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Section 15. Law and Society

Love-marriage. From Gāndharva Rite to Popular Hindi Cinema's Tales of Love

The aim of this paper is to examine marriage by mutual consent (*gāndharva*), as presented in the *Dharmaśāstra* and *Kāmaśāstra* literature and represented in Sanskrit drama and fiction, and so-called love-marriage in contemporary India.

As is well known, the Hindu legislators discussed eight modes of acquiring a wife. The Gāndharva form, marriage by choice, was accepted but generally ostracized.

The only ancient Hindu text that considers Gāndharva marriage as the highest form of marriage is the *Kāmasūtra*, which provides a description of it. This marriage is presented as the result of mutual attraction between a man and a woman without the prior sanction of the respective families. It is, of course, this marriage that is at the core of celebrated classical love stories, above all the story of Śakuntalā.

In present-day Indian society arranged marriage is still the culturally preferred way to select a suitable partner. The opinion polls show young Indians favouring the security of having parents select their partners for life. Love-marriage is quite uncommon and seems to be acceptable only to the extent that it is a so-called "love-arranged-marriage", where the self-chosen partners gain the approval of the families to get married.

Hindi films have popularized such a concept. Most of the modern Bollywood

movies focus on teenage romance leading to marriage, apparently glorifying love-marriage as opposed to arranged marriage. But normally, behind the celebration of romantic love, the tales preach the importance of the united family and traditional values. In the movies, rather than representing rebellion against the system, love-marriage actually emphasizes the importance of the family as the couple always obtain their parents' blessings by the end of the story.

In one of the most popular films of the 1990s, *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun?! (Who am I of Yours?!, 1994)* the hero of the film is asked whether he wants a love-marriage or an arranged one. He says: "It's a love-marriage that you have to arrange".