the opposite sex would be made impossible. As the authors of the survey called *Premarital Romantic Partnerships* have found out, even "the hint of a premarital relationship can precipitate parents into pressuring a young woman to marry a man not of her choice" (Hindin 98, see subchapter

⁷ Divakaruni, Banerjee Chitra. *Sister of My Heart*. New York: Anchor Books, 2000. [Subsequent page references preceded SMH are given in parentheses in the text]

5.1). So, even though the only information Sudha and the man exchange are their names, her unallowed visit to the cinema and conversation with a complete stranger are sufficient reasons for her mother to arrange the marriage as soon as possible in order to save her daughter as well as the whole family from a scandal. “If she’s old enough to fool around with men in movie houses, she’s old enough to care for her husband’s family” (*SMH* 67). This implies that even the merest interest in the opposite sex or any manifestation of sexual attraction can be taken as the mark of adulthood and thus the mark of readiness for one’s conjugal life.

The fact that it was the very first time that Sudha had not obeyed the rules set by the family could be regarded as an additional reason why Sudha’s mother hastened to find a husband for her daughter as quickly as possible. Sudha, not being able to resist Anju’s temptation, skips school to see a romantic film their mothers would never allow them to watch. On top of that, on their way to cinema, they spend their pocket money on forbidden western clothes and come to the cinema in jeans and colourful tops. As a result, Sudha’s mother, not wanting to entirely lose control over her daughter’s behaviour, decides to marry her daughter so as to tame her defiance and maybe even to provide her with male dominance that she, as a girl brought up in an exclusively female household, is lacking.

This indicates that, from Sudha’s point of view, her marriage can be seen as a punishment for demonstrating her natural instincts, for doing for the very first time what she really wanted and last but not least for violating the strictly-determined social rules. However, for her mother, marriage represents the only way to protect her daughter as well as the reputation of the whole family from undesirable scandals. One can even speculate that Sudha’s mother is so urgent in the planning to help Sudha avoid the mistakes her mother made. In other words, she does not want Sudha to let herself be seduced by the dream of love as she once did and to face the same wretched fate. As if she believed that through her daughter she could redeem her own life. As a result, Sudha is chosen by Ramesh, a man coming from a rigid small-town Indian family, and becomes a dutiful wife. Even though Ashok, the man she fell in love with in the cinema, has also sent a marriage proposal to her mother, he was not chosen because of the low social status of his family. Sudha feels desperate but she is not strong enough to express her true feelings and to try to persuade her mother to reconsider Ashok’s proposal. Finally, she gets married to a man she does not know and definitely does not love and she is forced to live together with his authoritarian widowed mother in a joint household.

Although Anju's marriage can be also classified as arranged, it is atypical in many respects. Firstly, despite its initial prearranged undertone, Anju's marriage is based on love. This is something unexpected in Indian society, which believes that love is to develop after marriage as the spouses get to know each other. Secondly, Anju does not get married to a traditional Indian joint household having to respect their rules and conventions, but she enters into a marriage with an Indian living and working by himself in America. She is therefore offered a completely different life full of seeming freedom and autonomy. Finally, Anju is permitted to start her college studies, which is something quite atypical for an Indian married woman, whose primary life duty is to raise children and take care of her husband's household.

The classification of these two marriages shows that even though both girls are pressured into getting married to complete strangers, their marriages are different in many ways. Whereas Sudha is forced to give up the man she truly loves and get married to a joint Indian household controlled by her husband's bossy mother, Anju falls in love with the man her mother has chosen for her and starts her new life in America without having to give up her ambitions and more importantly with no in-laws to oppress her.

7.1.1.2 Sudha and Anju as married women

Marriage has changed both girls in various aspects. Firstly, it has put them into many social roles that they had never experienced before. As a result, Sudha takes her life as a married woman as a part of her new identity, which is reflected, for instance, in her referring to herself as "another Sudha" (*SMH* 170) or "the new me" (*SMH* 171). Moreover, her marriage to a man she does not love has deprived her of her romantic and sometimes even naive nature. "But morning, before I am plunged into responsibility, allows me time to remember that Sudha I used to be. It seems impossible that I was the girl who ran panting to the terrace to wish on a falling star, who begged Pishi for stories of princesses and demons and saw herself in those stories. (...) But no, I have promised myself I will not think of that anymore" (*SMH* 170). This contemplation shows the deepness of the chasm between her two identities – a romantic identity of her childhood and coming of age, which she has been deprived of, and a new identity as a married woman that has been prefabricated for her. The chasm that separates these two worlds has been dug by strict social conventions and in particular by the institution of arranged marriage.

The influence of marriage on Sudha's life is best illustrated through Anju's point of view. As Anju has not seen her cousin for a long time, she is astonished by how much her beloved Sudha has changed. Mainly, Anju's critical remark "The girl, who'd wanted so much and settled for so little" (*SMH* 190) that highlights the contradiction between Sudha's life aspirations and the reality which she has been forced to accept. The institution of marriage has thus suffocated all her dreams of studying at college and designing her own clothes and thrown her into a mediocre life with a man unable to defy his dominant and controlling mother. It is therefore possible to say that Sudha's arranged marriage can be held responsible for transforming a romantic and ambitious girl into a desperate creature struggling for a better life.

As opposed to her cousin, Anju is looking forward to her new role as a married woman because, despite her initial fear, she falls in love with her future husband Sunil. Nonetheless, her love for her husband can be taken as love which stems from deception. Sunil decides to meet his future wife in a bookshop instead of the traditional process of so-called bride-viewing (see subchapter 2.1.2), which he considers as obsolete and out-dated. He wants to see Anju's real character and her natural behaviour. But, to gain her heart, he pretends to be a lover of Virginia Woolf and he buys the entire set of Woolf's books to impress his wife-to-be, who appreciates reading Virginia Woolf 'works more than anything else. One can thus say that Anju falls in love with an idealised image of Virginia Woolf's admirer rather than her Indian-American husband Sunil himself. "When he asks me if we stock any books by Virginia Woolf, he wins over me completely. I adore him already. I look forward to the evenings when we'll read *To the Lighthouse* to each other. Love happens, and so do miracles" (*SMH* 121). Anju's falling for a complete stranger can seem to be quite naïve. But, when her experience with men is taken into account, nobody can be surprised. Apart from Sudha's Ashok, with whom she exchanged several words in the cinema, Anju had never spoken to a man before. On top of that, she is afraid of marriage, imagining it as a torture that finishes a woman's life. That's why Sunil's polite behaviour, good appearance and especially his feigned love of Virginia Woolf are sufficient for her to start loving him and to feel excited about their upcoming wedding.

Despite being so much different, Anju and Sunil are alike in one aspect and that's their attitude towards traditions and rigid social conventions, which they both disrespect. While Sunil considers the process of bride-viewing as an unnatural and obsolete ceremony, Anju's rebellious nature and her inability to "bend with the wind" can be observed during

her wedding, which she finds lengthy and boring. “The mantras are really long. They make me want to yawn. But it isn’t proper for brides to yawn so to distract myself I watch my husband’s feet. Thank God his toes don’t sprout stiff black hairs like so many men’s do. At the end of the wedding, I’m supposed to touch Sunil’s toes to acknowledge him as the head of our household. Maybe if no one’s watching too closely – or even if they are - I’ll tickle them instead” (*SMH* 148). Apart from her defiant and anti-conventional character, her non-standard behaviour can be also ascribed to a lack of experience or maybe to her insufficient mental readiness for conjugal life. Anju views the wedding ceremony as fun without realizing the consequences of the wedding vows for her future life.

It is during their wedding day that Anju starts to be suspicious whether her love for her husband is just one-sided. Her idealised vision of a man who loves Virginia Woolf is collapsing. While Anju loves her husband taking him as a perfect man, he seems to have more affection for her cousin Sudha, whose beauty he cannot stop admiring. “‘She’s lovely, truly lovely’. There is nothing unusual about his words. All my life I’ve heard men admire Sudha. But there is something in Sunil’s voice that makes me give him a sharp glance. He keeps gazing at Sudha almost as if he isn’t capable of moving his eyes away” (*SMH* 151). Then, when he secretly puts Sudha’s fallen wedding handkerchief into his pocket with a strange romantic smile on his face, Anju knows that she had not been mistaken. She is totally devastated by this discovery because she knows that her only chance for happiness is gone. Although she feels hollow, betrayed and disillusioned, she pretends that nothing happened and hopes that the ocean separating her and her cousin’s life will eliminate all the signs of physical attraction.

Anju’s conjugal life is considerably different from a life of the average Indian woman. Thanks to her marriage to an Indian living in the United States, Anju has been given the privileges that most Indian women could only dream of. Firstly, she has become the mistress of her own household. In addition, she is allowed to study English literature at college and thus to do what she has always wanted. This is also unusual, because educating women, whose only life duty is to raise children, is considered a waste of time. On top of that, she can drive a car and wear modern clothes like jeans and colourful T-shirts that most Indian women, having to wear long impervious saris, are never allowed even to touch. That is why, despite all the doubts Anju has about her relationship with her husband, she respects him because she is fully aware of the fact that without him she would never be given such opportunities. “Unlike some of the other Indian husbands I know, Sunil has

always encouraged me to feel comfortable in America. He taught me to drive and introduced me to his colleagues at work. And when I said I'd like to see how I look in short hair, he said, 'Go for it!'" (SMH 187). But, on the other hand, knowing that she is expected to feel grateful to her husband for providing her with such a modern life makes her wonder whether her feelings for her husband is love or rather gratitude. This contemplation is further intensified by her husband who does not hesitate to prove his culturally-rooted male dominance from time to time and remind her that it is him who has enabled her to lead such a life. "If you took a good look at your life, all the things you're allowed to do, maybe then you'd be a little more ... ' He breaks off abruptly, but of course I know the word he's left out. Grateful" (SMH 193). Anju finds her situation unfair. Not only was she forced to have a husband that she did not ask for but now she is supposed to feel grateful for having him. That is why, in spite of all the advantages her modern American life has offered her, she is not satisfied.

Anju's marital satisfaction is also disrupted by Sunil's mysterious behaviour and suspicious activities. "There are days when Sunil takes the car to work and doesn't come home until midnight. When he finally returns and I explode with accusations, he just shrugs and says I have to let him live his life" (SMH 188). This shows that despite being an open-minded and liberal, modern man, the traditional Indian side of Sunil still exists. He finds himself superior to his wife and does not consider her a worthy person to confide in. Sunil's treatment of his wife demonstrates the already discussed double-standard of behaviour for Indian men (see subchapter 5.1) who are permitted to do what they want without being penalised for violating social rules. It is also Anju's complaint "It's always like this, one rule for me, another for him" (Divakaruni, *The Vine of Desire* 70)⁸ which indicates that if Anju behaved in such a way to her husband, it would definitely have serious consequences for her.

To conclude, Anju likes her husband, she appreciates all the things he has done to make her life easier but what hurts her is the fact that she cannot always trust him. "I like being married as long as I don't think too much about it. It's like floating on a giant bed of cotton candy, incredibly light and pink, but with sudden hollows into which you can tumble any minute" (SMH 161). This metaphor indicates that even though many Indian

⁸ Divakaruni, Banerjee Chitra. *The Vine of Desire*. New York: Anchor Books, 2002. [Subsequent page references preceded TVD are given in parentheses in the text]

women who are exploited and maltreated by their husband's relatives, Sudha included, might envy Anju for her seemingly free and easy life, Anju's marital life is full of doubts and uncertainties.

7.1.1.3 Sudha and Anju as a daughters-in-law

Sudha's low position in her husband's household mirrors the uneasy situation of new wives in the family of their in-laws. However, Sudha's initial impression of her mother-in-law-to-be seems to be quite promising. "I am to stay home with her and be the daughter she never had. She is looking forward to turning the household over to my care and spending her time with her prayer beads" (*SMH* 101). But, after a while, Sudha starts to uncover the real nature of her authoritarian and controlling mother-in-law and realizes that life in her territory will be anything but easy. "For though she had been kind enough to me so far, already I realized she was a strong-willed woman and used to having own way. I had seen her reduce servant maids to tears with a single glance" (*SMH* 168). Despite this first disillusion, Sudha still tries to get on well with her and even admires her for being able to take care of her family of three sons through the hard times that followed her husband's death.

As far as the duties related to the household are concerned, Sudha has officially taken over the household, as her mother-in-law had promised her, by being given the ring of keys, "the symbol of shared power" (*SMH* 169). Such an expression of trust fulfils Sudha with a temporary feeling of hope. "Love's grand passion has been snatched from me, yes, but perhaps there could still be quiet affections in my life. Perhaps I could learn to think of this woman as a mother and this place as a home" (*SMH* 169). But, even though Sudha has become the head of the household, doing all the household chores by herself, as the family tradition establishes, her mother-in-law still supervises all her activities. Sudha is completely subordinate to her, not being able to do anything without her mother-in-law's permission. The dominant position of Ramesh's mother within the household is best illustrated through the comparison of Ramesh and Sudha to mere "puppets being dangled in her hands" (*SMH* 197). One can thus see that all areas of Sudha's and Ramesh's conjugal life are overseen by this controlling and authoritarian woman, who does not hesitate to manipulate people, her own son included, for her own benefit.

It is Sudha's inability to become pregnant that considerably worsens her position within her husband's family. Since Indian tradition says that one of the primary life duties of each woman is to become "the mother of a hundred of sons", Sudha's mother-in-law starts to exert pressure on her in regards to her long-standing childlessness. One can even say that it is the first crucial conflict between Sudha and her mother-in-law. As nobody would admit that the problem of infertility could be on the man's side, Sudha has to undergo a series of humiliating medical examinations. In the end, they prove that there is nothing wrong with Sudha. Finally, without his mother being aware of it, Ramesh agrees to see the doctor and after several months Sudha becomes pregnant at last. The important role that pregnancy plays in Indian society can be also observed in the way Sudha's mother-in-law addresses her son's wife. When Sudha is trying to get pregnant with no success, she is unfriendly to her calling her *Natun Bau*, standing for a New Wife. By using this expression her mother-in-law implies that even after five years since the wedding, Sudha does not belong to their family. In addition, this way of addressing her can also express the lack of social respect and esteem that a woman cannot earn until giving birth to at least one son. As Sudha contemplates many times in the book, the value of an Indian woman is measured by the number of sons.

But, after proving her pregnancy, Ramesh's mother's treatment of Sudha changes considerably. She addresses her *Bau Ma*, Ma standing for a woman, takes over most of the household duties and tries to be as kind as possible. On top of that, Sudha is permitted to go out without supervision, and, at mealtimes, she is served first. But still Sudha cannot feel happiness. "My mother says I should be down on my knees, forehead to floor, giving thanks that my in-laws are so caring. But all of this love and caring, I want to shout, is it for Sudha, or for the carrier of their new heir" (*SMH* 226)? The expression "the carrier of the heir" (*SMH* 226) points out in an apt way how Indian wives tend to be treated by their in-laws. They are, as Anju puts it, taken as "nothing more than baby machines" (*SMH* 193).

Nonetheless, Sudha's mother-in-law's fury returns after finding out that the expected heir is going to be a girl. "She said it's not fitting, it'll bring the family shame and ill luck. Sanyal family has to be male – that's how it's been in the last five generations" (*SMH* 238). As a result, her mother-in-law insists on abortion. Sudha is desperate. Eventually, in order to protect her unborn daughter, she chooses a solution for which most

Indian women would never muster enough courage – she leaves her in-laws for living as a single mother at her mother’s house.

In comparison to her cousin, Anju, being her own mistress in her American household, is not exposed to any oppression from her in-laws. But, she also has a chance to experience living with her in-laws in a joint household. After her marriage, Anju has to live some time with Sunil’s parents before getting a visa to join her husband living and working in the United States. It is thus her very first opportunity to see what a traditional Indian household being dominated by a man looks like.

As far as Anju’s relationship with her in-laws is concerned, Anju becomes close to Sunil’s mother, a good-hearted and calm woman, who, remembering all the ordeals she had to face as a new bride in her husband’s family, tries to help Anju get used to her new position and to adopt the rules of their household as quickly as possible. When Sunil is absent, it is his mother who tells Anju various funny stories from his childhood to make the time spent together in the kitchen over cooking more pleasant. As Anju says, at such times, she looks beautiful. But, when her husband comes, she turns into a docile, passive and taciturn creature waiting for her husband’s commands. “When Sunil’s father is around, she becomes a different woman. She bends her head and speaks in a watery whisper, or hunches her shoulders apologetically as she rushes to fetch what he is shouting for” (*SMH* 162) . Simply expressed, Sunil’s mother is afraid of her husband and is trying to comply with all his commands in order to avoid his rage or even his physical assault. But, even the slightest thing, such as a special dessert prepared to celebrate their son’s arrival, is sometimes enough for her despotic husband to become furious. “In one swift motion Sunil’s father flings the bowl across the table at Sunil’s mothers. ‘Haven’t I told you never to make that unhealthy stuff? Who pays for the food in this house? Answer me’” (*SMH* 164)! The poor woman, instead of fighting back and standing up for herself after being humiliated in such a way, starts to clean the dark stains from her sari and meanwhile makes sure her husband has enough food on his plate. Anju is totally horrified. “How can I stay in this house with him and Sunil’s mother, that broken woman, as everyone expects me to” (*SMH* 165)? “Nothing in my life has prepared me for this” (*SMH* 164). This phrase indicates that it is the first time Anju, a girl brought up in an exclusively female world living up to values such as equality and mutual respect, encounters the role model imposed on Indian married women by society – the docile, submissive, ungrudging and unprotesting wife. So, it is through her husband’s parents’ relationship that Anju delves into the reality

of traditional Indian conjugal life based on male superiority and patriarchal values. As Anju says, “The house of marriage has many locked rooms. Tonight we’ve opened one and entered in” (*SMH* 166). The terrifying experience at her in-laws’ house makes her appreciate her broad-minded and liberal husband and look forward to her new American life. One can even say that the discouraging background of Sunil’s family has helped Anju to restore her love for her husband that was disrupted by his strange behaviour towards her cousin on their wedding day. Finally, not being able to cope with the way Sunil’s father treated his wife, Anju manages to persuade Sunil to allow her to wait for her visa in her mother’s house and spends the last few months there before starting her new American life.

The analysis of another social role related to marriage, the role of a daughter-in-law, has shown that both Anju and Sudha have been exposed to some form of ill-treatment from their in-laws. Whereas Sudha has problems with her mother-in-law who perceives her as nothing more than a carrier of a future heir, Anju is afraid of her father-in-law, a despotic and aggressive man, who does not hesitate to beat his wife for not fulfilling his orders. But, unlike Anju who is permitted to leave her in-laws after several months, the only way for Sudha to get out of her mother-in-law’s control is to run away.

7.1.1.4 Sudha and Anju as mothers

In her uneasy situation, Sudha longs for having a baby more than anybody else because only the baby could help her to forget for a while about the misery she has to face every day. “How much I want a baby..! (...) Perhaps it was because I felt motherhood was my final chance at happiness. Perhaps I believed it would give me back what wifeness has taken me” (*SMH* 183). This shows that Sudha’s marriage lacks any form of love. Giving birth to her own child could therefore fill her empty heart with the feeling of motherly love and could thus make her situation more bearable. Simply, Sudha wants a child to have somebody to love and to “fill the empty spaces inside her” (*SMH* 183). Then, after proving that her unborn baby is going to be a girl, Sudha decides to accept the social stigma of being single mother rather than to let her baby killed only because it does not fit into her in-laws’ expectations. Unsurprisingly, Sudha’s family does not endorse her brave decision. Her mother, a strict and conservative woman, tries to persuade her not to leave her in-laws in order to protect their family from the scandal Sudha’s decision would provoke. “She told me to grit my teeth and put up with it, and try for another pregnancy. A woman can

have many children, after all, but a husband is forever” (*SMH* 244). But, despite having nobody to support her, Sudha takes her fate into her hands and runs away to save her child. First of all, her unexpected return provokes a great deal of displeasure in her family. “A pregnant woman without a husband! What will people say”(*SMH* 247)? This reaction proves that family reputation and social face are of the utmost importance in Indian society – a society where, as Sudha says, “it is fine to kill a baby girl in her mother’s womb, but wrong for the mother to run away to save her child” (*SMH* 247). Finally, Sudha is accepted by her family and gives birth to a healthy girl named Daiata who will always remind her mother of her courage “to step from the security of wifhood onto the stony path of being a mother, alone, in a country where such things mean shame” (*TVD* 129).

Unlike Sudha, who is desperate because of her long-standing childlessness and who desires to have a baby to have somebody to love, Anju falls pregnant without any intentions to become a mother. Firstly, she is afraid of telling the news to her husband because she knows they cannot afford to have a baby. As she expects, Sunil’s first reaction is negative and proves again that the Indian in him is still living. He blames Anju for not having taken enough precautions during their sexual intercourse. “You were the one supposed to be careful, weren’t you” (*SMH* 220)? Sunil’s reaction shows the typical attitude of Indian men towards women, which is based on the conviction that a mistake is always on the woman’s side. In this respect, one can see a parallel between Sudha’s and Anju’s stories. While Sudha was unable to become pregnant, nobody would ever admit that it could be Ramesh’s fault; infertility was immediately ascribed to the woman. Although, finally, it turned out that it was actually Ramesh who was responsible for their problems with conception. Anju’s situation reveals the same pattern. Sunil, without any hesitation, accuses Anju of not fulfilling her task of being careful. He does not acknowledge for a second that it could also be his fault. But then, luckily, he changes his mind and starts to look forward to his first child. However, his attitude toward his unborn baby is quite possessive. It is mainly his reproachful phrase with which he criticizes Anju’s workload at school “All this behaviour will do is hurt my son” (*SMH* 236), which again contributes to the idea of Indian women being perceived only as carriers of heirs.

One can see another paradox in the comparison of Sudha’s and Anju’s pregnancies. Whereas Sudha, who needs to give birth to a son to gain at least some social respect and even to be able to keep the child, is expecting a girl, Anju, who does not care about the sex of her child, is going to have a boy. Nevertheless, despite the significance that tends to be

ascribed to a son in Indian society, in the end, neither of the couples has one. Anju miscarries her unborn baby in the sixth month of pregnancy. Her miscarriage is caused by her effort to earn enough money to enable Sudha to get to America and to start a new life. As the employment of Indian women is taken as a sign of man's inability to provide for his family, Anju has to work secretly. So, it means that she has to attend her college courses, work in a library after her school finishes and then take care of her husband who comes in the evening and expects his wife to clean the household and serve him a hot meal. All this must be done without giving any hint of anything unusual going on. If Sunil discovered the truth, he would forbid her to work and she would never gain enough finances to pay for Sudha's flight tickets and visas. As a result, one day, Anju, who is in the sixth month of her pregnancy, is no longer able to cope with the physical pressure that she has to face and breaks down. This collapse provokes the miscarriage of their unborn child. To sum up, it is possible to say that Anju's effort to rescue Sudha from the discouraging Indian background that blemishes a single mother and puts a disgrace on her child can be held responsible for depriving Anju of the only thing that could make her happy and that could save her unhappy marriage.

7.1.1.5 Sudha and Anju as transgressors of marital laws

The unfavourable social background based on male superiority forces both girls to transgress certain social norms to make their lives to at least some extent bearable. Sudha's first impulse to rebel against strict Indian marriage laws comes when she falls in love with Ashok, a man she encounters in the cinema, and whose wedding proposal has been turned down by her mother because of the low social position of his family. The only way to live in a love marriage for Sudha is therefore to elope. It would not be the first case of elopement in their family. Her mother also ran away from her parents to enter hastily into marriage with the man she felt affection for. Nevertheless, unlike her mother, Sudha is fully aware of the consequences such a decision could bring. "My heart heaves with panic. Elope. I am dizzy at the finality of the word. They will disown me. Never again to enter that old marble mansion that has always been home, never again to see the mothers. *Can I bear it, even for Ashok's sake*" (*SMH* 110)? Sudha's horror while only thinking about elopement highlights the irreversibility of such an action that would put disgrace upon the whole family and make it extremely hard for her cousin to find a reputable partner. Finally,

having considered all the hardships that her decision to follow her heart could bring, Sudha does not realise her transgressive dream and lets herself be forced to get married to a man she has seen just once. The main reason for giving up her love is to save Anju's marriage that would be shattered and maybe even broken off by the scandal her elopement would provoke. It is mainly Anju's authoritarian father-in-law-to-be's reaction that puts an end to Sudha's thinking about running away. "A good reputation has always meant more to me than all the money in the world. Even after the wedding, I'm prepared to send the girl back to her parents if I find something ugly..." (*SMH* 124). One can thus say that Sudha decides to sacrifice her true feelings and passions in order not to ruin the happiness of her cousin, the sister of her heart, and, as a result, gets married to a man she does not know and does not love.

Sudha's next marital transgression, which, unlike the first possible one, she has actually done, is running away from her in-laws. This is considered to be one of the most serious transgressions of Indian marriage law. As the traditional lawmaker Manu says, each woman belongs only to one man and it is her responsibility to take care of this man for the rest of her life. Sudha thus fails to fulfil this primary life duty. Nonetheless, her husband is also to be blamed. Instead of fighting for his wife and protecting their unborn daughter, he cowardly runs away. "He is a good man. But he's not match for his mother. When he told her it wasn't necessary, he'd be happy with a girl, she just looked at him with those hooded, dispassionate hawk-eyes until he looked away. (...) She chose words that went right into him, like steel hooks with poisoned tips, until finally he just gave up" (*SMH* 238). After realizing that Ramesh is really not a man to depend on, Sudha decides to leave her in-laws. "She leaves the security of wifehood with nothing but a bag clutched in her hand" (*SMH* 241). She never sees them again. She would rather deal with the shame of being a divorced single mother, financially dependent on her mother, than live in the shadow of a woman who killed her unborn baby just because it was going to be a girl. The divorce, which is considered to be the final disgrace for an Indian woman (see subchapter 5.3), gives rise to Sudha's great sense of disillusionment and sorrow but also a feeling of ease and hope for a better life. "I had worked so hard at being a good wife. I felt as though I'd spent years of my life pushing a rock uphill – and the moment I stopped, it rolled right down to the bottom. But, there was also a huge relief" (*SMH* 257).

To sum up, the failure of Sudha's arranged marriage has brought her one positive thing. It has taught her to stand up for herself, to defend her rights and to become much

more independent. After leaving her in-laws in order to save her daughter's life, Sudha emigrates to America hoping for a better and freer life. Such a decision definitely requires a great deal of strength, courage and determination that Sudha would hardly find if she did not have to struggle for her own and her daughter's lives. It is therefore in this aspect that her marriage has enriched her.

As far as Anju is concerned, working at the university library behind her husband's back is her only violation of strict Indian marriage laws. She oversteps the boundaries of what is expected from an Indian married woman by lying to her husband, opening her own bank account and earning her own money. In simple terms, she breaches Indian social norms by trying to gain some financial independence, a privilege ascribed exclusively to men. Nonetheless, as already said, she takes these actions in order to save her cousin from a wretched life. Living in the small village, everyone would point at her and treat her as a woman whose life is over because she has no husband; they would regard her daughter born out of marriage as a social outcast. After that, Anju is exposed to another violation of marriage laws and that is through her divorce. However, she cannot be held responsible for this, as it is her husband who initiates the divorce proceedings. The breakdown of their marriage is caused by Sunil's love for Sudha that lasted for all the years since their wedding day and was reignited with Sudha's arrival to America. One can thus say that Anju's decision to bring Sudha to America to be able to live in a dignified way after her scandalous divorce has deprived her of all the things which mattered to her – her unborn baby, her beloved cousin as well as her husband. On the other hand, Anju's separation from her husband enabled her to stand up on her own feet, to find a job without having to hide it and to become economically and socially independent.

When Sudha's and Anju's transgressions of marriage laws in both the discussed novels are taken into account, one can see another paradox. Anju, a rebellious girl who does not want to "bend with the wind" (*SMH* 114), hardly violates any social rules, whereas Sudha, a docile and passive girl, commits transgressions considered by Indian society as the most serious ones. Firstly, she thinks of elopement in order to be able to get married out of love. After that, she runs away from her in-laws to save her child, which is perceived as the most scandalous and deplorable act an Indian married woman can commit. Finally, she allows herself to be seduced by her cousin's husband and spends a night with him. This contrast can be explained by the influence of social background on an individual's behaviour. While Anju, who is more or less independent, has no urgent need

to transgress any laws, Sudha's unfavourable social background in which she is trapped forces her to breach the laws in order to assert her rights and to make her life at least to some extent bearable. When her affair with Anju's husband is considered, this transgression can be perceived as a result of her lifelong lack of affection which she has been exposed to since her childhood. Sudha's mother, a rigid and stiff woman, has never expressed any affection for her daughter. Instead, she supervises her at every step, caring more about what people say than about her daughter's true feelings. Moreover, Sudha does not experience any love from her husband, a kind but submissive man, who is manipulated by his despotic mother. That is why she succumbs easily to Sunil's passion, something that she has never encountered before. So, it is again the strict Indian social system that is to be blamed for suffocating people's feelings and emotions and turning them into emotionless creatures whose only life mission is to comply with what society requires of them.

It is thus the institution of Indian arranged marriage that shatters the strong bonds between Sudha and Anju, girls who used to love each other as sisters. Although Anju forgives Sudha for ruining her marriage that might have come to an end anyway, their relationship can never be entirely re-established. As Anju says, "Marriage has complicated our lives, divided our loyalties, set us on our different wifely orbits. Never again could we live together the way we did in our girlhood" (*SMH* 176). At the end of the novel *The Vine of Desire*, the girls become separated again. Whereas Anju leads a life of a divorced but independent American woman, Sudha, disillusioned by her unsuccessful attempt to start a new and freer life, decides to return to India. "America isn't the country for everyone (...) Going back would be a way for me to start over in a new part of India, where no one knows me. Without the weight of memories, the whispers that say, *We knew she'd fail*, or *Serves her right*" (*TVD* 321).

7.1.2 America versus India

In the first part of the novel *Sister of My Heart*, America is perceived as a land unfettered by old customs, offering unlimited opportunities, freedom and anonymity. First of all, Anju is fascinated with the idea of living in America. "When Sunil describes America to me, it seems almost as amazing as the fairy kingdoms of Pishi's tales. 'You can be anything in America. You can be what you want'" (*SMH* 161). But, after several months spent in this land of strangers, as Anju sometimes calls it, she is becoming more and more sceptical about the truth of these words. Although living in America has

provided her with opportunities she would never have gained in India, her life does not make her happy and she even wishes she could return to her Indian home. Her disillusionment mainly stems from her inability to comprehend the society in which she finds herself and which differs immensely from the one she was brought up in. “All my life I lived in the concept of duty – how a woman should behave towards her parents, her husband, her in-laws and her children. But, I didn’t think of it as a burden. It gave me the boundaries I needed. Without it, I believed, society would fall apart” (*TVD* 176). As a result, American society, which is not based on such strictly-defined concepts of duties or social roles and where, as Sunil says, anybody can be what they want, fills Anju with inner confusion and uncertainty for not knowing how to behave and what to expect. It is therefore possible to say that the strict Indian laws that lay down how each individual should behave provide Indian people with a certain wall of moral safety which in fact protects them from the confusion and unpredictability of the outer world. That is why Anju feels like a permanent stranger in her new home and cannot get used to the American way of life.

One can thus say that Anju’s Indian-American marriage represents a double burden for her. Not only is she exposed to the deeply-rooted male dominance of her Indian husband, which she would have experienced even in a traditional Indian marriage, but she is also surrounded by social incomprehension and isolation. She compares her American life to being “caught up” (*SMH* 206) and she regrets her hasty consent to the marriage. “How quick and eager I was to come so far from my family, not knowing how much I was giving up and how little I would gain” (*SMH* 206). However, her situation becomes better when she starts planning Sudha’s arrival. It may seem paradoxical that Anju, dissatisfied and disillusioned with her American life, invites Sudha to come to America to live there. In their letters, she even describes America as a land of freedom and independence. But, when Sudha’s low position within Indian society is taken into consideration, it is evident that America, with all the problems the immigrants have to tackle there, can help her and her daughter to live in a dignified way. “America will give you the advantage of anonymity. No one in America would care that you were divorced. (...) No one would look down on you, for America is full of mothers like you who’d decided that living alone was better than living with the wrong man” (*SMH* 272). Sudha thus comes to America in search of anonymity, freedom and a new life which would enable her to rely only on herself.

Nonetheless, Sudha also finds it difficult to get involved in American society and, ultimately, in *The Vine of Desire*, America is no longer described as a land of freedom and unlimited choices but rather as a land of rejection and ignorance. Sudha tries hard to assimilate into American society and to find a new home there, but with little success. Her vain struggle to be accepted by the majority and to become financially independent reflects the marginalization of immigrants in general. “I venture a smile, they do not see me. Is it their ignorance of my world that renders me invisible? If I were in their place, I wouldn’t have smiled at a brown woman in a sari either” (TVD 81). Perhaps it is the characteristic Indian devotion to a set of deeply-rooted rules and conventions that makes their assimilation into a western society difficult, sometimes even impossible. “I wish I had a pair of jeans! I think I’ll scream if one more stranger comes up and tells me how much they love my costume” (TVD 91)! But, as Sudha grew up in a traditionally-minded Indian family, she knows that wearing western clothes would be perceived as a denigration of her home culture. So, although she desires to look like the women around her, her ambitions are constantly inhibited by the rules and conventions she was brought up to respect. On the contrary, Anju, who has become more lenient about the rules set by her culture of origin thanks to her Indian-American husband, wears western clothes and even finds some friends among her college mates. But, despite spending quite a lot of time with them, she feels that they can never understand her problems entirely. “And yet they make her feel lonelier. Large chunks of herself will always be unintelligible to them: the joint family she grew up in, her arranged marriage, the way she fell in love with her husband, the tensions in her household...” (TVD 124).

To sum up, Anju’s and Sudha’s vain efforts to integrate into American society show how difficult the life of Indian women living in Indian-American marriages can be. Even though they are given opportunities they would never gain in India, they are not able to use them in full in order to make their lives easier. Such women are permanently restrained by their concept of duties and social rules, their husbands as well as their strict upbringing. They thus become the victims of the already mentioned “liminality” (see subchapter 3.1) finding themselves trapped between two different worlds and not fitting into either of them. As a result, Sudha becomes frustrated by the inaccessibility of the opportunities that America offers to her and decides to return to India to start over “in a culture she understands the way she will never understand America” (TVD 321).

7.2 *The God of Small Things*

The novel *The God of Small Things*, which is set in the quiet village of Ayemenem, in Kerala, shifts back and forth between 1969 and 1993 in a series of flashbacks and memories. The story is centred around the life hardships of fraternal twins Esthappen and Rahel who are socially ostracised because of their divorced parents and inter-caste origin. In addition, the disclosure of a love affair between their mother Ammu, a Syrian Christian woman, and Velutha, an untouchable Paravan carpenter, makes the twins' lives even more complicated. This forbidden relationship crosses all social and cultural boundaries and threatens the social face of the family. The consequences of such a transgression show how far the members of the community are able to go in order to pacify a woman who challenges the rules of a society in which "Love Laws lay down who should be loved and how and how much" (Roy, *The God of Small Things* 177)⁹ by giving free rein to her desires and by loving a man not as a member of society but as a human being.

7.2.1 Ammu

Ammu, described as a "cheeky" (*TGST* 40) woman with a rebellious spirit, comes from an upper-caste Indian family. The family is run by an accomplished but tyrannical and authoritarian ethnologist who compensates for his personal and professional failures by beating his submissive wife and his two children. Ammu's father's cruel treatment of her mother causes her to develop a strong aversion to the way society is organised. It motivates her to be brave enough to fight for her and her children's rights.

Ammu's rebellion against social norms which suppress people's individual desires and needs can be seen in the way she behaves and in the style of clothes that she wears. Whereas other Indian women wear impervious saris to express their respect towards their ancestors and Indian culture in general, Ammu does not see any moral obstacles in wearing backless blouses and a silver purse on a chain. In addition, the way she smokes cigarettes reveals certain features of her emancipation. "She smoked long cigarettes in a silver cigarette holder and learned to blow perfect smoke rings" (*TGST* 40). By this provocative behaviour, Ammu denies typical female roles and duties and mocks traditional male

⁹ Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. London: Fourth Estate, 2009. [Subsequent page references preceded *TGST* are given in parentheses in the text]

superiority. Simply expressed, Ammu represents a woman who is not afraid to manifest that she does not need any man to feel complete and that not everybody has to comply with what is expected of them.

7.2.1.1 Classification of Ammu's marriage

In an Indian context, Ammu's marriage would be classified as a love marriage as it has not been officially arranged by parents or other family members but by the partners themselves. However, since this marriage lacks any form of love, a more appropriate reference to it would be a marriage of convenience. Ammu decides to get married because she simply views it as the only way of running away from the suffocating and mediocre household being maintained by her ill-tempered and despotic father.

As Ammu's father considers women's education an unnecessary expense, Ammu is not permitted to pursue her college studies. So, at the age of fifteen, her only perspective is to wait for a suitable marriage proposal in their Ayemenem house and meanwhile help her mother with housework. But, as the family does not have enough finances to provide their daughter with any dowry, her marriage prospects are anything but bright. Finding a husband thus represents her only chance of getting out of this desperate life situation. One can even say that all that Ammu dreams of is to find a man who would consent to marry her, no matter where he comes from and what he looks like. Having a husband means escaping a wretched life with her parents in a small Indian village.

It is therefore not surprising that Ammu agrees to get married to a pleasant-looking, but rather easy-going, Bengali assistant manager of a tea estate who proposes to her only five days after their first meeting. Also, one cannot be taken aback by the fact that in order to become his wife Ammu does not hesitate to breach the social rules of her community. Apart from love marriage, Ammu's marriage can be classified as an inter-faith marriage where partners come from different religious backgrounds. Whereas Ammu is a Syrian Christian, her husband adheres to Hinduism. Crossing religious boundaries in marriage shatters the social face of Ammu's accomplished upper-caste family and is also the reason why none of her relatives come to her wedding ceremony.

To sum up, although Ammu's marriage would be perceived as an inter-faith, love marriage by Indian society, it does not stem from love, but rather from necessity. "Ammu didn't pretend to be in love with him. She just weighed the odds and accepted. She thought

that *anything*, anyone at all, would be better than returning back to Ayemenem” (*TGST* 39). Ammu’s uneasy situation shows that Indian marriage might appear to many young Indians as a kind of social obligation that has to be lived through so that an individual could become independent of their parents.

7.2.1.2 Ammu as a married woman

As Ammu’s marriage can be seen as a result of an escape rather than a well-considered decision, it is not long after their wedding day that Ammu starts to doubt whether her hasty consent to marriage could actually bring her a better life. At first, it is the difference of intellectual skill between the spouses that causes misunderstandings in their conjugal life. Since Ammu was not allowed to study college, she has the same level of education as her husband. But, she is much more intelligent than he is and that is the reason why she finds her husband’s thinking simple and shallow. She understands neither his primitive “schoolboy humour” (*TGST* 39), nor his lying without any specific reason. This causes that Ammu looks down on her husband and cannot bring herself to love him.

Moreover, although Ammu noticed that her husband drank quite a lot even before their wedding, after some time, Ammu comes to realize that her husband is “not just a heavy drinker but a full-blown alcoholic with all of an alcoholic’s deviousness and tragic charm” (*TGST* 40). Ammu’s desperate effort to flee from her father’s oppression thus appears to have prevented her from seeing things in a realistic way. Or, perhaps, not to spoil her dream, she pretended not to have seen the things that everybody saw. Later, “looking back on her wedding photos, she realized that the slightly feverish glitter in her bridegroom’s eyes had not been love, or even excitement at the prospect of carnal bliss, but approximately eight large pegs of whiskey. Straight. Neat” (*TGST* 39).

Ammu’s marriage proves that history repeats itself. Ammu is beaten by her husband in the same way as her mother used to be. But, there is one striking difference. Compared to her submissive mother who suffered her husband’s physical assaults in silence and let herself be beaten by a bronze vase every evening, Ammu does not hesitate to defy her husband’s drunken bouts of violence and even to hurt him back. “She took down the heaviest book she could find in the bookshelf and hit him with it as hard as she could. When he regained consciousness, he was puzzled by his bruises” (*TGST* 42). It is therefore possible to say that Ammu’s bitter childhood memories when she was forced to

witness her mother's daily beatings have created a rebellious spirit in her. She simply refuses to face the same miserable fate as her mother and is ready to fight for her rights as well as the rights of her children. So, when her husband, in order not to lose his job, agrees to send his wife to his manager's bungalow to be "looked after" (*TGST* 42), Ammu asks for a divorce and breaks up with him. Simply expressed, being sold as an object to satisfy another man's desires is the last straw for her and also the moment when she decides that returning home would be better, if not for herself, at least for her children, than staying with a violent and perverse drunkard who sees no moral obstacles in prostituting his own wife. So, Ammu leaves her husband and returns, unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem. "To everything she had fled from only a few years ago. Except that now she had two young children. And no more dreams" (*TGST* 42).

7.2.1.3 Ammu as a divorced daughter in her parents ' house

Returning home where nobody approved of her boundary crossing, reputation blemishing marriage definitely requires a great deal of strength and courage. Ammu endures all the humiliation accompanying her unwelcomed arrival after her failed marriage for the sake of her children. "She knew that for her there were no more chances. She had had only one chance. She made a mistake. She married a wrong man. Her life had been lived" (*TGST* 38). But, for her children, growing up without a drunken and violent father could offer them a chance for a better life.

For the generally accepted view that "a married daughter has no position in her parents' home and that a divorced daughter out of an intercommunity love marriage has no position anywhere at all" (*TGST* 45), Ammu receives no sympathy when she comes home. She is barely tolerated, her children taken as nothing else but "doomed, half-Hindu hybrids" (*TGST* 45) who will always remind their upper-caste relatives of their social blemish and "whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry" (*TGST* 45). Although finally accepted, Ammu and her children are constantly reminded that they have nothing to do in the house and that nothing in the house belongs to them. This treatment is for instance reflected in Ammu's mother's reproach directed towards her grandchildren jumping on beds as a part of their playing. "Tell your mother to take you to your father's house. There you can break as many beds as you like. These aren't your beds. This isn't your house" (*TGST* 83). This shows that even Ammu's mother, the woman who suffered in

silence and who had to give up most of her dreams because of her despotic and authoritarian husband, does not support the decision of her only daughter. She looks down on her and takes her as well as her children as a nuisance. One can speculate whether it is not because she in fact envies Ammu for her strength to revolt against the oppression, an act for which she had never had enough courage. So, despite also being a victim of a patriarchal society herself, even Ammu's mother turns out to be ruthlessly and passionately class-conscious towards her divorced daughter.

What can seem also paradoxical in the way Ammu's family treats her is the fact that both siblings, Ammu as well as her brother Chacko, return home after their failed intercommunity love marriages. However, the way they are received is totally different. Whereas Chacko is joyfully welcomed by his mother and takes over the family business right after his father's death, Ammu is despised and constantly made to feel unwanted in the house where she grew up. This again proves the already discussed double-standard treatment of men and women within Indian society. As Nirmala C. Prakash says in one of her essays, "what is forgotten easily in case of a man is branded blasphemous and sinful in case of a woman" (Dhawan 82).

However, a family member who despises Ammu and her children the most and who tries to do her best to make them as unhappy as possible is Ammu's aunt, Baby Kochamma, a bitter, selfish and spiteful spinster living in her brother's house. First, Baby Kochamma loathes Ammu and the twins because their miserable situation reminds her too much of her own frustrated ambitions and dreams. As the narrator of the story says, "the way that the unfortunate sometimes dislike the co-unfortunate, she disliked the twins and their mother" (*TGST* 45). For instance, she keeps pointing out that Ammu and her children live on sufferance in her brother's house. And still, she, as a woman with no husband, who failed to fulfil her life mission to take care of her husband and to raise children, is doing completely the same thing. She is tolerated in the house because an unmarried Indian woman cannot live by herself. She is supposed to live with her parents and after their death with one of her brothers. So, Baby Kochamma hates Ammu and her children for reminding her that for her brother's family she might be the same burden as they are. Secondly, Baby Kochamma cannot stand Ammu because this divorced woman, unlike her, fulfilled at least partly what society expects of a woman. She gave birth to two healthy children. That is why, in order to hurt her maternal love, Baby Kochamma calls her children "doomed, fatherless half-Hindu hybrids" (*TGST* 45) to stress that by having these children Ammu

breached the rule of endogamy (see subchapter 5.2), which is, in her point of view, even worse than not having any children at all. The last reason why she resents Ammu is Ammu's courageous "quarrelling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less woman" (*TGST* 45). She simply envies Ammu for her rebellious nature and her reluctance to come to terms with the fact that a woman without husband has no right for any form of love. So, when Ammu's sexual affair with a carpenter is revealed, Baby Kochamma is the first one to express her disgust over such a scandal. Whereas she, as a spinster that has never tried to find a man after being rejected by the man of her dreams, might desire to experience it as well. To sum up, it is possible to say that Baby Kochamma's bitterness, envy and hatred towards Ammu and her children can be held responsible for the tragic ending of their lives.

7.2.1.4 Ammu as a mother

Since Indian society does not believe that children could be raised as well-mannered and polite individuals only by their mother, without any intervention of their father, Ammu has to do her best to persuade others that she is able to manage her children single-handedly. That is also the reason why she feels so angry about her children's disobedience in public because any of their mischief is seen as confirmation of this generally held patriarchal view. It is again mainly Baby Kochamma who waits for any pretext to point out that Ammu is not strict enough and that children desperately need a man to learn how to behave. "It's useless, Baby Kochamma said. They're sly. They're uncouth. They're growing wild. You can't manage them just by yourself" (*TGST* 149). The fear of being labelled incapable of looking after her own children causes Ammu sometimes to be very severe with her children, which can make an impression that she does not actually love them. "If you ever, and I mean this, EVER, ever again disobey me in public, I will see to it that you are sent somewhere where you will jolly well learn how to behave. Is that clear? (...) Her eyes were frightening" (*TGST* 148). But, her strict treatment of her children has nothing to do with a lack of affection but can be rather perceived as a way of protecting them. Ammu is simply afraid that she could lose her children if her mothering was in contradiction with what is expected of her.

Nonetheless, finally, after being damned by her family for having a sexual affair with a carpenter, Ammu, no matter how much she tried to be a good mother, is branded

inadequate to take care of her children and Estha is sent back to his father who, according to Ammu's relatives, is a better example for a small boy to follow. The reader is thus faced with yet another cultural contradiction - Ammu's drunken, violent and shallow husband is found more suitable to bring up Estha than his caring mother that loves her son more than anything else.

However, the desperate situation in which Ammu finds herself after her divorce causes her love towards her children to be unstable and variable. Once, she hugs them affectionately reassuring them that she is their "mama, their baba and that she loves them double" (*TGST* 149), another time she feels hatred for them referring to them as to "millstones round her neck" (*TGST* 253) and finds them responsible for all her problems. "If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be here! I would have been free. I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born" (*TGST* 253)! It is thus not surprising that although the children like Ammu, they are sometimes afraid of her impulsive reactions and even doubt whether she really loves them. This might be also the reason why Rahel is not able to cry over her mother's dead body in a crematorium even though she is expected to do so. At the age of nine, she is simply too small to comprehend that her mother's strange behaviour was caused by despair and hopelessness rather than by the fact that she did not love them.

The real intensity of Ammu's maternal love is revealed when she is forced to surrender custody of her children after her scandalous love affair. This extreme situation proves how deeply Ammu loves her children and how much she is able to endure in order to get them back. Since the only way of being able to look after her children again is to become financially independent, Ammu needs to find a job in order to save enough money to rent a flat. But, as a divorced woman with no education and no experience, her chances of getting a decent job are very low. So, again, society places Ammu into insoluble conflict. On the one hand, she is prevented from seeing her children because of a lack of finances and independence; on the other hand, the patriarchal society makes it impossible for her to stand on her own feet. But, despite all this, Ammu fights for being able to bring up her children by herself until the very end. One can even say that it is her vain effort to defy strict social rules that deprives her of her own life. "Ammu died in a grimy room in the Bharat Lodge in Allepey, where she had gone for a job interview. She died alone" (*TGST* 161). This shows that Ammu refused to give up and would rather die than let the patriarchal society snatch from her the only thing that she loved – her children.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, it is Ammu's refusal to comply with social conventions that makes Estha's and Rahel's lives much more difficult and even turns them into social outcasts who have to struggle to be loved and to be tolerated by others. For instance, as Ammu is not able to decide whether to keep her husband's surname or to reacquire her maiden name after her divorce, Estha and Rahel have no surname. That is also the reason why Estha, unsure about his own identity, signs his school notebook "Estha Unknown" (*TGST* 156). This shows that their mother's rebellion against culturally-rooted female submission manifested in her rejection to bear the surname of her violent husband and her despotic father in fact causes her children not to know who they are and to whom they actually belong.

7.2.1.5 Ammu as a transgressor of marital laws

Ammu, a woman of non-conformity and defiance, has violated Indian deeply-rooted marital laws several times. Firstly, it is her love marriage through which she expresses her disdain towards Indian social conventions by not providing her parents with their natural right to choose a partner for their child. Ammu notifies her parents of her decision to marry her future husband by a letter, which is considered a deplorable act for which a child deserves to be repudiated by their family. Moreover, by getting married to a man coming from a different religious background, Ammu mocks the rules of her community and insults all its members. Then, when she finds her loveless and unhappy marriage a burden to be shrugged off and asks for divorce, she breaches the borders of what is expected of an Indian married woman - to support her husband, to live in his shadow and to take care of his satisfaction for the rest of her life. On top of that, by initiating divorce proceedings by herself, she challenges the traditional Manu law saying that a woman has no right to separate herself from her husband (see subchapter 5.3.). So, for all these transgressions of the social rules worshipped by her ancestors for centuries, Ammu is damned by her family and tolerated in their house just for the sake of her children and the last remains of the family's already shattered reputation.

At this stage, when Ammu knows that she has already been damned by society and thus has nothing to lose, she decides to listen to her heart and to do what she wants without having to show regard for any social conventions. She simply finds no reasons for complying with social orders when she is no longer regarded as a member of society but

rather as a person with no rights, ambitions or dreams and whose right for life could also be questioned. One can even say that, because of her failed marriage, Ammu is perceived by others as a virtually untouchable¹⁰ woman who everybody tries to avoid in order not to get stained. And, as R.K. Dhawan says in his manuscript about Roy's *The God of Small Things*, as a result of this social condemnation, "an untouchable woman touched an untouchable man" (53). Ammu decides to give complete freedom to her carnal desires and has a sexual affair with Velutha, an untouchable carpenter employed in her mother's factory, which ultimately sullies her family once and for all.

What draws Ammu to Velutha is mainly the same open revolt against society that Ammu tries so hard to suppress in herself. Ammu admires Velutha for his refusal to accept his innate low social status and his determination to break through despite discouraging social circumstances. So, when Rahel thinks that she might have seen Velutha among demonstrators "marching with a red flag and angry veins on his neck" (*TGST* 71), Ammu wishes it was him. She wants him to make her inner and silent protests public. "She hoped that under his careful cloak of cheerfulness, he housed a living, breathing anger against the smug, ordered world that she so raged against" (*TGST* 176). So, it is their status as outcasts and their desire to change the way society is organised that draw them together. In addition, Ammu finds affection for Velutha for being, apart from herself, the only person who really loves her children and with whom her children feel happy. Unlike their own relatives who look down on them considering them as "doomed, half-Hindu hybrids" (*TGST* 45), Velutha is never bothered when Estha and Rahel come to see him or ask him for help. So, it is possible to say that "Ammu loves by night the man her children love by day" (*TGST* 202) and it might be also the reason why Ammu finds her children responsible for what happens after her affair is revealed. The final reason for Ammu's falling in love with Velutha might be the fact that she has never been loved by anybody else before. Neither her parents, nor her husband were able to provide her with the feeling of security and love as Velutha was. That is why she succumbs to him so easily without considering the scope of consequences that this forbidden love relationship in which "they made the unthinkable thinkable and the impossible really happened" (*TGST* 256) could bring.

The disclosure of Ammu and Velutha's inter-caste relationship out of marriage brings much more serious consequences than anybody could ever imagine. In order to save

¹⁰ In traditional Indian society, "untouchable" stands for a name for any member of a wide range of low-caste Hindu groups and any person outside the caste system (Britannica).

the last remains of their reputation as well as to accomplish her personal revenge, Baby Kochamma testifies at the police station that Velutha raped Ammu and kidnapped her children who at the time of his arrest were with him, as almost every day. On the grounds of this false charge, Velutha is arrested and beaten with such an intensity that he dies the next day. Ammu is never given any chance to set the story right. Although she insists on Velutha's innocence, nobody trusts her. Who would trust a divorced woman who has slept with an untouchable man?

By loving a man outside the rules of "Love Laws that lay down who should be loved and how and how much" (*TGST* 177) Ammu had defiled generations of breeding and brought the family to its knees. As a result, she is driven out of her mother's house and prevented from being with Estha and Rahel because a woman capable of such immoral acts could have a negative impact on the upbringing of her children. So, Ammu pays a severe price for crossing the river and satisfying the demands of her body and soul. "Two lives and two children's childhoods" (*TGST* 336). Velutha is killed, Ammu dies in poverty and despair. Estha and Rahel are deprived of the only people who truly loved them. Estha is sent back to his father because only a father knows how to bring up a son. Rahel lives on sufferance in her grandmother's house being constantly reminded that she has no right to live there. Simply expressed, for having a mother who dared to seek love outside the institution sanctified by the community both of the twins are treated as social outcasts who have to struggle to be accepted and tolerated by others.

CONCLUSION

Although one would expect that the author who has spent all her life in India being surrounded by strict and rigid social rules and conventions might be more fettered in describing the social background of her home country than the author who left India for the United States to gain greater autonomy, the overall analysis of three selected characters, Anju, Sudha and Ammu, and their difficulties related to their failed marriages has shown that the chosen Indian authors, CH. B. Divakaruni and Arundhati Roy, do not deviate much in the way they perceive the concept of traditional Indian marriage.

Since marriage has not brought happiness to any of the selected characters, both authors try to convey that Indian arranged marriage is not always a guarantee of a satisfied and orderly conjugal life. The stories of Sudha and Anju show that the sacred facade of arranged marriage either lacks love or comes crumbling down because of an imbalanced familial set-up. Ammu's story proves that a marriage of convenience only to escape from her parents can be just as disastrous as an arranged marriage. Love in all these three marriages thus remains either an unfulfilled dream or a fleeting experience. Sudha and Ammu experience love out of their marriage, Anju loves her husband but he loves somebody else.

Nonetheless, all of the women are strong enough to defy their unhappy life situations and ask for divorce. But, as both stories portray, divorce is not always the solution. Although Sudha's divorce has enriched her in many ways and turned her into an independent woman, she has to struggle to be accepted by Indian society as a divorced mother. Ammu's situation after divorce is even worse. She is damned by her family and finally expelled from their house not being able to take her children with her. Anju represents the only character who does not face social humiliation and ostracism because of her divorced status. Her seemingly easier position is caused by the fact that she has no children and by living far from her home country. By this contrast between Sudha and Anju, Divakaruni tries to demonstrate that America, regardless of all the problems Indian women have to face there, is more lenient towards divorced women and divorce as such. But, despite all this, Anju seems so shaken by the outcome of her marriage that she might not be able to integrate into American society as an ordinary divorced woman anyway.

One could think that Divakaruni, as the author who spent most of her life in the United States far from all the conventions and restrictions of her country of origin, might portray Indian marriage set in America as the only chance for an Indian woman to lead an

equal conjugal life. But, surprisingly, Anju's marriage proves the opposite. Although Anju is offered many opportunities she would have never gained in India, she is constantly reminded by her dominant husband that it is him who provided her with this life and that she would be nothing without him. This shows that traditional Indian marriage based on male superiority represents such a deep-rooted and embedded institution within Indian society that even liberal and autonomous background of the United States into which it is set cannot change its typical features. Neither Arundhati Roy perceives America as a chance for Indian women to gain more respect and esteem in their traditional marriages. Both Rahel's and Chacko's American-Indian marriages end in divorce. So, it is possible to say that both authors try to convey that leaving India does not help Indian women to decrease their social discrimination and disrespect rooted for centuries in the values of their community.

In addition, the selected authors concur in raising the question of woman's physical needs that tend to be totally neglected in Indian patriarchal society. Married women are expected to satisfy the needs of their husbands, on the other hand divorced women do not have any right for any physical desires. But, both Divakaruni and Roy ascribe carnal desires to their divorced characters. Sudha, as a divorced woman who takes care of her daughter single-handedly, succumbs to Anju's husband and spends a night with him. Ammu, a divorced woman who lives on sufferance in her parents' house together with her two children, satisfies her needs by having an affair with a carpenter employed in her mother's factory. What's more, Roy does not hesitate to describe Ammu's inability to resist the physical temptation in a very detailed manner. "She moved quickly through the darkness like an insect following a chemical trail. She didn't know what it was that made her hurry through the undergrowth. That turned her walk into a run ..." (*TGST* 332). This in-depth description of woman's sexuality might lead the reader to speculate whether the fact that Roy has spent all her life in such unfavourable background suppressing woman's needs, ambitions and dreams has not made her even more straightforward and critical than her Indian-American colleague.

To sum up, the analysis of three chosen characters within this diploma thesis has shown that both authors, CH. B. Divakaruni and Arundhati Roy, do not differ much in the way they perceive traditional Indian marriage set either in an Indian or an American context. Both of them refuse to portray their married female characters as passive and submissive creatures suffering in silence as many Indian women do. All of the analysed

women represent strong individuals who are not afraid of expressing their needs and desires and who are able to leave the sanctified institution of Indian marriage if it suppresses their natural rights; even if this means to become a social outcast who is ostracised for realizing one's own ambitions at the expense of the rest of their community.

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