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„Bollywood and Beyond:
Karan Johar's *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* and
Deepa Mehta's *Fire*”

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1 Preface

It was the interest in the difference between the various kinds of Indian cinema that initiated the research question of this thesis. Normally, people all over the world predominantly associate Indian cinema with the term 'Bollywood' and do not take New Indian Cinema, Middle Cinema, Diasporic Cinema, or other types of filmmaking in India into account. There is no doubt about the fact that popular Hindi cinema, of which Bollywood forms the best-known and biggest part, releases most productions annually and constitutes one of the leading forces of Indian cinema. In this thesis, however, also the non-mainstream production *Fire*, by the producer and director Deepa Mehta, is granted attention. The film is analysed in comparison to the mainstream production *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* by Karan Johar, a film that is often claimed to be composed of many features that are typical of popular Hindi films.

Within the framework of these two Indian motion pictures, this thesis focuses on the main themes and topics as well as on the way they are represented in these two films by the directors. Even though Karan Johar and Deepa Mehta come from two rather distinct schools of filmmaking, they tackle similar themes in their films. Both productions highlight the value of the traditional Indian family system, certain prevailing and long-established traditions, and they deal with the role of love and sexuality. Karan Johar, as well as Deepa Mehta, both have Indian roots, nevertheless, even though they address similar themes, in their productions they each reflect versions of 'Indishness' that sharply differ from each other. Especially the ways in which the filmmakers address these themes will be explored and the differences and similarities between the two productions are subject to analysis.

The thesis is structured into three parts, each of them dealing with the analysis of one of the three themes. However, before engaging in a detailed examination and comparison of the films, the value of the themes 'Family', 'Indian Traditions' and 'Love and Sexuality' for Indian society are examined.

The first part of each chapter will therefore explore the ways in which a traditional Indian family is structured, how certain traditions are represented and celebrated by different groups, and how the issues of love and sexuality are dealt with by Indian society. The findings from these parts will then be transferred onto the films *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* and *Fire* and the reflection of the themes in the films will be examined. Being productions by two filmmakers who have entirely different ways of looking at and representing society, it will be interesting to explore the similarities, as well as the distinguishing features of the films, with regard to their themes.

2 Background

India is known internationally for its filmic productions, which form part of one of the biggest film industries worldwide. Every day, Indian audiences fill the countless cinema halls within the country and the film business seems to have grown to constitute an essential part of modern Indishness.

The Indian film genre that is most celebrated within the country, as well as internationally, is Bollywood, the Bombay industry. Bollywood, besides being the most popular one, also produces most films annually within the Indian film business. However, it does not only put most productions on the market, but it additionally attracts the mainstream Indian audience and has rapidly gained importance also overseas in recent years. Despite the popularity of mainstream films, some other basic types of Indian cinema should not be forgotten, as also a great number of Regional, Art, Middle or Diasporic Cinema producers have proven remarkably successful in the past and have created highly interesting and good films.

This thesis mainly draws on two films: *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, which is traditionally regarded as a mainstream Hindi production and *Fire*, that was produced and directed by an independent filmmaker, as will be explained in more detail below. Even though the focus will be on these two productions, references will be made to other exemplary films occasionally.

There can be identified a number of themes that occur repeatedly within Indian cinema, and also in the films that are subject to analysis in this paper, that can generally be said to reflect several conventional values of the country's society. One of the main themes of *K3G* and *Fire* is, first of all, the 'family', which constitutes an essential part of the films' plots. Furthermore, certain 'Indian traditions' such as the arranged marriage, religious festivities and mythological stories provide the background to the films. Finally, the issue of 'love and sexuality' and their realisation in the production will be analysed in this thesis.

These themes offer a framework for the present paper and will guide the reader along. There are, for instance, hardly any films that do not depict a certain family structure or that do not present the family as an integral part of the story (Uberoi 20). Additionally, many movies focus on a number of prevailing traditions, such as the system of arranged marriage, the celebration of religious festivities, or on the preservation of traditions among individual families. Such traditions can be said to be highly important for Indian society in general as they form and shape the Indian ways of life. Love and sexuality also form a substantial part of many Indian films, even though they are depicted in a rather implicit way in the eyes of an audience that is used to the Hollywood way of filmmaking. In both films, *K3G* and *Fire*, the family constitutes the central theme, which is why it will be taken as the basis of this examination around which the other themes are structured. The first part will therefore be the most comprehensive one, laying the foundations for the other chapters. An analysis of the value of all these themes for the real world, i.e. for Indian society and their transfer to an imagined world, namely world of motion pictures, will provide the framework for this thesis.

All these themes have been taken up from people's daily lives and from the cultural and moral values that are shared by the majority of Indians. These values are then transferred to an imagined – namely the cinematic – world. However, the ways in which they are interpreted by different filmmakers sometimes contrast sharply with each other and each director tries to convey another variation of Indishness to the audience. In many cases it is these themes, which reflect the cultural and moral values of certain people, as well as the ways in which they are translated into practice, that are the determining factors for the viewer's decision about whether or not to go to the cinema and watch the film.

As mentioned above, this thesis will predominantly concern itself with the analysis of two Indian films. It is the aim to compare the notions of Indishness, the different Indian lifestyles that are communicated through the themes of these productions. The first film, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (*K3G*, as it is familiarly termed), with the English title *Sometimes Happy*,

Sometimes Sad, contains a number of elements, such as song and dance, stars, themes, etc., that are generally attributed to Bollywood films. In this context it is important to say that some scholars, such as Thoraval or Gokulsing and Dissanayake (*Narrative* 90) allude to the existence of a certain Bollywood formula, according to which successful Bollywood films are assembled. However, definitions of this formula and its constituents vary considerably and are therefore not unambiguous. Whereas the formula for Thoraval, for instance, consists of “one or two stars, six songs and three dances in each film” (64), Gokulsing and Dissanayake list “concern for the family, reverence for mythological gods and goddesses and the defeat of the criminal as a result of poetic justice” (*Narrative* 90) as essential constituents. Hence, it is difficult to speak of a film adhering to the formula, because a clear-cut definition does not exist. One can say that certain elements of the film occur in a number of Bollywood features, however, the identification of a certain film as representative of all Bollywood productions is a delicate matter. Certain themes of a film, for instance, can be representative of the genre; however, it is not only the themes that make a Bollywood film. Director, actors, and many others exercise influence on these productions and form it in different ways. This is why the focus of this thesis is on one specific mainstream Hindi film, with the individual ways the director Karan Johar translated the themes into practice, rather than identifying *K3G* as a prototype of Bollywood cinema. Whenever the term ‘Bollywood’ comes up in this thesis, it refers to mainstream Hindi films that were produced in Mumbai (renamed Bombay in 1995) (Ganti, *Guidebook* 2).

The film *K3G* will be set in relation to is *Fire*, by the Indo-Canadian filmmaker Deepa Mehta. Being a diasporic, transnational and independent filmmaker (Levitin, *Transnational* 271), Deepa Mehta did not conform to the tradition of filmmaking that most mainstream Hindi filmmakers adhere to and her production, which is part of a trilogy, negotiates a different version of Indishness. Both, *K3G* and *Fire* were shot in India, however, the audiences each film appeals to, the narrative structures, the ways of production, and many other features differ considerably from each other. On the surface, it seems that many similarities can be found, especially concerning the themes

they approach. In how far and in which ways they actually bear a resemblance or differ from each other will be outlined in this paper.

It was the desire to explore those features that distinguish Deepa Mehta's production so sharply from mainstream Hindi films that was one of the key factors for the development of the topic of this thesis. By concentrating on the main themes of the films, which will provide the framework for this thesis, the distinct manners in which they are put into practice will be analysed. Additionally, differences and similarities between the productions will be elaborated in the course of this thesis. The ways in which the themes 'family,' 'traditions,' and 'love and sexuality' are dealt with, as well as the question in how far they differ from each other in these two specific productions will be the primary focus of the present paper.

2.1 Karan Johar's *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*

Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham: It's All About Loving Your Parents, was directed by Karan Johar and appeared on the market in 2001. Karan Johar is the son of the famous Indian producer Yash Johar who, with his production company Dharma Productions, also acted as the producer of this film. The screenplay was written by Sheena Parikh and the music is by Jatin-Lalit (Jatin Pandit and his brother Lalit) (IMDb). After *Kuch Kuch Hota Hoi*, *K3G* is the second success of the young Indian producer Karan Johar (Alexowitz 178), who even managed to reach an international audience with this production. According to Myriam Alexowitz, *K3G* proved extremely successful not only in the United States, but also in Britain. As a result, it was the first Bollywood film to have received German subtitles, which lead to an equal breakthrough in German cinemas in 2003 (177).

The title, which in Europe reads *Sometimes Happy, Sometimes Sad* (or internationally *Sometimes Happiness, Sometimes Sorrow* (IMDb)), as well as the subtitle *It's All About Loving Your Parents*, already indicate that one of the major themes of *K3G* is the family, which goes through ups and downs in the

course of the film. The story about the Raichands, an extremely wealthy family who leads a happy life until their eldest son Rahul falls in love with a girl and marries her against his father's approval, is told through the eyes of their second-born son, Rohan. This marriage results in the breakup of the Raichand family because the father Yash disowns Rahul, who, as a consequence, moves to London with his new wife. The film lasts for around 210 minutes and shows in great detail how the different members of the family deal with their loss, as well as how Rohan tries to bring the family back together. With the help of various techniques, which will be elaborated in the respective chapters below, the film manages to evoke the audience's emotions in a spellbinding way.

One of the main reasons for the success of the film *K3G* in India is the fact that it is what Matthias Uhl calls a 'multi-star movie'. It features a great number of well-known actors, such as the famous Shah Rukh Khan, Amitabh Bachchan, Jaya Bachchan, Hritik Roshan, Kajol, and Rani Mukherjee, to name only a few, in order to reach a wide audience (96). Because of the appeal of stars to the audience "casting a leading male star is usually the first step in putting together a Hindi film" (Ganti, *Guidebook* 66) and "[f]ilms are often financed simply on the basis of a star-cast [...]" (55). Additionally, according to Alexowitz, *K3G* is a film that mixes traditional Indian values with the values of modern society (177). This binary opposition between tradition and modernity creates a certain tension, which makes it attractive to a young as well as an older audience.

The major themes of *K3G* are the family, the celebration of certain traditions, and love, either between parents and their children or between married couples. The way in which these are conveyed to the audience will be explored after a short introduction into the film *Fire*, its producer Deepa Mehta, and after a general insight into the value of the family for Indian society.

2.2 Deepa Mehta's *Fire*

Deepa Mehta was born in India in 1949 and moved to Canada at the age of twenty four, where she married Paul Saltzman, a Canadian director and producer. Even though she studied philosophy, she turned towards filmmaking after having finished university. At the beginning of her filmic career, she directed short films and documentaries but she later started writing screenplays and directing films such as *Sam and Me* or *Camilla* (Wise 143). In 1996, she began filming in her homeland India and *Fire*, the first film of her Elements Trilogy *Fire*, *Earth* and *Water*, appeared on the international market.

According to J. Desai, “*Fire* is a South Asian diasporic film and also part of South Asian cinema. [...] [It] reflects the significance of Bollywood and Indian cinemas not only through referencing particular films through its dialogue, plot, and music but also through its form and aesthetics, employing melodrama and the family social drama as significant.” (161) Deepa Mehta’s film cannot clearly be assigned to mainstream Hindi cinema. Nevertheless, certain similarities between popular Hindi films and her films exist. There are a number of reasons why the film has an underlying Indian tone. These reasons include, within many others, the facts that the film was shot in India, that it takes this country with its distinct culture as a subject, and that the director and most of the actors are either Indian or have Indian roots. There can also be found a number of aspects in the Deepa Mehta’s productions, and therefore also in *Fire*, which are traditionally associated with New Indian Cinema, or Art Cinema. These elements include concern for “workers, peasants, and middle-class people, [...] poverty, exploitation, superstition and authoritarian social and familial structures” (Binford 151). A middle-class family is at the centre of *Fire* and also authoritarian structures are crucial for the development of the plot, as will be emphasised later.

The plot of the film *Fire* is based on the short story *The Quilt*, written in 1942 by the Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai (Gopinath 295). The film tells the story of two sisters-in-law, who, rejected by their husbands, fall in love and start an

intimate relationship with each other. The film proved highly successful at international festivals, as well as at international box offices. In India, the situation was a different one: It was only in 1998 that *Fire* passed the censorship and appeared on the screens in the country, attracting only a limited audience. In 1998, however, “Shiv Sena’, the most powerful extreme Right Hindu Party” (Thoraval 209) terrorised the film and forced distributors and cinema owners to withdraw it from the screens in India’s biggest cities Mumbai and Delhi (J. Desai 176). Shiv Sena protested against the open depiction of a lesbian relationship and of scenes of nudity and declared that “such films should be made in the West as lesbianism does not suit India” (180).

On the other side of the protests, women’s groups, lesbian and other feminist activists, who felt impinged upon their rights, demonstrated in order to prevent the closing of further cinemas in other Indian cities (J. Desai 178/9). Soon, the matter became a delicate and deeply emotional one and members of all kinds of Indian castes and organisations got involved in the discussions and debates about the film and its topic. Attempts by Deepa Mehta to avoid the withdrawal of the film from Indian cinemas resulted in contradictory statements, which “varied from naming *Fire* as a lesbian film to claiming it is about women’s choices to suggesting that lesbians were hijacking the film” (186).

The fact that the film *Fire* proved highly controversial and that its success within India contrasted markedly with its international breakthrough has now become obvious. It was important to emphasise the differences of opinion about the film, as literature on it seems to be more concerned with this controversy than with an analysis of the film as such. However, the controversy and the success of the production will not be followed any further here because the focus of this paper is on the major themes of the film and their implementation in contrast to that of the film *K3G*.

3 The Role of Family, Men and Women in Indian Society

Family, family, family. In India, all is finally family.
(Blaise and Mukherjee 92)

With this quote, Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee put one of the most important values of Indian society in a nutshell, as will be further demonstrated in this chapter. However, one must not forget, that “the family as an institution is near universal” (T. Patel 19). Most individuals are concerned with this aspect of life, as people all over the world live or grew up in a certain type of family structure and have therefore experienced family as either an intimate space, as a public institution or as both (19). Two of the most common kinds of kinship systems are the nuclear and the joint family and certain countries may show a prevalence of one of these structures. Modern western society, for instance, is characterised by the nuclear family, consisting only of the nucleus, i.e. of father, mother and possibly their unmarried child(ren) (Uberoi 22), whereas India, on the other hand, is known for its joint or extended family system, in which a number of generations lives together in one household.

The various ways in which people of different societies live together, have generated countless debates and discussions, especially within anthropologists and sociologists. The reason for this is the fact that the family as a public, as well as a private institution, seems to be an extremely significant aspect for the characterisation and representation of a certain society, as Meghna Gulzar confirms in the following quotation: “Any art form of society is reflective of its culture” (280). Also Uberoi agrees with that and claims that the role of kinship systems for Indian society is, within others, mirrored in its representation in the film industry, which rarely produces successful films that do not evolve around the family (20). The first part of the present chapter deals with the value of the family for Indian society, which, as indicated in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, is an essential value

for Indians. This chapter will consider certain prevalent family structures within these kinship systems. The analysis will form the basis for an exploration of the two films *K3G* and *Fire*, in both of which the family is one of the crucial and decisive issues, as has already been indicated in the introductory part of this thesis. The part following the theoretical analysis of the importance of the family for Indian society will therefore deal with the way these structures are put into practice in the films and are used to portray certain types of Indian families. At the same time, these representations shed light on the kinds of Indishness the two directors present. It will be explored whether they give a description of different or rather of similar versions of Indian society.

3.1 General Aspects

Considering the size of India's population, speculations on preferred kinship structures can, obviously, only lead to rather generalising results. There might be objections to such generalisations because conventions concerning family systems vary according to religion, caste, economic situation and many other social variables of individual families (Uberoi 23). Such diversity makes it difficult to present an accurate portrait of the Indian family (Gulzar 282). However, many studies have been conducted to find out what types of kinship systems are prevailing within India and many of these studies lead to similar results. Before the results are presented, however, the two most important types of Indian family systems, the joint and the nuclear family, will be explained.

Definitions of joint families are not always clear-cut and researchers argue, for instance, whether the term refers to "a household shared by at least two married brothers [or to] any household which is something other than a nuclear household of one married couple" (Säävälä 64). This difference in opinion does not only result in a great number of definitions but also in a lot of confusion. Säävälä provides us with one of the most common definitions, in which the term joint family stands for "a set of at least two brothers with

their wives and children, and possibly their parents and unmarried sisters, who usually share the same dwelling and a common hearth. There may also be other relatives residing together” (62). Being one of the most common and useful definitions, this will be the one that is referred to in this paper. It needs to be noted here, that the definition provided above is true for the patrilineal type of family that is predominant in India. If the word ‘brothers’ is substituted by ‘sisters’, it can also be allocated to a matrilineal society, which is, however, not the norm in Indian society (I. Desai 84).

In a traditional joint family, therefore, various generations, tied by “bonds of filial, parental, or marital relations” (Säävälä 64) live together in the same household, with women and men taking on their individual status, as well as a number of different responsibilities. The roles men and women adopt in such a family system will be explored further below. The co-residency of various family members within one household means for the whole family that they are “joint economically, physically, socially, and ritually” (62). They eat together, share the house and also their income between all family members, have social responsibilities towards each other, especially towards the elderly, and perform family or religious rituals together (63). I. Desai confirms the definition of a joint family that is used in this context by listing the following requirements: “To constitute a joint family [...], the law requires certain conditions to be observed: common property and income, co-residence, commensality, co-worship and performance of certain rights and obligations” (84). Living in a joint family provides people with economic and social security. This is especially important for the elderly, who cannot care for themselves any longer and rely on their family, who they have looked after their entire lives (Lamb, *Independent* 83). Living in a group therefore gives the members of the family a feeling of safety because most people are fearful of having to live in isolation (Alexowitz 179). Additionally, complex family structures are important for people to establish their social and personal identity (Säävälä 72), as will become clear later in this chapter.

A nuclear family, in contrast to the joint family, consists of parents and their unmarried children (Uberoi 22). According to Uberoi, a nuclear family “is

demonstrably the family form best suited to the requirements of a modern, urbanized, industrial, society founded on individualist values” (22). The nuclear family system is often associated with western society and feared by many Indians who are used to living together with their entire family.

Patricia Uberoi claims that even in India, which is internationally known for its extended family system, nuclear families are, and – what is important – have for a long time been predominant. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the joint family structure remains within the most common family systems of the country. (24) The fact that nuclear families overweigh joint families is often neglected by Indians as it has been a long tradition in Indian history to give family top priority. Recent developments give the impression that the number of joint families is decreasing due to the influences “of the four ‘zations’ – modernization, industrialization, urbanization, and Westernization” (Lamb, *Independent* 84) on Indian society. People feel threatened by urbanisation, globalisation and other modern influences coming from the West and therefore perceive reality in a distorted way (Säävälä 72). According to Mukherjee, “different forms of nuclear family accounted for more than half of the Indian households recorded in the 1991 census, [but] there was also a marked presence of joint families, accounting for about one-fifth of the total” (66). I. Desai, in his study on prevalent family structures, gives similar results and confirms this claim (90). The joint family has not been predominant for many decades, but it is generally believed that it used to be universal and it thus still forms a crucial part in the Indians’ perceptions about family. When people talk about the reducing numbers of the joint family, they mostly mean that the co-residence of two married couples has become less important. However, studies proof that this argument is not true because rather than decreasing, the presence of joint families is actually increasing, with the only difference that the family members are now older than they used to be in the past (Säävälä 66).

In addition to, or maybe even as a result of the seemingly decreasing number of joint families, the ways in which such families function are often idealised. Being among the main themes of the most important and great Indian epics

Mahabharata and *Ramayana*, which form the basis of many filmic productions in India, partly explains the significance of the institution of the family in the country (Gulzar 280). “[T]he joint family is, if not a *fact* of traditional Indian society, at least a deeply held traditional *value* that continues to provide the underlying principles of household-building strategies in South Asia [...]” (Uberoi 157). The two epics are central for most Hindus and, since they are taken very seriously, they contribute substantially to this special value of the family.

“The nuclear family form and the companionate marriage are widely taken as signs of modernity, while the conventions of joint family living are nostalgically recalled to epitomize a bygone ‘tradition’, doomed to extinction in modern times” (Uberoi 32). As mentioned above, the tradition and glorification of the family arose from the two epics, which highly praise the family. According to Lamb, who conducted studies on people’s perceptions of the joint family, Indians associate mostly positive aspects with it, such as “fellow-feeling, supportive interdependence, patriarchy, crowded hearths, plentiful time, and moral-spiritual order [...] material and social support, [as well as a] sense of identity, as vital members of enduring intimate families” (*Independent* 83). This idealised account of a joint family is a proof for the fact that it is this type of family that people’s minds centre on when talking about kinship systems. It is not the most common type, nevertheless, enormous cultural and personal value is attached to it and this is reflected in the media too.

Mainstream Hindi films often reinforce such idealised pictures of the joint family. Right from the beginning of the history of Indian film, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* were taken as guidelines for adaptations, which, similar to the two epics, centre their stories or plots on the family. The trend for films to evolve around the family continues until today. Two versions of how to realise this, however, will be elaborated and become clear in the analysis of the films *K3G* and *Fire* in the second and third part of this chapter. Before the careful examinations of the films, the different roles that men and women traditionally adopt within such family structures will be looked at.

The fact that men and women take on different roles in a family was already mentioned above. A joint family is a social system in which the subordination of certain members is almost inevitable, since the system would otherwise not function. What is 'ideally' needed in an extended kinship system, is a leader and decision-maker who exercises power over the rest of the members of the family. In 1990, India, being characterised by a patriarchal society, showed a rate of eighty percent of men over sixty that were considered heads of the households. In contrast, only fifteen percent of women achieved the same status at that time (Mukherjee 66). These numbers might no longer be fully up-to-date, however, it takes time for social behaviours and conventions to change and even though the percentage of men acting as heads of their families might have declined, that of women will not come close to that of the men, even in the twenty first century. The number can therefore be considered a valuable indicator for the dominant position and role that men take on among their families still nowadays.

According to E. Dey,

[...] family as the basic social unit [in India] consists of a structure of power with a definite location in space. Traditionally patriarchal family means many generations living under one roof with a clear division of responsibilities 'outside' and 'inside' the house. The male is the official head of the family, who is the provider of food, shelter and clothing and also the defender against attack from other males (145).

In this quotation, Dey confirms the fact that India is, generally said, a society in which mostly men dominate the scene. The picture she provides of the duties and responsibilities of men in the household is one which in reality is only represented in an idealised structure, to take up the notion of the ideal or idealised family once more. Mukherjee points out that such idealised structures convey the picture of a perfectly happy family, in which no one fights or rebels against the domination or subordination. In many cases such hierarchical structures are

incessantly played out among the members of the family at many levels: between the head of the family and the rest of the members; between generations as between adults and children; between kinship positions as between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law; and,

significantly between its men and women members, with their differential and gender-based sharing of the resource pool of the family and disparate participation in domestic work and in exercise of agency and authority (62).

Tensions between the family members are inevitable, considering how many people and generations live together in the same house in a joint family. However, E. Dey claims, the role of men presented above is not assumed by every male head of the family in India. The duties and positions are subject to change and they are no longer as clear-cut as they appear in the definition (146) or maybe as they used to be some time ago. Besides, if more men live in a joint family, not all of them necessarily take on the same responsibilities and duties.

Monica Das Gupta points out that there is a division between the positions of men among a family, with the oldest male member of the family claiming most authority over family decisions (43). Uberoi confirms this by stating that

the Indian family instantiates, for the most part, the typical principles of a patrilineal kinship system whereby descent, succession and inheritance are reckoned in the male line, authority is vested in senior males and the residence rule is 'patri-virilocal' [...], meaning that the new bride should be brought to live with the husband's family (30).

It is therefore the oldest male member of the family that exercises most authority and sometimes assumes enormous power. According to Alexowitz, men dominate over women and older over younger members. The eldest son takes on his father's position when he dies (180). Shah, however, points out that "proverbial ideas about Hindu society, such as, men are dominant over women, fathers over sons, and mothers-in-law over daughters-in-law, are [...] relative to certain situations" (22-23). It is therefore rather difficult to make generalisations about the individual positions men adopt within their kinship systems, as they vary according to geographical, economic and other aspects. Even so, the fact that they traditionally occupy the dominant status amongst the family hierarchy remains valid. Uberoi, within others, criticises this convention and emphasises that the patriarchal system justifies men's authority over women and younger male members of the family. In addition to

that it “influences notions of *entitlement* to household resources, to the material disadvantage of women and girl-children in particular” (32), an aspect that is fiercely criticised by feminist scholars. Further effects the men’s dominant status and their role as decision-makers of the family have on the role of women amongst the family will be explored in the following section.

In a typically patriarchal society, as is the case with India, it is traditionally the woman who marries into the family of her husband and comes to live with his relatives in the traditional joint system, as Uberoi mentions (30). According to Monica Das Gupta, this arrival in a new kinship system has a profound effect on the status the newly wed woman adopts in her husband’s family, as

there are strong intergenerational and intragenerational bonds between household members related to each other by blood. [...] This means that the woman marrying into the household is in a very weak position in terms of making decisions to protect her own and her children’s health. Layers of people are above her in the household hierarchy of status and authority, beginning with all the adult males, and continuing through all the women older than her (43).

Mukherjee confirms this low status of women concerning important decision-making and assuming control, in contrast to men (67). A woman’s status is highly dependent on that of her husband (Alexowitz 180) and, as mentioned above, it is particularly the newly wed women that occupy one of the weakest positions among all family members (Mukherjee 67). However, in most families they have the opportunity to slowly work their way up in the hierarchy. One of the most efficient ways to do this is, for instance, the giving of birth to a son (Lamb, *Saris* 75), as will be referred to again later in this chapter. Nevertheless, at the beginning of their marriage some of these women face an extremely difficult life, as their mothers-in-law often exercise the power they are granted in certain respects over their daughters-in-law and make their lives a misery (Mukherjee 67). As is the case with the hierarchy of men within the family, also here the individual status of women within the kinship system is not a universal, or rather a national rule that every Indian family necessarily conforms to (Shah 22-23).

In her book *White Saris and Sweet Mangoes: Aging, Gender, and Body in North India*, Sarah Lamb gives an account of the studies she conducted in West Bengal. Amongst other things, she concerned herself with the relationship of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law and came to the conclusion that these two members of a family heavily depend on each other and that both of them can exert a certain power over the other. A daughter-in-law can, for instance, “take a son’s loyalties away from his parents and even [...] persuade the son to begin a separate household of his own” (Lamb, *Saris* 72). The mother-in-law is therefore in danger of losing her son if she is too hard on his wife. According to Lamb, however, at least in the first years of a woman’s marriage, it is the mother who exercises authority over her daughter-in-law, be it in a positive or in a negative way (*Saris* 72). Even though in some other regions these systems of rules might have shifted slightly, they are still strongly reflected in Indian popular cinema (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 77). In how far the films *K3G* and *Fire* preserve and continue to depict these traditions will be evaluated in the two parts following this section.

Many of the norms that are associated with traditional Indian society, especially concerning the ideal conduct of women, have their origins in classical Indian texts from the past such as the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* or the *Manusmriti*. This point can be illustrated by two examples: In the *Ramayana*, Rama’s wife Sita is presented as the ideal woman who deeply respects and admires her husband. She is characterised by loyalty and obedience towards her husband. Also the *Manusmriti* includes very strict codes of conduct for women. According to this text, “a female should be subject in childhood to her father, in youth to her husband, and when her husband is dead, to her children” (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 77/78). One can therefore identify three main roles which correspond to Indian women: that of the daughter, of the wife, and that of the mother (Uhl 142). Gokulsing and Dissanayake claim that the influence of such regulations largely has an effect on women in traditional India (*Narrative* 78).

As far as the responsibilities of a woman in the household are concerned, there is a clear distinction between 'inside' the house and 'outside' (E. Dey 145). The outside sphere is subject to men's obligations, whereas inside is the workspace of the women. The man is, as referred to above, traditionally considered as the head of the family who provides his family with the vital necessities. In order to be able to do so, he needs to earn money, which traditionally happens outside the house. The woman, on the other hand, "is the bearer of children and nourisher of all members of the household" (145) and traditionally stays inside the house.

The fact that an Indian woman does not only adopt one role within a family has already become clear. However, one of the most important functions she fulfils is that of the mother.

From a structural perspective, [...] motherhood increases a woman's security in her in-laws' home and represents the beginning of her transformation from the potentially lowly status of new daughter-in-law to the highly respected statuses of mother, mother-in-law, and grandmother. (Seymour 97)

In addition to that, Seymour claims that "[m]otherhood is clearly central to patrifocal family structure and ideology and is highly celebrated in Hindu myth and cosmology" (98). Tapati Gupta argues that "in the light of patriarchal demands and domination, for most women 'motherhood' and the 'status' that comes with it are perhaps the only 'gift' they enjoy from the family legacy" (qtd. in N. Dey 223). The importance for young married women, especially for those of the lower social strata, to become mothers is therefore central in their lives.

As already indicated earlier, none of the conclusions that have been drawn in this chapter can be valid for all regions or throughout all castes that exist within India. However, certain phenomena can be observed that have their roots in the past and are still reflected in today's society. Additionally, as Uberoi points out, "[...] on the whole it appears that the Indian family system continues to be culturally and typologically distinct from the western (Euro-American) system, unexpectedly resilient, and remarkably adaptable to

changing circumstances” (29). Taking this into account, it is now time to look at the ways the films *K3G* and *Fire* deal with the issue of family and how they each construct a version of Indishness of their own.

3.2 *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*

“The family has been a pivotal part of [Indian] artistic heritage and depicted in great detail, right from the Epics – the Ramayana and the Mahabharata” (Gulzar 280). According to Gulzar, this importance of the family for Indian history has led to the fact that “the most popular art form in India today – namely Hindi cinema,” still takes advantage of the subject for its films, although it often portrays the family in a modernised way, as will be pointed out again later. Indian audiences never get tired of soap operas based on the family or of family dramas such as *K3G* (280), as could be observed by the success of the movie in India. The family theme proved to be one of the most powerful issues within Indian film history (288). What Patricia Uberoi states about the film *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun (HAHK)*, can equally be applied to *K3G*: [I]t is quintessentially what is classed in popular parlance as a ‘family’ film – ‘family’ understood in the double sense of (i) *for* a family audience; and (ii) *about* family relationships, inclusive of, but much broader than, the true romance that provides its basic story-line” (140). The fact that this quotation seems to be geared to *K3G*, will become clear in the analysis of the film in this part of this paper.

Once the viewer has read the quote “It’s all about loving your parents” by the producer Yash Johar on the cover of the DVD, it remains beyond doubt that one of the main themes of *K3G* is that of the family and its immense value for all members. Of course, the story of the Raichands is accompanied by not only one love story; however, these romantic stories form part of the subplot, whereas the main storyline centres on family relationships. According to Uberoi, contemporary media conveys a picture of “the Indian family not as it really is, but as it is *imagined to be* [...] and posits the patrilineal joint family as the ideal, ‘traditional’ and culturally authentic form of Indian family life”

(30). It will be established in the following section, what kind(s) of family is/are represented in *K3G*.

Two types of family structures can be identified in *K3G*. On the one hand, there is Anjali Sharma's family, which is composed of her father, who dies in the course of the film, and her sister Pooja, who ends up accompanying her sister and her new husband to London. The Sharmas are a middle class family who live in Chandni Chowk, a neighbourhood in New Delhi, in which, judging from the number of people the family is constantly surrounded by, there is no room for privacy. The part of the family that is related by blood is not complete; however, those members that are missing in order to constitute an extended family, according to the definition provided above, seem to be replaced by friends and neighbours of the family. Sayeeda, for instance, who works as the nanny for the Raichands, who will be analysed later, is referred to by Anjali as 'auntie' and she appears to have taken over the role of the mother for the girls. It is never clearly stated where Sayeeda and her daughter Rukhsar live, however, they give the impression to form an essential part of the 'family'. Considering the fact that *K3G* is not centred on the Sharma family and that the audience does not learn a great deal about them, they will only be dealt with occasionally. This part will primarily deal with the Raichand family, whom an essential part of the filming time is dedicated to.

It is undeniable that the Raichand family belongs to India's upper class. Numerous images of their luxurious mansion in the outskirts of one of India's biggest cities, New Delhi, as well as depictions of Yash's office and the helicopter he takes to get to work, point towards the fact that the protagonists of the film belong to the upper stratum of Indian society. What is interesting to note is that, according to Gulzar, films that portray the "unbelievably super rich" (286), still continue to represent certain aspects, such as the man as the head of the house or the depiction of the obedient woman, in a rather traditional way. She claims that "[o]nly the packaging has become modern – wrapped in foreign locales, clothed in western designer labels and dotted with marvels of technology like e-mail, mobile phones, zany sports cars and

even helicopters!” (285/6) However, it is argued here, that rather than presenting society seemingly modern only on the outside, tradition and modernity co-exist in this film in a similar way as they do in Indian reality. The binary opposition tradition versus modernity comes into play here. The Raichand family exhibits a certain influence from the West, such as the wearing of Gap and Ralph Lauren clothes by Rohan when he was a boy, as well as the driving of expensive European sports cars. Nevertheless, many traditional values, concerning the family but also other conventional aspects of Indian society, are preserved, as will be pointed out in the chapter on Indian traditions.

Although the Raichands are an extremely rich family, which the audience cannot help but notice as their wealth is continually displayed, it is them as a family with their upholding of deep-rooted traditions that are at the centre of the story. As in *HAHK*, “[...] the pleasures of consumption are subtly (or not-so-subtly) linked with the valorization of the family, reinforcing the opinion held by many of [Uberoi’s] informants that affluence is an important enabling factor in harmonious family life” (Uberoi 163). The audience therefore demands to see wealthy and happy families in their favourite films and thinks that this wealth makes it easier to live together as a family peacefully. By presenting the Raichand family as extremely affluent, *K3G* definitely responds to this demand by the audience.

On the one hand, the family theme seems to hold the film together, as it remains dominant throughout the production. On the other hand, this view can be turned around and one can say that the film holds the family together. At the beginning, a harmonious picture of the Raichands is presented. In one of the first scenes, Rohan already points out the importance of the family:

If you want to be someone in life, if you want to achieve something ...
If you want to win, always listen to your heart. And if your heart doesn't
give you any answers ... Close your eyes and think of your parents.
And then you'll cross all the hurdles. All the problems will vanish ...
Victory will be yours. Only yours ... (*K3G* 00:05:09-00:05:33)

This harmonious and perfect image of the Raichand family gets temporarily disrupted by the marriage of Rahul to Anjali, which they do not have his father's blessings for, and the consequent disowning of Rahul by his father. However, it is re-established at the end of the film. The family theme runs through the whole production and is emphasised by a number of technical devices, such as the song "Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham", which translates into "We shall never part, through tears nor through smiles." This song functions as a leitmotif, as it recurs every time the members of the family either are together or think of each other. In addition to that, it is interesting to observe that the camera frequently moves in circles around the different family members, which can be interpreted as a symbol for unity and togetherness. Similar to the recurring circular pattern on the marble floors, within which the characters, especially Yash and Rahul, are frequently arranged when having a conversation, the camera can be taken as a sign of inclusion; a symbol for the fact that a traditional Indian family simply belongs together.

As far as the type of family structure is concerned, Yash and Nandini, played by the famous married couple Amitabh and Jaya Bachchan, are the parents of Rahul (Shah Rukh Khan), who was adopted when he was a child, and Rohan (Hrithik Roshan). According to the definitions of certain family structures provided in the first part of the chapter 'Family', the Raichands, strictly speaking, form a nuclear family, consisting of parents and their unmarried children. However, considering the fact that also the grandmothers (maternal and paternal side) play a crucial part in the film and constantly seem to be present in the house of Yash and Nandini, it is argued here that the way in which the family is presented, resembles more an extended family unit. In fact, it would be difficult to tell that the two grandmothers do not actually live with their children, if Rohan had not mentioned in an e-mail that on his way home from college, that he would go and visit his 'two favourite girlfriends' (K3G 00:07:03), meaning his grandmothers, in Haridwar. As already indicated above, the Raichand family is, according to the definitions, a nuclear family; however, the perception one gets of the film points towards strong family bonds and the fact that the various generations of the Raichand

family spend most of the time together, give the impression that they live under the same roof. The audience perceives the family, including the grandmothers, as a unit throughout the film, although the idyll is temporarily disrupted.

In a certain way, also Rahul and Rohan's nanny Sayeeda seems to be part of the Raichand family. With the words: 'Go Sayeeda. Go with my son. Wherever he goes ... I don't want him to miss the warmth of a mother's affection,' (K3G 01:36:09-01:36:18) Nandini sends her to London with Rahul and Anjali. Only Yash does not perceive it that way, as he is aware of her social status throughout the film.

It was argued above that a traditional joint family is "joint economically, physically, socially, and ritually" (Säävälä 62). In the case of the Raichand family, there are certain economic ties. Yash has inherited the business from his father and in the same way he was planning on handing it over to his oldest son. However, these ties seem to be the only economic ones, as Rahul manages to lead an economically independent life in London and also the two grandmothers live independently. The physical bonds, i.e. the family living together in the same household and eating together, as well as the social bonds do not appear to be very strong, as all members are presented as both, socially and financially independent. However, an extremely intense relationship between Nandini and Rahul can be noticed, as will be elaborated in the subsequent part of this paper. Out of the four areas mentioned by Säävälä, the ritual tie, besides the emotional one, can be said to be the strongest, as the sorrow about the disrupted family seem to be greatest during traditional religious festivities that cannot be celebrated together with the entire family.

We are told about the story of the wealthy Raichand family from the perspective of Yash and Nandini's youngest and second son Rohan. If the audience did not know about the adoption of Rahul, they would not be able to guess it. Nandini seems to love him more than anything, even more than Rohan, as certain remarks by Rahul and his brother seem to suggest (K3G 01:11:11). It is interesting to question the necessity of Rahul's character

having to be an adopted child rather than being related by blood. However, this can be interpreted as another aspect indicating the fact that the overall perception of the family on the viewer is supposed to be that of a united family, no matter whether or not they are related by blood. The bonds and the love between the members are most important. Uberoi, who observes a similar situation in the film *HAAK*, claims that “[a]s a moral institution, the Indian joint family is one in which [...] the biological relation of parent and child are subordinated to the larger interests of the family collectivity” (156). Uberoi emphasises the fact that it is not important whether or not the members of the family are related by blood as long as the individual members keep together and offer each other support, as it would be the case in the ideal Indian family. This support does not seem to be present throughout the film. Nevertheless, the audience can be sure that the breakup of the family will be resolved in the end, as it seems to be characteristic of mainstream Hindi films for all problems to be overcome in the end (Mathur 66).

The way the Raichands as a family are presented on the one hand reflects the conventional assumptions of Indians that the extended family unit is slowly giving way to the nuclear family. However, at the same time it evokes the audience’s fantasies about the inseparable family that manage all ups and downs in life. Family films like *K3G*, in which the lasting reconciliation of the family, as well as the eternal happiness of each of its members are one of the most important aspects, seem to help people to get over their preconception that the number of joint families is declining due to western- or modernisation. The fact that *K3G* is not about a ‘real’ and traditional joint family recedes into the background, as the film shows the importance of the family for each of its members, just like the following quotation suggests: “You got to learn to stick to your own blood or you ain’t going to have any blood to stick to you.” (Faulkner qtd. in Parameswaran 340).

The role of men in traditional, and/or idealised, Indian families has already been discussed above. The theoretical findings about the male responsibilities in a kinship system will now be applied to *K3G* and the

representation of men's roles in the family structures in this film will be evaluated.

It was emphasised earlier that the traditional hierarchical structures of Indian families are based on gender and age, as is also highlighted by Seymour (272). Men are therefore dominant over women and older men over their younger male members. In the Raichand family, there are three male protagonists: Yash and his two sons Rahul and Rohan. All other male characters only play minor parts in the film, which is why they will only be dealt with occasionally in this analysis.

There is no doubt about the fact that Yash, who is the oldest male member of the Raichands – his father has already died – acts as the head and dominates over his relatives. This can, first of all, be observed from the behaviour of his sons towards him because both of them treat him in an obedient, dignified and respectful manner. However, one can notice that this attitude towards their father seems to be even stronger in Rahul, who, as the oldest son – as mentioned above, the fact that he is adopted does not seem to change the situation in any way – appears to be even more dutiful and one gets the impression that his admiration of Yash is tremendous. A key scene in which this can be observed is when Rahul informs his father about his falling in love with Anjali. Yash presents himself devastated about the fact that his son even considered marrying a girl of a lower caste. In an act of apology, Rahul goes down on his knees before his father, asking him for forgiveness: 'I'll do as you say, just as you say' (K3G 01:26:36).

Here, authority and pride come in, which Yash, however, exercised not only on his son but equally on his wife. Yash overrules Nandini's wishes, such as her wanting to join the wedding of Sayeeda's daughter, who is also of a lower caste. With a simple and firm: 'End of discussion, Nandini. We can't go there,' (K3G 01:12:58) he expresses his dominant position and highlights the fact that nobody in his family has the authority to overrule his decisions. A similar situation can be observed when he expels Rahul, as Nandini would never have made such a decision. In situations like those mentioned above, it becomes obvious, once more, that it is the father who acts as the head of

the family and makes the ultimate decision, which must not be questioned by anybody. The claim that was made in the theoretical part above that the leaders of a traditional Indian family are mostly male, therefore also applies for the Raichand family in our film.

Even though Rahul's paternal grandfather has already died, the influence he still exercises on his son must not be forgotten. Yash owns his own business that he once inherited from his father. Whenever Yash is seen in his office, the audience is made aware of the presence and importance of his father, even though he is dead. In this context it can be said that what Sarah Lamb observed during her research in West Bengal, can equally be applied to the representation of fathers and grandfathers in *K3G*. According to her, factors like, "a man's greater chances of having control over property, a living wife, sons, and a lasting place in the family line [...] contributed to [...] perceptions that older men tend to be served and remembered by their sons, both in old age and after death" (*Saris* 80). The imitation by Yash of the way his father is portrayed on the picture is a symbol for an imitation of his (life-)style in reality. Yash's father seems to be constantly present in his son's mind. To the audience, this presence is, on the one hand, indicated by means of the portrait hanging right opposite Yash's desk in the office. Only those scenes that are about decisions of important family traditions are set in Yash's office. This room, however, also seems to be partly his father's office, as he, with his constant presence in the back, plays a crucial role in these scenes. On the other hand, there are Yash's references about how much he admired and respected him as a father (*K3G* 00:23:52). Of course, this strong bond between Yash and his father is emphasised in order to make the contrast between Yash's behaviour towards his father and that of Rahul towards Yash even more obvious. Yash, is presented as loyal and obedient towards his father, whereas Rahul jeopardises the relationship with his father because of his love of and marriage to a girl of a lower caste. This is not only a disruption of family traditions but also of the way society is often portrayed. The tensions between dominance and subordination are challenged here, as the son makes his own decision, against the will of his father.

Rahul's responsibility as the oldest son is to strictly follow family traditions in order to be able to take over his father's business one day. This will therefore only happen if he behaves like a good son. Rohan, on the other hand, is not expected to maintain these traditions as strictly as Rahul, not even after the latter has moved to London. Yash is surprised to hear Rohan telling him about his plans to go to London to study, even though studying in London has been family tradition for a long time (*K3G* 01:43:00). Rohan's fate rather seems to be that of bringing the disrupted family back together in order to re-establish their happiness.

The analysis of men's roles in the film *K3G* already reveals the fact that the roles allocated to men and women by traditional Indian society are also adopted by the film. An analysis of the status of the newly wed woman in the house of the Raichand family cannot be carried out because rather than moving in with Rahul's family after the wedding, the young couple is expelled and goes to London to create a new life for themselves. What can be said, however, is that all Nandini wants for her son is happiness and she therefore does not disagree with Rahul marrying the woman he loves. Inferring from this, as well as from her loving and tender personality, one could suspect that she would have treated her daughter-in-law well and that they would have lived together paying each other mutual respect.

The relationship between Rahul and Anjali is one of love and it seems to be characterised by a certain western- and modernisation, as there are no clear signs of subjugation or domination of either husband or wife. When, for instance, the decision needs to be made whether Pooja's guest could stay with Anjali and Rahul, the latter at first objects, however, his wife and sister-in-law talk at him and try to convince him until he finally agrees. What is, however, noticeable is the fact that it is Rahul who occupies the sphere outside the house and earns money in order to be able to support the family. Anjali, on the other hand, together with their nanny Sayeeda, takes care of their son and is responsible for the domestic chores. Consequently, the responsibilities each of them assumes within the family coincide exactly with those that are associated with men and women in traditional Indian society.

Generally, the character of Nandini in *K3G* is one of the most significant ones for the analysis of the role of women in the film, as she, besides Anjali, is one of the major female characters. The responsibilities Yash and Nandini adopt in- and outside the house are clearly divided. Yash is presented as a successful and rich businessman, driving expensive cars and possessing a number of helicopters. Nandini on the other hand is the bearer and caretaker of their children, whom she has an exceptional bond to, as will be explained later in this chapter.

It was argued above that, according to the *Manusmriti*, “a female should be subject in childhood to her father, in youth to her husband, and when her husband is dead, to her children” (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 77/78). This quote perfectly matches Nandini’s role at the beginning of the film. She is obedient and respectful towards her husband and does not question his decisions. “The *Ramayana* says that a wife’s god is her husband: he is her friend, her teacher.” (77) Nandini abides to this rule for a long time, even though deep down she fundamentally disagrees with her husband’s behaviour and is terribly hurt by his decisions. However, towards the end of the film, she is finally given a voice and expresses her disapproval of her husband’s decisions:

Do you know mother always says that ... A husband is God. No matter what he says ... No matter what he thinks. Its [sic] always right. You brought Rahul home one day ... Right. We gave him lots of love ... Right. He became a part of our family. He became my life... Right ... absolutely right. Then ... one day he left home and went away. Wrong. You let him leave ... Wrong. You separated a mother from her child ... Wrong. Our family shattered to pieces ... Wrong. Then how does a husband become a God? God can’t do any wrong can he? My husband is just a husband ... Just a husband ... Not a God. Not God. (K3G 03:13:02-03:14:53)

At the beginning of this extremely emotional speech, Yash is shocked and gives Nandini a long and disbelieving look. To increase the dramatic effect of the situation, as well as of the fact that the wife openly disapproves of her husband’s decisions, her first words are accompanied by a thunder-like drumbeat, as well as by music that increases the tension. Yash’s disowning of his son tore the family apart and Nandini, who has always been a dutiful

and good wife, has slowly lost respect for her husband and no longer regards him neither as a god, nor as a friend or teacher. She makes clear that as long as Yash does not admit his mistake and forgive his son, this situation will not change.

An important feature of a great number of Hindi films and particularly of this feature is not only a woman's role as a wife and her behaviour towards her husband, but also her function as a mother. As mentioned in the theoretical part of this chapter, a woman receives a higher status within a family once she has given birth, especially to a son (Lamb, *Saris* 75). According to Gokulsing and Dissanayake, this high status of a mother is above all due to the fact that India as a country is personified by the mother goddess, Shakti, which translated means 'strength' (*Narrative* 79). Mathur claims that "[s]he is the benevolent 'shakti' – the actualizer of Gods [sic] latent power and the embodiment of His grace" (67). The term 'mother' in India is therefore highly associated with religion, which is why mothers are repeatedly portrayed praying in their homes by Indian cinema. Additionally, a mother stands for sacrifice and devotion and it is her fate to be there for and serve her family with all her strength during her entire life (Uhl 143). According to Gokulsing and Dissanayake, a frequent image of the mother is therefore that "[s]he is caring, steadfast in her devotion to the family, nurturing and upholding moral values" (*Narrative* 29).

K3G seems to be a prime example for the representation of the mother in a similar way as it was described above. Nandini's main role in the film is that of the caring and self-sacrificing mother, who devotes, as is traditionally requested by society, her entire life to the family. The religious aspect a mother is often associated with in popular Hindi cinema, does not come short in *K3G*. Mathur even suggests that "[t]his silent suffering, stoic species [of the mother] is [...] distressingly deified on celluloid" (67). Nandini can frequently be observed praying in front of their altar at home and finds it especially important to celebrate religious festivities with her family. With regard to practicing religion, Nandini therefore fulfils all expectations.

“The mother-son relationship in Hindi cinema is striking because of the particularly charged intensity with which it is staged.” (Virdi 88) Also Nandini’s relationship to her sons, especially to Rahul, is characterised by strong emotional bonds, which the film does not miss to place great emphasis on and to present to the audience in an especially emotional way. The fact that the bond is particularly strong between Nandini and Rahul can be observed rather at the beginning of the film, when Rahul returns home to celebrate Diwali¹ with his family. The – at that time still joyful – Raichands invited family and friends to celebrate, dance and sing with them. While the guests inside the mansion are dancing and singing, the audience can observe dramatic scenes in which Rahul approaches his home in a helicopter. As soon as the helicopter lands and Rahul puts his feet on the ground, Nandini can feel his presence and arrival. Even though she cannot yet see him, she stops, puts everything down and walks towards the door to welcome her son. Meanwhile, the accompanying music becomes faster until it stops all of a sudden and the audience is left to observe the wind blowing through the curtains. Nandini, for a second, thinks she has been mistaken. However, of course, only seconds later she finds out that she can still rely on her motherly instincts. Rahul, in his haste to see his mother, literally stumbles through the door with the words: ‘Hey, mother ... how do you always sense my presence much before I arrive?’ (K3G 00:15:20-00:19:06)

Similar to all the scenes in the film which deal with the relationship between mother and son, also this particular one is extremely dramatic and musical effects, as well as the characters’ mimicry and actions are meant to evoke the viewer’s emotions. The bond between Nandini and Rahul is always presented with great sensation, whether happy or sad, in order to guarantee entertainment for the audience. According to Benegal, “[c]omplete entertainment is possible only when the nine emotions, love, hate, joy,

¹ Diwali is the festival of lights and legends (Zimmermann 98), which will be introduced in more detail in the section ‘Religious Festivities’ below.

sorrow, pity, disgust, fear, anger, and compassion, are blended expertly in different ways around a predominant emotion” (315). As far as *K3G* is concerned, the director adhered to Benegal’s proposition and the success of the film might, to a great extent, be a result of that.

Many of the images of women presented in this chapter, are, of course, idealised pictures. Even though Nandini, for instance, breaks with her obedience, she remains the faithful, devoted and caring mother she has been right from the beginning. According to Gokulsing and Dissanayake, “the word Shakti is used to describe [a woman’s] role as mother in Indian films” (*Narrative* 79). Nandini is a proof for this, as she maintains all her strength throughout the film and finally even manages to convince her husband of his mistake.

After a detailed analysis of the family and the roles of men and women within this kinship system in the film *K3G*, we will now turn to the production *Fire* by Deepa Mehta.

3.3 *Fire*

As mentioned in the introductory section, the film *Fire* is not a typical mainstream production and does therefore not adhere to many of the conventions observed by popular Hindi cinema. Due to the controversy of the feature within Indian audiences, one would suspect that certain themes were treated in a different way than they are traditionally handled in mainstream Hindi films. It was analysed in the chapter above, how *K3G* dealt with family issues, i.e. what kind of kinship systems are prevalent and which roles and responsibilities men and women adopt within these structures. This section will have a closer look at Deepa Mehta’s *Fire*, at the way the family is represented and which roles men and women adopt in this film, in comparison to *K3G*.

Like in *K3G*, also in Deepa Mehta's production *Fire*, the family is a central aspect. However, rather than taking a super-rich family as the centre, as it is the case with Karan Johar's and many other mainstream Hindi productions, such as for instance *Devdas*, Deepa Mehta's story focuses on a middle-class family. Also the family theme in this film is accompanied by a love story; however, it is a love story of a different kind, namely one between two women. This love relationship between Radha and Sita will not be elaborated any further here, as it will be a central aspect in the chapter 'Love and Sexuality'.

Fire is almost exclusively about one single family and their life in one of New Delhi's suburbs. What is interesting to note right at the beginning of the analysis of this film, is the fact that the viewer does not find out about their family name throughout the whole feature. This stands in stark contrast to *K3G*, where the family name is part of the family's honour and pride and is therefore frequently mentioned. The fact that the family in *Fire* is not that obviously held together by a last name might be an indicator for the fragile relationship between the individual members, which will be referred to various times in this chapter.

Concerning the family structure, the family in *Fire* clearly forms a joint kinship system, according to the definition given above. They consist of the two brothers Ashok and Jatin, their mute mother Biji and their two wives Radha and Sita. In the case of this film, it is even possible to specify the type of family more precisely: The fact that two brothers are living together with their mother, points towards a patrilineal family, in which the wives came to live with their husbands after the wedding, according to tradition. In addition to the members of the family that are related by blood, there is the servant, Mundu, who also lives in the same house. Mundu's character stands in contrast to Sayeeda in *K3G*, who, in a certain way, seems to be considered a substantial part of the family by most members, even though she is, similar to Mundo, a servant of the Raichands. The relationship between Mundu and the family he lives with, however, is characterised by distance and he is clearly

treated as a servant. The fact that they live under the same roof does not alter the situation.

The living together of the family in a joint kinship system is observable in their economic, as well as their physical and social dependence on each other. The whole family, except for Biji, who needs permanent nursing care, works in the family business, which is owned by Ashok. All the money that the shop brings in is collected by Ashok and then distributed between the family members. This is clearly observable when Ashok hands out money to his younger brother Jatin, his wife Radha, and then puts some aside for Swamiji, his guru, who will be granted more attention later in this paper. The physical and social unity of the family is depicted by their co-residence, as all of them live in the apartment above the family business. Secondly, they all share the same workplace, namely Ashok's little restaurant and the video-rental store. Furthermore, all family members care for Biji, however, it is especially Radha who looks after her mother-in-law. The social, as well as the economic security seem to be especially important for the women in the family. It therefore appears that the economic, the physical and the social jointness that a traditional Indian family is characterised by, according to the definition by Säävälä (62), are effectively granted. As far as family or religious rituals, and emotions, as will be demonstrated later, are concerned, the family clearly lacks these bonds. Ashok performs his own rites, independent of the rest of the family or at the expense of his wife, by regularly visiting his guru, as well as by constantly proving his celibacy to himself. Jatin's only ritual seems to be his girlfriend Julie. Radha and Sita together, as a result, start their own rituals. They celebrate religious festivities together and create personal rituals, such as meeting on the roof terrace whenever they need to get away from their husbands or are not feeling well.

It has already been pointed out above that the fact that no family name is ever mentioned is an indicator for the emotional relationship between the family members. The bonds between Radha and Ashok, as well as those between Jatin and Sita, are characterised by coldness and the audience can notice hardly any emotions between the couples. The emotional life of each

of them seems to be isolated from that of the others. Whereas Ashok is utterly loyal to and blindly obeys his guru Swamiji, Jatin shares his love only with his mistress, Julie. As a result of this, Radha and Sita develop an intimate relationship with each other and for quite a long time the social and economic stability the joint family system provides them with almost exclusively seem to be the reasons why they do not abandon their family and break out of traditional structures.

Rather than depicting an idealised image of Radha's family, Deepa Mehta discusses the household in all its facets. None of the family members seem to be happy with their situation but no one changes anything. Their life goes on with each person bearing their individual responsibilities and performing their daily routine in Ashok's family business as well as in the house in the usual way until Sita disrupts the monotony.

In *Fire*, the system of domination and subordination is clearly divided, according to traditional Indian conventions. Ashok, the oldest male member of the family took over his father's position after his death and now acts as the head of the house, as Indian conventions demand him to do (Alexowitz 180). He is the owner of the video-rental and take-out store, administers financial aspects and arranges his brother's marriage, against the will of the groom.

It was indicated in the theoretical part on family structures and the role of men and women in India that tensions between different family members can arise because of prevalent hierarchical structures (Mukherjee 62). In *Fire*, these tensions are especially noticeable between the two brothers Ashok and Jatin, as the latter challenges his brother's decisions several times. Jatin, for instance, secretly buys porn which he rents to his customers without Ashok's permission (*Fire* 00:18:02). Additionally, he does not agree with Ashok giving money to his guru (*Fire* 00:28:44) and also does not approve of his marriage to an Indian girl. However, since Ashok is the head of the house, and probably especially because Jatin is economically dependent on him, he has to give in and accept his brother's decisions.

What is striking in the film is the way in which the sphere inside the house and that outside are divided between men and women. Ashok, Jatin, and partly also Mundu, occupy the public sphere. They rent videos and sell food and are therefore in direct contact with their customers. Radha and Sita, on the other hand, do the cooking and care for Biji, which only happens inside the house, without any contact to other people. Sometimes, when their husbands are not at home, it is Radha, Sita and Mundu alone who take care of the shop. However, the women are never seen dealing with customers. Mundu shifts between both worlds. As a man, he may exit the private sphere; however, he is only allowed to do menial jobs, i.e. whatever Ashok, Jatin, Radha or Sita tell him to do. He is, for instance, frequently asked to serve drinks to their regular customers or to look after Biji. But rather than watching her favourite film *Ramayana* with her, he puts on porn and masturbates in front of her until he is caught by Radha (*Fire* 01:10:15), whom he is secretly in love with.

The interpersonal relationship between the family members, as mentioned above, leaves a lot to be desired as far as warmth and love are considered. Ashok, even though he seems to love his wife and treats her kindly, has sexually distanced himself from Radha because she cannot conceive any children. As a result, Ashok has completely fixated on Swamiji, his guru. He spends every minute of his free time with him, blindly obeys him, has pictures of him hanging on his bedroom wall, and even, as indicated earlier, puts money aside for his operation. Swamiji is also the one to talk Ashok into the practice of celibacy and who convinces him that 'desire is the root of all evil' (*Fire* 00:14:15). Ashok therefore uses Radha as a temptation to test his "freedom from desire" (J. Desai 165) and thus exercises absolute authority over her in that way.

As becomes clear already at the beginning of the film, Jatin is not happy about his arranged marriage with Sita. However, he did not have a choice, as Ashok and Biji made his life 'bloody hell' (*Fire* 00:21:48). Jatin is in love with Julie, a Chinese-Indian girl who, however, did not want to marry him because, according to Jatin, she 'didn't want to get stuck in a joint family and

become a baby-making machine' (*Fire* 00:21:35). Similar to Ashok, who spends most time with Swamiji, Jatin uses every spare minute to go and see Julie. As far as his marriage to Sita is concerned, he only fulfils his duties as a husband because Ashok wants Sita to get pregnant. According to Nanda, Jatin has a "wham, bam, and thank you mam relationship with his new bride" (175). He does not make a secret of his affair and, on the one hand, expects Sita to cook and work for him but on the other he hardly pays any attention to her. It is only when Sita rejects him that he really looks at her for the first time and starts becoming interested in her.

The portrayal of men as "boorish, perverted, or good old-fashioned male chauvinist pigs while the women are [depicted as] downtrodden and victimized" (Unterberger qtd. in Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 117) led to the fact that the film was regarded by many as feminist. However, what Deepa Mehta intended to do was to "hold up the mirror of social change in contemporary India" (117). She therefore wanted to make people aware that certain conventions are changing and that Indian women slowly start acting their own initiative.

The family structure in *Fire* is a conventional patrilineal joint system, as observed above. Hence, both wives came to live with their husbands' family. However, whereas Radha has been married to Ashok and lived with his family for a long time, Sita only just got married to Jatin and we can observe her meeting and moving in with his relatives. According to Mukherjee, newly wed women have the lowest status in a traditional Indian family (67). Nevertheless, Sita only experiences limited power from her mother-in-law, as the latter is mute and partially paralysed. The only way for her to show her disapproval of certain situations is to ring the bell, which she has placed right beside her. Biji indeed makes use of the bell various times. For instance when she catches Sita dressed up in her husband's trousers, a sight that she highly disapproves of. However, even though Biji is the oldest female member of the family, she does not occupy a dominant position among her relatives, due to her handicaps. She seems to respect her daughters-in-law and is highly dependent on them. In contrast to *K3G*, where scenes between

mother and son are depicted in an extremely emotional way, the bonds between mother and son(s) in *Fire* do not appear to be very strong. They live together in the same apartment, but it is Radha, especially, and now increasingly also Sita who take care of her. Biji's inability to speak and to move serves as a way of characterising Indian women's general behaviour towards men. It can be seen as a symbol for their subordination, their devotion and absolute commitment to their families, and, most of all, their duty never to criticise a man's decisions.

Similar to Biji, also Sita's sister-in-law, Radha, does not exercise authority over her new relative although she has been living with the family for a long time. The two women get along well right from the beginning and Radha slowly introduces Sita into the life and routines of the new family. Concerning her new female relatives, Sita can therefore consider herself lucky as she is treated as an equal by Radha and is not terrorised by her mother-in-law.

The analysis of traditional Indian family structures and values showed that it is important for Indian women to give birth to children and to become a mother. This was mentioned in connection with the status of a woman, who achieves a higher position within the family, especially if she bears a son. Only once Sita has born children, i.e. a son, will she be seen as a 'real' woman. Radha, on the other hand, will never be able to achieve this status due to her infertility.

Considering the fact that one cannot notice any hierarchy between Radha and Sita, a child would not change Sita's status within the women of the household. However, Ashok, especially, is waiting for Sita to become pregnant so there would be someone to carry on the – never mentioned – family name. Since Radha is infertile, Sita is seen as the last chance to become a mother and give birth to a son to carry on the name. But Jatin does not care about having children and it is therefore mostly Ashok, who is hoping for Sita to become pregnant. At one point, he even suspects her to be pregnant already because she 'looks happy these days' (*Fire* 01:02:28). Seymour's claim that "[m]otherhood is clearly central to patrifocal family

structure" (98) is thus clearly portrayed in Ashok's character, yet, not in Jatin's.

The fact that the hierarchy between the women is not that strict, however, does not mean that the same is true for the domination and subordination of men and women within the family. Ashok and Jatin clearly dominate over their wives. They do whatever pleases them and leave the family business to meet Swamiji or Julie whenever they want. In addition to that, as indicated above, it is Ashok who administers the family's finances. Radha and Sita, on the other hand, are expected to work in the shop or manage the household whenever their husbands are not at home. It is therefore clear that it is the men who exercise authority over the women in this family, at least at the beginning of the film, as is brought to light later in *Fire*.

The harsh realities of life, perpetrated by the masculine world make [a woman] believe that obedience is security and therefore right. She is terrorized to accede to unreasonable demands in the name of security – financial, emotional and social. She learns to be a good daughter, a good wife, a good mother, a good love interest, but never a good individual at peace with herself, her world of her interests. (Mathur 69)

Mathur fiercely criticises the system of domination and subordination in the different spheres of male and female responsibilities, as well as the picture that Indian cinema frequently portrays of women. Also *Fire* starts out by depicting Radha and Sita as obedient wives. However, it turns out that the film clearly challenges the conventional roles of Indian women. They are portrayed as dutiful, loyal and self-sacrificing at the beginning of the film but are granted more voice as the film progresses.

Deepa Mehta's choice of names for her female characters is no coincidence. It was indicated earlier that certain religious myths and epics such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* exercise considerable influence on most Indians' lives. This influence is also reflected in *Fire*:

[I]n Hindu mythology, the married Radha embodies a sexualized and feminized relationship as a human consort and shakti (female power) of the god Krishna. Radha, although married to someone else, is the primary lover of Krishna and thus symbolizes love, desire, and

sexuality that are not within the heteronormative narrative of the family or marriage. (J. Desai 168)

In the film, Radha is repressed by her husband and she therefore also turns to someone outside her marriage, namely to Sita. In Hindu mythology Radha and Krishna represent “an idealized, transcendent heterosexual union” (Gopinath 294), with no differentiation in hierarchy. According to Uhl, the couple is, above all, associated with enjoyment of the moment (143). In the film, on the other hand, Radha is a woman onto whom chastity is forced by her husband because of her infertility (J. Desai 168). In her relationship to Ashok, her role as a lover seems to be secondary, as she rather acts as an ‘object of temptation’ (*Fire* 00:14:04) on which he can test his self-control. As a result, Radha finds love in someone else. It is not a heterosexual relationship as in Krishna and Radha, yet, there can be identified many similarities between Radha’s and Sita’s relationship and that of Radha and Krishna. As mentioned above, the two women treat each other with respect and there cannot be identified any hierarchical structures. Additionally, Radha and Sita in the film stand for love, desire, and sexuality, which they do not get from their husbands but only find in each other. Furthermore, once they realise their importance for each other, they enjoy each moment they have together until they finally leave their husbands. With this, Deepa Mehta’s choice of the name Radha becomes clear.

Also Sita’s name comes from Hindu mythology. “*Sita*, immortalised in the *Ramayana*, is the ideal woman, the ideal wife; she is steadfastly loyal to her husband and obeys his wishes unquestioningly.” (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 77) She is a “highly esteemed character” (J. Desai 176) who “proves her chastity to her husband, Ram, by immersing herself in fire, and thus represents the ideal of wifely devotion and virtue” (Gopinath 294). The story of Sita and Rama implicitly accompanies the audience throughout the film. First of all, the story of the *Ramayana* plays a crucial role for Biji, whose favourite film is *Ramayan*, which she repeatedly demands to watch. Secondly, the character Sita is frequently called by her name so that the audience never forgets about the role she is expected to occupy within her marriage. Deepa Mehta, however, challenges these expectations and

does not satisfy people's anticipations about Sita's role. In the film, rather than being chaste and loyal, she is the one who eventually starts to disrupt the 'family idyll'. She does not allow for herself and her sister-in-law to suffer and to be repressed and she is the one to convince Radha that they could lead an independent life. Sita does not fulfil the audience's expectations with her husband, whom she slowly starts to ignore, but rather as far as her relationship with Radha is concerned, to whom she is loyal and devoted.

The fact that *Fire* proved highly controversial within Indian audiences was mentioned in the introductory section of this paper. The names of the protagonists, Radha and Sita, were one of the reasons why people wanted to stop cinemas from showing the film. Shiv Sena's leader Bal Thackeray "suggested that if the names in the film were changed from the Hindu names Sita/Nita and Radha to the Muslim names Saira/Najma and Shabana, he would find the film acceptable" (J. Desai 180). This is a proof for the fact that the figures of Sita and Radha are highly idealised in Hindu culture, which is why they wanted to ban the names from a film that, according to their opinion, does not present an Indian way of life. (180)

There is one further female character in the film, which needs to be granted attention, namely Julie, Jatin's lover. There is a tradition in popular Indian cinema to present the protagonists as the pure, obedient and self-sacrificing woman or mother. We were able to observe this in the analysis of *K3G*, but also of *Fire*, even though it is not a mainstream Hindi film. Yet, many popular films feature another female character in one of the minor roles. This character takes on quite an opposite role of that of the traditional wife or mother, namely that of the vamp (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 78) or the whore (Virdi 47):

[T]he vamp [is] normally a decadent modern woman, generally with a name like Rosie or Mary. She flouts tradition and seeks to imitate western women. She drinks, smokes, visits night clubs and is quick to fall in and out of love. She is portrayed as a morally degraded person and has come to be associated with everything that is unwholesome about the west. (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 79)

There cannot be found such a character in *K3G*. In *Fire*, on the other hand, Julie, a Chinese-Indian girl, is intended to partly occupy this role of the vamp. She speaks English with an American accent, rather than with an Indian one and is an independent character that does not live according to Indian traditions. Julie does not want to get married and, as far as her relationships with men are concerned, she could more easily be associated with a western woman, rather than with a traditionally Indian one, as she is described above. Her depiction is not as exaggerated as it would be in a popular Hindi film. Yet, she is clearly a symbol for increasing modernisation and westernisation in India.

This chapter formed the basis of the themes 'Indian Traditions' and 'Love and Sexuality', which are to be explored in the subsequent section. It was important to establish the family structures, as well as the role of men and women in Indian society and in the films in order to be able to understand the value of certain prevalent Indian traditions and conventions. These include the practice of the arranged marriage, the special celebration of certain religious festivities, the passing on of mythological stories, but also the way in which love and sexuality are handled by society and reflected in Indian cinema.

4 Indian Traditions

India is a country that is extremely rich in traditions. Many of these conventions have been and relatively frequently still are handed down from generation to generation. One of these customs has developed into an institution, namely that of marriage. It is common knowledge that the tradition in India of the parents arranging the marriage partner for their children is still rather widespread within India. The origins of marriage in general, as well as of arranged marriage are not known (Raha 23). However, the attitudes Indians adopt towards it, and especially towards arranged marriage, point to the fact that in most cases enormous value is attached to the institution of marriage, as well as to the fact that it should be arranged by the parents of the couple (Seymour xvi, Uberoi 136). The following chapter will examine the role of arranged marriage in Indian society and analyse the way this issue is mirrored and dealt with in the two films *K3G* and *Fire*.

After this evaluation of arranged marriage in India and its reflection in the films, those traditions and rituals that derive from the role religion plays in India will be explored. Indians follow a large variety of religions, with Hinduism being one of the most widespread within the country (Sen qtd. in Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Globalised* 6). Besides Hinduism, also a number of other religions affect society; however, it can be said that Hinduism, due to its vast number of followers, exercises the strongest impact on Indians. It was pointed out earlier that certain epics, especially the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, strongly influence people's lives. Many long-established traditions have their origins in these two epics. Even the film industry extremely frequently falls back upon the themes and topics of the epics and uses them as underlying stories. (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 55) As far as religious festivities are concerned, this thesis will deal with two for the films especially important festivals, namely Diwali and Karva Chauth. They form an essential part of the themes of the films, which is why their function for the plot will be examined.

Even though the characters of the films, especially those in *K3G*, might show a number of 'westernised features' and the influence of modernisation and urbanisation is undeniable, the importance that is given to traditional values in the films is still comparably high. Tradition and modernity can therefore be said to co-exist in Indian society, as was mentioned earlier, rather than replacing one another. The fact that certain conventions and customs still play an important role in an increasingly modernised society is clearly reflected in the two films, as will be pointed out later.

4.1 Arranged Marriage

4.1.1 General Aspects

Marriages in India are usually highly celebrated and the festivities frequently last for days. The way in which they are organised in India, differs significantly from that of many other countries. In India, many families still follow Indian conventions and have the parents find suitable partners and arrange the wedding for their children. (Alexowitz 184) Tenhunen, who conducted studies on marriage in a region near Calcutta, offers a precise definition of arranged marriage: "[M]arriages are called arranged if they refer to marriages involving gift giving from the bride's side to the groom's side and if they are arranged by guardians or in co-operations with the guardians (usually the parents of the couple)." (80) This way of organising a marriage stands in sharp contrast to love marriages, which Mody defines "as those marriages in which the couple fall in love and choose for themselves their own marriage partner" (48). Within many other critics, Mody argues that the "view that such marriages are necessarily illegitimate, unusual and the westernised practice of an urban deracinated elite" (1) is dominant, as will be specified at a later part of this chapter. Before that, however, a fairly detailed analysis of the practice of arranged marriage in India will be carried out.

According to Uberoi, it was generally believed that the system of arranged marriage would slowly decrease due to ongoing western- and modernisation, as well as increased education and industrialisation of the country (Krueger 4). This was meant to happen in a similar way as joint families were supposed to make way for nuclear families (22). It was thought that people would slowly adapt to western conventions, where the prevailing form of marriage is love marriage. In order to accelerate this process, the Hindu Marriage Act, which declared arranged marriage illegal, as well as the Special Marriage Act, that made marriages between different castes and religions possible, were introduced in the 1950s. Nevertheless the system of arranged marriage has proven remarkably resilient and is still the dominant practice (around ninety per cent of all marriages) within the country. (24) Even though it can be hard for young women to leave their own families and live with their new husband's family, whom in many cases they have never met before, women do not necessarily find this type of marriage oppressive. According to Seymour, "Indian women are socialized to expect a dramatic transition at the time of marriage and to assume new responsibilities in their husband's household" (Seymour xvi). They live in a society where this type of marriage is a dominant social practice and they therefore generally do not disapprove of it. Seymour confirms the fact that "[a]rranged marriages are still the accepted practice [...] in most of India" (196) and studies show that 87% in rural areas and 82% in urban areas 'preferred' arranged marriages" (Uberoi 136) to love marriages.

Arranged marriages are commonly seen as an "exchange system" (Seymour xvi), "a union between families" (Uberoi 31), where complex and often large kinship networks are created. As emphasised in the chapter on family structures in India, it is usually the women who marry into their husbands' families and they frequently come to live in a patrilineal joint family. It is in both, in the husband's as well as in the wife's families' interest to preserve or even rise in one's social status by marrying their children into the same or, if possible, even a higher caste (Seymour 287). Isogamy, i.e. the practice to marry a partner within the same caste, or hypergamy, "a woman's marriage

into a family of superior caste status,” (Uberoi 31) are therefore the preferred ways of arranging marriages in India.

According to Seymour, especially in the past, marriages were arranged when the girls were still young children in order to “protect a girl’s family from the potential dishonour that a sexually mature girl could produce if she were to have contact with inappropriate men outside of marriage” (9). Still nowadays this practice is commonly accepted and followed and the ‘purdah’ additionally helps to maintain a girl’s sexual purity. Seymour argues that many families continue to be seriously concerned about preserving a girls’ virginity, as “[a] daughter’s controlled sexuality still symbolizes family honor in India [...]” (287). Uberoi confirms this by stating that girls “are still expected to enter marriage as pure virgins. If once ‘sexualized’ outside the context of legitimate marriage, the girl’s chances of a ‘decent’ marriage are severely impaired (250).

Marriages for daughters are traditionally arranged when the girls are still children. In many cases men are chosen that are older than the girls, in order to assure gender hierarchies, i.e. a man’s authority over his future wife. (Seymour 9) The preservation of a girl’s sexual purity, as well as the prevailing system of authority, which has already been elaborated in the first part of this paper, are the main reasons why girls are ideally

socialized to be obedient, self-sacrificing, and hardworking so that they will adjust well and contribute positively as wives and daughters-in-law in their new households. It is important to emphasize, however, that such qualities do *not* imply passivity; an initially shy, respectful wife and daughter-in-law must one day become a forceful mother, mother-in-law, and grandmother. (9)

As indicated earlier, arranged marriage in India is usually combined with gift giving, i.e. dowry or, however only within certain regions of India, with brideprice. “Dowry refers to gifts of cash and goods given by the bride’s family to the married couple and the groom’s family, while brideprice refers to the gifts from the groom’s family to the bride’s family in consideration of the marriage.” (Uberoi 26) Dowry is the more common practice out of these two. It functions as an indicator for the social status of a family but can get a girl’s

family into serious debts, especially in the case of hypergamy, i.e. a girl's marriage into a higher social stratum. The amount of dowry paid to the husband's family "is not a fixed share of an estate but rather a portion determined by the current demands of the marriage 'market', the relative numbers of sons and daughters in the family, and the bride's looks, education, and other attributes." (26) Most of the money or goods are administered by the husband's family and are, in turn, used for their own daughters' marriages. (26)

Because of the economic burden a girl's marriage places on the family, generally sons are preferred over daughters, whose numbers are, as a result, often restricted "through abortion, infanticide, and neglect" (Seymour 287). In contrast to arranged marriage, which is generally readily accepted, the practice of dowry is usually disapproved of as it imposes a heavy financial burden on many families (288). Nevertheless, rather than decreasing with ongoing modernisation, gift giving as part of the marriage ritual is increasing in contemporary Indian society. In order to ensure a secure and good future for their daughters in their new families' lives, more and more families are burdened with substantial debts, which, in many cases, they have to pay off for the rest of their lives (288).

It was emphasised at the beginning of this chapter that arranged marriage in India is seen in opposition to love marriage. Arranged marriage is traditionally described in positive terms: It is "a religious ritual, sanctified and validated by kin and community and blessed by God with the gift of love from that day onwards" (Mody 8). "Love-marriages, on the other hand, are widely viewed as a most unholy union. They challenge 'natural' [...] caste hierarchy and social considerations of class, status and standing [...] and are considered to be anti-social and [...] bad." (Mody 8) Romantic love and love marriages are "mostly regarded as a fickle basis for marriage" (Uberoi 218) and as problematic concerning the stability of a matrimony (241). As mentioned earlier, studies show that a great majority of young people accepts and even desires (Seymour 213) arranged marriage. One of the young women of Seymour's research project in Bhubaneswar "did not want to assume the

responsibility of selecting her own husband. She was confident that her parents would make a good choice of marriage partner for her.” (213) The experience of life of the woman’s parents are therefore highly respected and trusted. Romantic desires of young people, on the other hand, necessarily recede into the background. Marriage, rather than being “a means of individual self-fulfilment, contracted on the basis of the romantic/sexual attraction of a boy and a girl, [...] is, first and foremost, a union between families” (Uberoi 31).

Love marriages, even though their number might be slowly increasing in modern Indian society, still belong to the minority of all matrimonies that are consummated. In certain cases a love marriage might be preferred as “the immediate families are spared the anxieties of matchmaking and the not inconsiderable burden of dowry and of wedding entertainment” (Uberoi 218). Nevertheless, arranged marriage is generally accepted and forms the majority of marriages in India.

4.1.2 *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*

The institution of marriage, in close connection to the value of the family, forms a crucial part of the mainstream Hindi film *K3G*. It is eventually this institution with the different attitudes of certain members of the Raichand family towards the way in which it is supposed to be organised, that finally leads to the disruption of the family in *K3G*. Very early in the film, the director stresses the importance of arranged marriage for Indian society. The viewer can observe Anjali’s friend Rukhsar getting acquainted with her future husband’s family, without ever having met her husband before. Mody argues that “[l]ove between husband and wife is expected to grow as the relationship develops, and it is predicated on the notion of devotion, both to God and to each other” (8). Thus, it is generally the opinion that love develops slowly after marriage, a view that sharply contrasts with western society where traditionally love precedes marriage.

At the beginning of the film, Yash's mother confirms the value of arranged marriage with the words: 'It's a great tradition. The elders of the house choose their daughter-in-law.' (*K3G* 00:31:45-00:31:49) Considering the authority Yash exercises over his family, as was elaborated in the chapter on the family structure in *K3G*, it is hardly surprising that he considers himself to be the one to arrange the marriage for his oldest son Rahul. Yash adheres to the well- and long-established Indian convention of arranged marriage and already has a girl in mind for his son. This girl is Naina, the daughter of his business partner, whom Yash has known for a long time and who he seems to be getting along with very well. Naina's family and the Raichands appear to be equally wealthy and Yash can be sure that she comes from a good family. Also Rahul has known Naina and her family for almost his entire life. Nevertheless, Yash's matchmaking plans do not turn out the way he expects them to.

In contrast to the way arranged marriages are often handled in India, the liaison between Rahul and Naina was not established before their puberty, i.e. when they were still young children. Rather, we can observe how Yash discusses the issue with his business partner, when their son and daughter are already well in their twenties. The audience does not find out in the course of the film, whether Rahul or Naina have had any other relationships before and whether especially Naina has preserved her sexual purity. However, the fact that there are no hints towards an involvement with anybody else of either of the two characters suggests that this was not the case. According to tradition, also the audience is therefore left with the impression that such behaviour would socially be unacceptable.

It was indicated above, that the age difference between the couple for which a marriage is arranged is often considerable. This age difference, of course with the man being the older one, is supposed to maintain prevailing systems of authority (Seymour 9). In the case of *K3G*, the audience does not find out how old the characters are supposed to be, however, Rahul and Naina, seem to be of about the same age. Despite that, the viewer gets the impression of Naina being an obedient and good young woman who would not question her

husband's decisions or challenge his authority, regardless of his age. Thus, the fact that there is no obvious age difference between the two young people is not crucial because traditional conventions concerning authority are very much respected.

Whether or not any gift giving from the side of Naina's family was involved in the arrangement procedures of the marriage does not become clear to the viewer. The definition of arranged marriage by Tenhunen provided above not only requires a marriage to be arranged by the young people's parents or relatives but also assumes the paying of dowry (80). The marriage was obviously supposed to be arranged by Rahul's and Naina's fathers. Nevertheless, the definition cannot clearly be applied in this case as the viewer does not know whether or not the payment of dowry would have been involved, had the wedding in fact taken place.

As was already touched on earlier, the change of tradition within Indian society as a result of the increasing western influence did not happen in the same extent as it was generally expected (Uberoi 24). This is true regarding the joint family system but also as far as the tradition of arranged marriages is concerned. In the film, a certain tendency towards the adoption of western conventions is noticeable in Rahul, especially as regards his attitudes towards, his treatment of women as well as his opinion on marriage. Partly we can also notice an adaptation to western customs in Yash, who, for instance, drives expensive European cars and wears suits to work, rather than Indian clothing, and enjoys dancing with half-naked girls at parties. However, especially in the character of Yash, we can also observe the fact that the custom of arranging one's children's marriages is remarkably resilient (Uberoi 24) within Indian society. This implies that although the adoption of some western customs is almost inevitable, certain distinct and long-established Indian traditions can be preserved at the same time.

When telling his father about the woman he loves, Rahul does not expect Yash to disapprove of the marriage. Thus, Rahul is far from accepting arranged marriage as the norm, as he himself is characterised by a rather progressive attitude towards the issue, which might partly derive from his

studying in London. Similarly, the fact that Anjali's lower class status could present a problem for his father did not even enter Rahul's mind. Yash's opinion on marriage, on the other hand, closely coincides with what Uberoi states about marriage, namely that it "should properly be a union of status equals within an endogamous community (the 'caste') whose existence and reproduction are dependent on the observance of this principle" (31). Clearly, Yash does not approve of hypergamy, as the following quote suggests:

Raichand. The name and the respect has [sic] been given to us by our ancestors. To honour and respect them is our foremost duty. And I'll never tolerate an ordinary girl becoming a hurdle in performing that duty. You didn't even think once about the background of the girl, her status, her breeding. You didn't give a thought to whether the girl will be able to understand our culture ... our traditions. Will the girl ever understand our rituals ... our rites? Will the girl understand our ethics and principles? Will she adhere to the values of our family? Will she? How did you even love to think that she can be a part of our family? That she can be a part of my family. How did you think? (K3G 01:22:25-01:23:48)

It becomes clear as the film develops that Yash is not generally against love marriage because he thought that Rahul was actually in love with Naina. Rather, in his opinion, "[...] love marriage becomes viable and desirable only to the extent that it is simultaneously 'arranged love-marriage'" (Uberoi 261-2). Hence, it seems that Yash does not find Rahul's love marriage problematic because of its possibly threatened stability but rather because of Anjali belonging to a lower caste. As far as Yash is concerned, this marriage "challenge[s] 'natural [...] caste hierarchy and social considerations of class, status and standing [...] and [is] considered to be anti-social and [...] bad" (Mody 8), as was suggested earlier. Through the marriage with Naina, Rahul's father means to connect his family with another rich family of the same caste, and therefore marriage seen as an 'exchange system', as Seymour (xvi) calls it. As a result, Rahul's father was expecting the creation of a complex extended kinship network.

Yash is clearly the head of the family who is responsible for all major decisions. Nevertheless, or maybe even because of that, it is important to

emphasise Nandini's view on Rahul's marriage. The following conversation between them makes her opinion on it clear:

Nandini: "These days everything has changed."
 Yash: "Nothing has changed, Nandini."
 Nandini: "But these days children make their choices themselves."
 Yash: "Nothing has changed, Nandini."
 Nandini: "What I meant was ..."
 Yash: "Nothing has changed, Nandini."
 Nandini: "But ... "
 Yash: "I said it ... didn't I? That's it!" (K3G 00:31:57-00:32:12)

Generally, it can be said that Nandini is a person who strictly adheres to long-established conventions. She is frequently portrayed praying and acts as the ideal wife. In this case, however, she clearly disagrees with her husband's decision and takes a rather progressive point of view on the issue. As a loving mother, all Nandini wants is for her son to be happy and to approve of the girl whom he is going to get married to one day. Even Yash's mother, who at the beginning of the film emphasises the way marriages are traditionally organised, later wants to know what Rahul thinks of Yash's plans to marry him to Naina. As it turns out, however, Rahul does not let himself be forced into a marriage that he does not approve of.

According to Mody,

popular Hindi films do much to traverse an imaginative terrain that many viewers find entertaining, exciting and challenging. By stomping away in this celluloid dreamscape, popular films greatly enlarge the realm of the possible, and since love-marriages are largely characterised as inhabiting precisely this world of possibility and personal fulfillment, it is difficult to ignore the influence of Hindi movies upon the dreams and aspirations of ordinary people. (8-9)

Many popular Hindi films, and *K3G* is certainly one of them, thus challenge Indian traditions and clearly portray influences from the West. Nevertheless, many conventions, such as the joint family or the practice of the arranged marriage, are deeply rooted in Indian society and will probably remain so in the near future.

4.1.3 *Fire*

The fact that the traditional and distinct way of marrying and of organising marriages in India is also represented in Deepa Mehta's production, is a sign for the cultural value it is given by Indian society. Again, however, it needs to be emphasised that the director, Deepa Mehta, challenges the picture of and attitudes towards marriage. She represents the issue in a different way than it is frequently depicted by popular Hindi cinema. Mainly, this part of the thesis will deal with the marriage between Jatin and Sita, as this marriage was clearly an arranged one. But also Ashok's marriage to Radha will be touched on several times in the course of this chapter.

Ironically, Jatin and Sita are introduced into the film *Fire* in a scene that takes place in Agra, at the famous Taj Mahal, where they spend their honeymoon. According to the tour guide who shows them around, the Taj Mahal is a "symbol of [Shah Jahan's and his wife Mumtaz Mahal's] *eternal love* [emphasis added]" (*Fire* 00:02.47). However, later on the guide reveals that the architect of the building, as a result of Shah Jahan cutting off the architect's hands so he would not be able to build another Taj Mahal, drilled a hole in the roof of the building, which left the symbol of eternal love futile (*Fire* 00:03:42-00:04:03). Thus, for a moment, the director of the film creates the impression that the newly wed couple will find eternal love in each other. The anecdote about the hole in the roof of the building, however, is already an eminently valuable indicator for later incidences.

Jatin's and Sita's marriage is arranged by Jatin's older brother Ashok. Similar to *K3G*, also in this film it is the elders, namely the oldest male and the oldest female member of the family, Ashok and Biji, who make this decision. No gift giving from either side is ever mentioned, which is why it is not possible, similar to *K3G*, to directly apply the definition of arranged marriage provided above. However, it remains clear that Jatin does not approve of this marriage as he is deeply in love with his Chinese-Indian girlfriend Julie. As indicated earlier, Ashok would have accepted Jatin's marriage to a girl with Chinese-Indian roots, but Julie had no desire to marry him. In order to keep their

relationship exciting, she prefers not to get married. With a strong American accent she asks Jatin: 'Do you know what the word 'hunt' means? It's my favourite word. It means 'to pursue', 'to chase for a game or a kill'. Jatin, when we stop hunting, all excitement fizzles out. You don't want that to happen to us, do you?' (*Fire* 00:12:14-00:12:38) What is interesting to highlight here is that Ashok would not only have agreed to a love marriage but additionally to Jatin marrying the offspring of an immigrant rather than a truly Indian girl. This is a fairly progressive attitude for a man who otherwise so strictly adheres to Indian traditions and customs.

In the case of *Fire*, the marriages that are arranged within the family do not serve as exchange systems, in which kinship relations are extended. This must be seen in contrast to the marriage between Rahul and Naina in *K3G*, with which Yash clearly intended to extend his kinship network. The family in *Fire* seems to have hardly any contact with Radha's or Sita's relatives. Additionally, the marriages were not obviously arranged so the family would rise in status – at least the audience does not get to observe anything that would point towards this fact. It can therefore be said that for the director a rise in status of the family was not one of the major concerns.

Jatin eventually agrees to his marriage to Sita because Ashok and his mother do not stop talking at him to finally get married and have children who carry on the family name. However, this decision is not necessarily made by choice but rather his family, as well as prevailing social traditions, at some point makes him give in. Whether or not Ashok's marriage to Radha was arranged does not become clear in the film. On the one hand, one would assume that he followed the tradition of marrying the woman the elders of the house chose for him. This assumption results from Ashok's general adherence to conventions – as the oldest male in the household he takes up the traditional role of the head and assumes all family responsibilities, he fulfils the typically male chores outside the house and chooses to live in a joint family system. On the other hand, one cannot be sure in assuming that, as his approval of Jatin's marriage to Julie – which would have been an unconventional love

marriage to a woman with Chinese roots – does not necessarily suit the overall picture the audience gets of Ashok either.

Besides the fact that the elders arrange the marriage for the younger members of the family, a further similarity between *K3G* and *Fire* can be revealed. It was claimed in the theoretical part on arranged marriages that traditionally marriage partners are chosen when the future bride and groom have not yet reached puberty, in order to preserve – especially the girl's – sexual purity (Seymour 287). The marriages in both films are arranged when the couples are already past their puberty. However, in *K3G* it seems that neither Rahul nor Naina have had any relationships before and this is where the difference between the two films lies. Sita in *Fire*, on the other hand, is clearly not the first girl Jatin has ever had a sexual relationship with. Whereas Jatin as a man thus obviously does not need to enter a marriage being sexually pure, Sita, in contrast, is expected to be a virgin. This becomes clear when they first sleep together and Jatin naturally explains the following to her: 'Listen, Sita. If you bleed ... Don't worry. It happens the first time.' (*Fire* 00:24:29) He tells her about that, expecting that she does not know and therefore expecting that she is still a virgin; an expectation which, of course, she does not disappoint.

Much the same as in *K3G*, also the director of *Fire* does not reveal the age of the film's character. However, whereas Sita and Jatin seem to be rather close in age, Ashok appears to be older than Radha. Of Radha and Sita, it is the former who is obviously more obedient towards her husband and who fulfils all his orders and wishes without objecting. Before Sita marries into the family, Radha puts up with all the oppression she suffers from her husband's side. She represents the ideal self-sacrificing and devoted wife. In Sita, on the other hand, one can notice a certain rebellious nature. She does not allow her new husband to get herself down and manages to cheer Radha up and to convince her that obedience is not always the best way to behave.

At the beginning of her marriage, Sita still seems to believe in arranged marriage and does not show any objection against it. She tries to get to know her new husband Jatin, is obedient towards him and devotedly waits for him

to come home in the evening. Seymour's statement that "Indian women are socialized to expect a dramatic transition at the time of marriage and to assume new responsibilities in their husband's household" (xvi), therefore clearly applies to Sita at the beginning of the film. However, even though she starts off as the ideal wife, she expects her husband to show respect towards her. As soon as she becomes aware that Jatin has a lover, her behaviour starts to change. Sita no longer admires her husband but begins to ignore him.

As far as the opinion on arranged marriage of the female protagonists is concerned, it is difficult to analyse their attitude towards the issue. First of all, the audience cannot be absolutely certain about Radha's marriage having been arranged. Secondly, the women never openly express their view on it. Even though they both make bad experiences and suffer in their marriages, it cannot be claimed that Radha and Sita clearly object to it or find it oppressive. It rather seems that they accept their fate and make the most of the situation without publicly condemning this powerful tradition.

Being one of the major themes of both films, the system of arranged marriage and the role this institution plays in the two films was explained and analysed in detail in this chapter. In connection with long-established Indian traditions, however, also the role of religion must not be underestimated. Religion profoundly influences Indians in their beliefs, their behaviour and in the establishments of rituals and customs, as will be closely examined in the following chapter.

4.2 The Role of Religion

The vast majority of Indians may be Hindus, but we have more than a hundred million Muslims (India has the third largest Muslim population in the world), we have more Sikhs than any other country, more Jains too, more Parsees as well; India has had Christians for over fifteen hundred years (much longer than Britain has had any) and while the number of Indian Buddhists today may be small, ours is the birthplace of Buddhism. (Sen qtd. in Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Globalised* 6)

There are probably only very few statements that can express India's religious diversity and plurality better than this quote provided by Sen. Accordingly, also religious celebrations, especially Hindu festivities and rites, form a crucial part of the religious as well as social life of most Indians and are additionally faithfully reflected in the country's cinema. According to Gokulsing and Dissanayake, "D.J. Phalke, the originator of Indian cinema, based his first feature film, *Raja Harischandra*, on a Hindu religious story, after he saw a film about the life of Christ." (*Narrative* 55) This idea of taking religious themes as the foundation for filmic productions was carried on by subsequent filmmakers and continues until today. (55)

A reference was made earlier towards the importance of the mythological stories *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* for Indian society and film. These religious epics and the ways in which they are incorporated into the productions *K3G* and *Fire* will be examined in the following chapter. After that, emphasis is laid on the two major religious ceremonies and rites Diwali and Karva Chauth, which play an important role in the two films. Of course, the festivities and rituals that are dealt with in this thesis are not all-encompassing. Rather, only those will be examined that constitute a large part of the films *K3G* and *Fire* and that are themes that are of considerable importance in the two productions.

4.2.1 Mythological Stories: *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*

In the chapter on the role of women in Indian society and their representation in films, the influence of national religious epics on the development of hierarchical structures and on the image of women in India was pointed out. There are two types of Hindu religious texts: the *shrutis* and the *smritis*. The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* form part of the latter, which are considered to have been most influential in the development of many of India's social and moral traditions. (Alexowitz 24-5) In the course of history, these texts have developed into myths and they are still nowadays very frequently

quoted and recited not only in Indian theatres, films and other media, but also in everyday life (Mody 23).

In contrast to many other religions which have one single holy book they can fall back on and according to which certain moral rules are established, Hinduism does not have only one such text. Some of the oldest scriptures of Hinduism that are still highly valued today are the Vedas, which go back three thousand years before Christ. (Uhl 136) The Vedas belong to the *shrutis*, which are said to be the words of the gods. In addition to the *shrutis*, however, there is the category of the *smritis*, which are assumed to have been written by Brahmins. (Alexowitz 24) The epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, which are *smriti* texts, are often considered as even more influential than the Vedas, as far as the establishment of traditions and customs is concerned. (Uhl 136) These two mythologicals are going to be explained, together with their realisation in the two films *K3G* and *Fire*, in the following parts of this thesis. First of all, the focus will be on an examination of the two spiritual scripts, and consequently on an analysis of the two films and the influence the epics exercised on them.

What needs to be highlighted before introducing the epics, however, is the fact that for a long time both of these texts were primarily transmitted orally all over the South Asian continent. This means that a large number of versions of both scripts exist, as Clothey highlights: “The stor[ies] [were] fluid; in each telling or dramatization different nuances would be highlighted, depending on context and dramatic troupe.” (69) Alexowitz confirms this diversity of the texts and claims that there exist about 1300 versions of the *Mahabharata* (25). A similar number can probably be said to exist of the epic *Ramayana*.

According to Uhl, the *Mahabharata* was written between 400 B.C. and 400 A.D. (136), however, these dates vary considerably among scholars, as Alexowitz, for instance, traces the text back to even 2000 B.C. With 110 000 couplets it is not only the most extensive Hindu epic but also the longest epic worldwide. It was written in Sanskrit and is said by some to have been composed by Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa. According to legend, he was

communicated the story by the elephant-god Ganesh. (25) Other sources, however, claim that it was originally “songs sung by bards in praise [...] of their noble patrons” (Clothey 70). The exact origins of the text are thus difficult to determine after such a long history. Over the decades and centuries, the text, which was initially only comparably short, was extended and the last elements are said to have been added around 500 A.D. (Alexowitz 25).

The *Mahabharata* is a text which tells the story of two related families, the Pandavas and the Kauravas. They are cousins but fight against each other for the rule of the kingdom. The actual battle between the two enemies, which marks the climax of the story, only takes up about a quarter of the entire epic. According to Gokulsing and Dissanayake, the rest is “devoted to Indian philosophical, metaphysical, spiritual and ethical thinking” (*Narrative* 43). The *Mahabharata* is therefore primarily about the transmission of the binary opposition ‘good versus evil’ and about the protection of traditional morality. O’Flaherty confirms this by stating that “it is to mythology that we should turn if we are to obtain a clearer and more representative picture of the nature and significance of evil in Indian culture and imagination” (qtd. in Dissanayake 189).

Gokulsing and Dissanayake point out that

[t]he *Mahabharata* embodies the Hindu understanding of the concept of *dharma*. This is what sustains world order. From the *Mahabharata* people learn the rules and the codes of ideal conduct laid down for everybody. It is an encyclopaedia of Indian culture and has been described as the National Epic of India (*Narrative* 43).

The concept of *dharma* in Hinduism stands for “a ‘way of life,’ the fulfilling of social, legal, and ritual obligations in a way that does not disrupt [cosmic] balance. [It is] a way of being in the world.” (Clothey 11) The *Mahabharata* thus implicitly sets the rules for one’s ideal conduct and determines what is right and what is wrong. Thus, it is considered to be a crucial document for people’s standard of conduct, a fact that can be further emphasised by a common Indian proverb. This proverb clearly supports the statement about

the importance of the *Mahabharata* for society and the fact that it transmits an important social message: “[A]lles, was nicht in Indien zu finden ist, das wird auch nicht im Mahabharata zu finden sein.”² (Alexowitz 25)

Besides being about the protection of the public moral, also love stories and stories about hatred and intrigues are incorporated into the text. Alexowitz claims that the fact that the *Mahabharata* does not only consist of one narrative strand but is characterised by numerous subplots is the reason why it proved highly useful as the basis for many mainstream Hindi films. Within these subplots of the epic, the love stories and intrigues are deployed – a narrative technique that was readily taken over by mainstream Hindi cinema. (Alexowitz 27). The fact that the narrative structures of mainstream Indian films “with endless digressions, detours, plots within plots, remain unmistakably Indian” (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 19), will be emphasised after an introduction into the *Ramayana*.

The *Ramayana* is the second important Hindu epic that has, similar to the *Mahabharata*, profoundly shaped people’s perceptions and ways of life in India. Alexowitz traces the origins back to 5000 B.C. and notes that it might possibly have been written by the sage Valmiki, who lived in Northern India at that time. Again, however, the origins go far back in history and it proves difficult to reliably trace the exact and true development of the epic. What is certain, however, is that in comparison to the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* is comparably short, as it only consists of 24 000 verses. (27)

Generally said, the *Ramayana* “celebrates the life and exploits of Rama” (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 43). Similar to the *Mahabharata*, also this text deals with the conflicts between gods and demons, and therefore also with the opposition of good and evil. In the story, Prince Rama is sent into exile for fourteen years by his step-mother Kaikeji, who wants her own son to become the successor of the throne. Prince Rama takes his wife Sita

² Everything that one does not find in India, one will not be able to find in the *Mahabharata* either.

with him, who, however, is kidnapped one day by Ravana of Lanka, the king of the demons. (43) Rama, who is seen as the embodiment of the god Vishnu and who is supposed to overthrow the demon-king, eventually succeeds in liberating his wife in Sri Lanka and also in winning back his father's kingdom. It will be mentioned again later, in connection with Diwali, the festival of lights, on their way back from Sri Lanka the lights were supposed to help them find their way home. However, the story does not end once they get back to India. As a result of Sita having been kidnapped by a man, Rama starts doubting her innocence and no longer trusts her. In order to proof her fidelity, she undergoes an acid test. Fire-god Agni, however, refuses to burn her because she is innocent. Even though the test therefore proofs her absolute fidelity to her husband, Rama remains suspicious and finally sends her away; an act that he comes to regret deeply later. Sita, being the daughter of Mother Earth (Alexowitz 28), "[e]ventually [...] return[s] to the earth and resume[s] her rightful place as a goddess" (Clothey 70).

As a result of this legend, Rama is regarded as the ideal and dutiful son (Alexowitz 28), having been "faithful to his word [...] and to his duty" (Clothey 70). Sita, on the other hand, as pointed out earlier, represents the ideal and faithful wife, whom Hindu women should take as an example and try to aspire to (Alexowitz 28).

After a definition and exploration of the two most important Hindu epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, these religious texts with their underlying moral concepts and their influence on Indian cinema in general and on the two films *K3G* and *Fire* in particular will be examined in the following part of the paper.

It was emphasised earlier that the central moral notions of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are clearly reflected in many long-established rules of conduct and customs of Indian society (Alexowitz 25). For a long time, the texts have been subjects of oral transmittance. Their themes have extremely frequently been taken as subjects for plays in theatres and of other dramatisations. As a result of the immense value that is attached to the epics, also the Indian film industry saw its chances and again picked up the

epics' most valuable themes and ideologies. Benegal points out that "[t]he subject of early Indian film consisted largely of traditionally told mythological stories and fables. The characterizations were inevitably based on archetypes of good and evil. These narratives projected traditional values – the inviolability of the family." (315)

The Indian family system with its strength and resilience as well as with its reflection in cinema has already been extensively dealt with earlier in this paper. Nevertheless, one further note on the institution needs to be made in this context: To a large part it is due to the two epics that the family enjoys such a privileged status in Indian society in general and in the individuals' minds (Gulzar 280). The value it is given is further reflected in people's everyday lives. It is an issue they are confronted with daily, which is why they can identify with the theme when they watch it on screen. A result of that is that most Indians even demand to see it on screen, as a film that does not highlight the importance of the family does not clearly reflect those social issues that are considered most precious by Indian society. As a logical result, directors of mainstream Hindi films, who aim at addressing a large audience, take advantage of this interest. Especially the 1990s, after having experienced a period of action films, returned to "the portrayal of the family" (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 4).

In close connection with the family is the issue of emotions. According to Rajabali, Indian myths are filled with emotions: "Take the *Mahabharat* and you'll see what I mean," he argues. "Every situation has feelings – dilemmas, other kinds of conflicts, confrontations, sacrifices, moral issues coming up all the time." (qtd. in Ganti, *Heart* 292) This quote can be equally applied to mainstream Indian cinema, as Ganti further confirms:

For Hindi filmmakers, emotions are not about individuals but about their relationships with others. Rather than referring to internal states, filmmakers are referring to social life in their discussions about emotion. Therefore, 'adding emotions' to a films involves adding family members and placing characters in a web of social relations of which kin are the most significant and common in Hindi films. (Ganti, *Guidebook* 77)

Again, the relation between emotions and the family become clear. Ganti claims that “[a]dding emotions is also about making narratives more moral because being connected to others means that one’s actions have consequences greater than oneself” (292). One result of the tradition of taking epics such as the *Mahabharata* as the basis for films is therefore the fact that those Hindi films that convey and strengthen certain standards of morality are emotional in a similar way as the epics are. With this combination of family and emotions, moral issues are evoked and entertainment, which is a crucial issue for the audience and consequently also for directors, is created. Benegal discusses the notion of popular entertainment that films provide and claims that entertainment is “a combination of the essence of the nine basic emotions. Complete entertainment is possible only when the nine emotions, love, hate, joy, sorrow, pity, disgust, fear, anger, and compassion, are blended expertly in different ways around a predominant emotion.” (315)

The moral opposition good versus evil that is created by the myths and their reflections in film, will be evaluated further below. For now, it can be said that the country’s cinema, as a medium that has an extremely strong impact on the population, has made frequent use of these concepts since the beginnings of film in India. It has adopted some of the epics’ themes, its narrative structure and its ideology. With the help of these features, Indian cinema has developed its very own identity, which is fundamentally distinct from most other national cinemas. (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 19)

Being a production that is characterised by a number of elements that are frequently claimed to be typical for Bollywood films, also *K3G* can be said to have adopted certain features of the epics. The main plot of the film evolves around the importance of the family. However, similar to the epics, also the two love stories of Rahul and Anjali and of Rohan and Pooja are effectively incorporated into the story. Additionally, *K3G* is filled with a unique blend of emotions which can change from one moment to the other. The characters frequently burst into tears and interestingly this is not only true for the female

characters of the film. Especially the scenes in which Rahul tells his father about being in love with Anjali, or after his marriage, when Rahul informs his family about his decision, are all charged with emotions. But also the relationship between mother and son is presented in an extremely poignant way. The songs that are played in the background in such key scenes provide a powerful reinforcement and help making the audience feel with the characters, engage in deep sentiments and thus creating entertainment.

One of the most important moral messages that the film *K3G* aims to transmit to the audience is the immense value of the family. As emphasised earlier, being what is most important in life. The characters of the film all suffer from the break-up of their family and in the end learn from their mistakes. They learn to respect each other again. Another moral that is clearly conveyed in the film is that of doing the right thing. By marrying Anjali Rahul thinks that he is doing the right thing. Also Yash, who disowned his son as a result, thinks that he is acting in the correct way, as sons need to respect their fathers' decisions. And finally, there is Nandini who keeps quiet until the very end, without ever objecting to her husband's actions, even though she is bitterly hurt. All three of them therefore make their decisions without doubting their rightness.

In *Fire*, the epics play a slightly different role and especially the *Ramayana* is incorporated into the story in a more explicit way. First of all, one of the female protagonists is named after Rama's wife. In the epic, as pointed out above, Sita is "is the ideal woman, the ideal wife; she is steadfastly loyal to her husband and obeys his wishes unquestioningly." (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 77). In the film, on the other hand, Sita does not necessarily embody the role the goddess occupies in the epic. Already on the first day at the house of her new family, the director provides an insight into the character's rebellious nature. Mehta has Sita turn on loud music, dance to it and pretend to be smoking a cigarette – and all this while being dressed up in the clothes of her husband. Radha and Biji are the first ones to be confronted with this impression of the young woman who seems to be everything else but chaste. At the beginning of her marriage, Sita tries hard

to be a good wife and to do what is expected of her. She carefully carries out domestic work, takes care of Biji and patiently waits for Jatin to come home in the evenings. When she realises, however, that Jatin is not fulfilling his duty as a husband, also Sita's behaviour starts to change. It is only with her arrival that also Radha, who so far has embodied the ideal wife, starts to break with certain traditions and to disobey some of her husband's commands. Sita, rather than remaining loyal to her husband, chooses not to let him ruin her life. Slowly, Radha and Sita come closer to another, develop a homosexual relationship and replace their husbands by each other.

In addition to naming one of the characters after the goddess Sita, the director also created a number of intertextual references in the film. When Mundu takes care of Biji, he is supposed go upstairs to watch her favourite film, the *Ramayan*, with her. However, he takes advantage of the time he can spend alone in the apartment, and masturbates to porn, which he has secretly borrowed from Ashok's video shop. He is almost caught by Sita, but manages to change the channel back to the *Ramayan* just in time. Mundu pretends to have been watching the scene of the film together with Biji, in which Sita is accused by God Ram to be an impure woman (*Fire* 00:17:15) – a reference towards future happenings of Sita's character in Deepa Mehta's film.

This exact same scene is again mentioned later in the film. One evening, Ashok and Swamiji attend one of the many theatrical performances of the story of Rama and his wife Sita. Both of them are visibly enjoying the show and show sympathy for the character of Rama, rather than for Sita who is wrongly sent into exile by her husband. (*Fire* 01:01:02) For them, it is therefore Sita's own fault that she is sent away and, according to their opinion, Rama makes just the right decision as living with a possibly impure woman is not acceptable. The perspective the audience observes this scene from is that of men, who, of course, sympathise with the male character, Rama. However, this scene can be imposed on the film, as here the role of Sita is shown from the female perspective. Emphasis is laid on the fact that the circumstances of Sita's actions are made clear, so the audience can

understand the character's decisions. Rather than feeling pity for Sita's husband, the viewer therefore knows how she must be feeling and does not denounce the beginning relationship of the two women.

The third reference to the scene in which Sita goes through trial by fire takes place at the end of the film. However, it is now no longer Sita who occupies the role of Ram's wife but Radha. When she confesses her infidelity to Ashok he tries to force himself upon her. In an attempt to liberate herself, Radha's sari catches fire. She manages to extinguish the fire and thus passes the test. Regardless of her extramarital and thus 'impure' relationship with Sita, Radha is released as a pure woman at the end of the film. (Gairola 318) Thus, this very scene that is explicitly referred to three times in the film, has a highly significant function in Deepa Mehta's production.

By means of explicitly showing performances of the story of the *Ramayana*, Deepa Mehta directly incorporates the story into the film. The borders of good and bad are challenged and blur, as different perspectives on the main characters of the epic are represented. In *K3G*, on the other hand, the effects of the epics on films can only be felt implicitly. Clearly, a moral message is transmitted in *K3G*, however, this is done without ever mentioning directly that many ways of conduct transmitted in the film derive from the two holy texts.

4.2.2 Religious Festivities: Diwali and Karva Chauth

Besides the influence of the holy scripts *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* on Indian society and film, religion plays another crucial role that is not to forget. Being an extremely religious people, they put great value on the celebration of religious festivals. In which way these festivals are represented in the films and what role they play, will be analysed after an introduction into two of the most prominent religious festivities in India.

Diwali is short for 'Deepawali' (Alexowitz 182) and is the Hindu festival of lights, candles and colours. Diwali is one of the most important religious

festivities in India and is especially celebrated in the northern parts of the country (Favero 95). The word 'Deepa' stands for 'light', 'avali' signifies 'line' (Alexowitz 182). From these translations one of the most important aspects of the festivity can already be inferred – light. Being the festival of lights, great importance is given to the lightening of candles on the window sills, next to the entrances of as well as inside people's houses. In most parts, Diwali is celebrated in honour of Lakshmi, the goddess of beauty, wealth and happiness. Considering the size of India, however, it is not surprising that different regions have established slightly different ceremonies and rites for Diwali. Whereas some therefore honour the goddess Lakshmi, others centre on the elephant-god Ganesh, on Saraswati and/or on other gods and goddesses. Traditionally, the festival goes on for five days, starting at the end of the Hindu month 'Aswina' (October) and lasting until the beginning of 'Kartika' (November). The exact date of its beginning each year depends on the moon. (Zimmermann 98)

It is difficult to compare Diwali to religious festivals in the western world, as, being a five-day festival, it seems that a number of western religious holidays are combined within this Indian one. Nevertheless, parallels are frequently drawn and one could generally say that Diwali is a mixture of Christmas and New Year's Day. It is important for most Indians to spend this time with their family and friends. (Zimmermann 98) Gifts are bought for each other, which, according to Favero, consist mainly of dried nuts and sweets (95), and together the families get ready for a start into a new year by means of various spiritual ceremonies and rituals. According to Alexowitz, the worshipping, praising and honouring of gods and goddesses is usually followed by frolicsome singing and dancing. (182)

In addition to being a combination of Christmas and New Year's Day, Diwali is also a celebration that can, firstly, be compared to Thanksgiving, as many Indians make sacrificial offerings such as fruit, grain, spices and flowers. Secondly it is comparable to All Souls' Day, as the deceased are commemorated during Diwali. Finally, Zimmermann concludes, it is a celebration in honour of the god Rama, whom the lights were supposed to

help find their way back home, after having liberated his wife Sita from the demon Ravana in Sri Lanka. (Zimmermann 99) Alexowitz claims that the festival of lights is by many seen as the festival of enlightenment. People's spirits are filled with light during this time, whereas all darkness is banned, and good wins over evil. (182)

This exploration of Diwali with its numerous functions makes it clear that it is one of the major festivals in India. A number of religious and moral values are celebrated and honoured in a rather short period. In *Fire*, a film that is not primarily designed for Indian audiences, this festivity does not appear at all. *K3G*, a production that aims at the mainstream Indian audiences, on the other hand, clearly represents the importance of Diwali for Indian society, as one will be able to observe in the following section of this paper.

The mansion of the Raichands, as well as they as a family, are introduced in a flashback, when Nandini's and Yash's mothers tell Rohan about the reasons for Rahul leaving the family. Rohan does not know why his brother was suddenly gone because he was still a young boy and because he promised Rahul never to ask for an explanation. In the first few scenes of this flashback, the audience gets to observe a lavishly decorated house, made ready for the festival of Diwali. There are statues of gods and goddesses, candles and joss sticks on trays, coconuts for sacrificial offerings, and multicoloured petals. All these decorations together create an extremely colourful and festive picture. Furthermore, there is Nandini's singing voice. She makes blessings and we see her, dressed in one of her nicest saris, praying in front of the statues together with her guests. The tray she is holding is decked out with lit candles, with food and with a small statue of the elephant-god Ganesh. Nandini's song can, on the one hand, be understood as being about worshipping the gods, but on the other, she additionally emphasises the value of the family with the words 'Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham' ('We shall never part, nor through tears nor through smiles.')(00:13:30). With exactly these words, the camera angle changes and the viewer of the film gets to observe the festivity from above. Now, candles dominate the lower part of the picture and one can see women walking past

the candles with silver trays that are decorated with colourful petals. The hall is filled with people – especially the women are dressed in colourful saris – who all worship the statues of the gods that are positioned in front of them in a similar way an altar in a temple is positioned.

This Diwali scene, which lasts for around seven minutes, and, as is typical for popular Hindi films (Ganti, *Guidebook* 80), intensifies emotions by means of a song, presents an extremely colourful and happy picture of the Raichands. Every member of the family, also Naina who is thought to be Rahul's bride-to-be, as well as all their friends are present and celebrate the festivity with them. The presence of the gods and goddesses is frequently underlined by a simple filming technique, in which the camera is situated behind the statues. The characters are then filmed with the gods and goddesses in between themselves and the camera, in order to highlight the importance of both, of religion as well as of the family for this festival. Additionally, short sequences in which the three statues are shown in their full glory and splendour are inserted various times.

At the beginning of the sequence, the focus is on the women, namely on the two grandmothers, Naina, and Nandini, who, by embracing each other openly display how happy they are to be together. Then Yash and Rohan – and even Naina's father is presented as if he were part of the family – come downstairs to join the others in their joyous celebration. Yet, one member of the Raichand family is still missing. Rahul's arrival in the helicopter was already mentioned earlier, in connection with the relationship and special bond between him and his mother. The same scene now brings the family together in order for them to be able to celebrate the festivity jointly as an extended family. The guests are singing and dancing, according to tradition, as was indicated above, and the women perform sacrificial and worshipping rituals. Meanwhile, Rahul is arriving by helicopter; scenes which create a dramatic tension and, being shown in slow motion, add a touching atmosphere to the sequence. For the audience, the Diwali scene ends with a shot of the entire Raichand family – including Naina and her father – standing

together and praying happily in front of the statues of the gods and goddesses. (K3G 00:12:30-00:19:36)

In this scene, the audience can clearly perceive that the emphasis Indians place on celebrating the festivity with their entire family is also represented in K3G. As indicated earlier, one of the major themes of the film is the family. This scene acts as one of the most intense and strong ones of the film regarding the bonds between the family members. The flashback, which started out with this happy celebration of Diwali only ends about one hundred minutes later. The audience is brought back to 'present day' and now observes Rohan coming back home for Diwali ten years after Rahul has left the family. This celebration of the festival now strongly opposes the picture of Diwali that the viewer got to enjoy earlier in the film.

Now, it is Rohan rather than Rahul, who enters the mansion and sees his parents praying in front of the same statues that the audience remembers from before. However, this time one cannot see any colours or feel any happiness in the room. Instead, the vast hall is characterised by coldness and emptiness. Yash and Nandini are unaccompanied, standing in the middle of the huge hall in a lonesome way, with Rohan being their only guest. The theme of the song is the same as it was in the first Diwali sequence: 'Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham'; however, in contrast to the earlier Diwali scene, the melody, similar to Yash's and Nandini's expressions on their faces, now assumes a serious and mournful tone. The married couple is standing far apart from each other, indicating the fact that they have drifted away from each other. In contrast to Rahul's almost magical appearance in the first Diwali scene, Nandini now does not even realise that Rohan has arrived until he touches her. The fact that sadness about the disruption of the family dominates the scene is also visible in Rohan's expression, who desperately wishes them all to be together.

The first celebration of Diwali that is shown can be said to have happened according to tradition. Family and friends were together, the house was lavishly decorated and the gods and goddesses were collectively worshipped. Ten years later, however, the characters of the film experience

the exact opposite. Only the importance of the family to be together, especially during these religious holidays, remains the same. It is finally and symbolically this occasion that makes Rohan reach the decision to bring his family back together: 'I'll bring you back Baiyya. I'll bring you home Bhabhi. To your home ... Our home.' (*K3G* 01:39:40-01:39:47)

Karva Chauth, or also Karwa Chauth, is another religious ritual that is of great significance for many Hindus in India. In contrast to Diwali, which receives special attention only in *K3G*, Karva Chauth is an issue in both films. Similar to Diwali, it is also predominant in the northern parts of the country (Alexowitz 186). According to Punyani, however, Karva Chauth is one of those festivals that are "becoming a big craze" (101) and it is increasingly gaining importance in the whole country.

Karva Chauth traditionally takes place nine days before Diwali and mostly concerns married Hindu women, who fast for their husbands for one entire day. In the morning, before sunrise, women take a ritual bath and then fast until the evening when the moon rises. These rituals are supposed to bring the women's husbands prosperity, health and happiness (Alexowitz 186), as well as a long life (Punyani 101). What women want to show their husbands by performing these rites is their reliability, love, loyalty and selflessness towards them. According to tradition, the fasting ends once the full moon can be clearly seen in the dark sky. Women then change into their nicest saris and perform another solemn ritual on their husbands: With the help of a light piece of cloth, as well as a ring, they pretend to catch the moonlight with the ring – the full moon is a symbol for richness and entirety – and project it onto their husbands to bless them. (Alexowitz 186)

In *K3G*, Karva Chauth is a festivity, which Rohan takes advantage of in order to bring his family back together. On the day of Karva Chauth, Rahul and Anjali, now living in London, are not yet aware of the fact that the person they are accommodating is in fact Rahul's brother Rohan. Various times Rohan makes implicit statements about the importance of the family and about the beauty of India in order to make them miss their home country and to eventually come back to India. The way in which Rahul and his little family in

London celebrate Karva Chauth resembles the description provided above. However, one important ritual element is added. In the film, the rite of Sargi is mentioned, which is, according to Rohan and Nandini ‘something that every mother-in-law sends for her daughter-in-law’ (K3G 02:32:27) – ‘some sweets, a few almonds and signs of marital bliss and lots of love’ (K3G 02:33:45) – a few days before the actual day of Karva Chauth. Since Anjali does not have any contact to her mother-in-law, she does not know about this ritual, but Rohan secretly promises her that this year she would receive her Sargi (K3G 02:32:54). Thus, he calls his mother in order for her to explain the tradition of Sargi to Anjali and to send it to her. Both women are not aware of who it is they are talking to but the strong emotional bonds between them can clearly be felt by the audience. As mentioned earlier, it is again during a religious festivity that Indians find the company of their family increasingly important, as is reflected in this production.

In the following scenes, a few days later in the film, the viewer gets to observe the way Karva Chauth is celebrated by Rahul’s family in London. The Karva Chauth sequence in *K3G* takes place in a huge hall with many of Rahul’s and Anjali’s friends. Even Pooja, who has quickly adapted to western lifestyle and traditions, claims to have kept the traditional fast that day. She is not yet married but is deeply in love with Rohan, for whom she has kept the fast. Similar to the Diwali scenes in the film, also this sequence is a rather long one, accompanied by singing and dancing, during which Pooja declares her love to Rohan.

When the moon finally appears in the dark sky, all the women taking part in the celebrations take their trays full with candles and sacrificial offerings. They walk towards the moon and honour it by handing one tray over from one person to the next. In addition to that, Anjali, together with all the other women, catches the moonlight with the help of the ring, as was described above, and projects the light on her husband.

Ganti argues that in mainstream Hindi cinema “[s]ongs are [...] used as the primary vehicles to represent fantasy, desire, and passion” (*Guidebook* 81). The fact that this is true can clearly be observed in *K3G*, as suddenly, in

Rohan's imagination, Yash and Nandini appear in the singing sequence and join their family in the Karva Chauth celebrations. Soon, however, Rahul has Rohan return to reality and the singing and dancing continues without their parents. As the music is becoming faster, Rahul and Rohan embrace each other, a moment which their mother in India can strongly feel. Nandini temporarily disrupts her own Karva Chauth rituals and excitedly opens the main entrance of their mansion to welcome her sons – an act that can only lead to bitter disappointment for Nandini, as, of course, no one is waiting for her outside the door. Again, the importance of celebrating such religious festivities together with one's family needs to be emphasised here, as in *K3G* the impression is created that with an incomplete and disrupted family, also the ceremonies remain incomplete.

In *Fire*, the situation is a slightly different one. Of the protagonists, it is especially the two women who insist on observing the fast. They get up early in the morning to have breakfast before dawn. In contrast to the explanation of Karva Chauth provided by Alexowitz, the female protagonists of the film change clothes already in the morning rather than after the fast. Thus, Radha and Sita dress in fancy saris, wear heavy jewellery and decorate a bowl with colourful petals. Their husbands, on the other hand, do not insist on them keeping the fast. They either tell them not to keep the fast at all, or, if they do, then not to be too strict about it. Ashok and Jatin therefore do not find the fast especially important. Nevertheless, their wives spend the day according to tradition. Sita emphasises her moral obligation towards her mother and Biji not to break the fast (*Fire* 00:40.32). Ashok asserts that they are not supposed to work that day so Radha and Sita stay at home with Mundu and Biji. It is interesting to note that while playing cards, Radha tells her sister-in-law about the origins of Karva Chauth. According to the legend, there was once a king who showed such arrogance as a result of the beauty of his wife that the gods who envied him decided to punish him for his behaviour. They covered his entire body with so many needles that it took the queen a whole year to remove them. Just before she took out the last two needles from the king's eyelids, she received an important visitor. Meanwhile the maid removed the last needles, which made the king believe that it was the maid

who had saved him all along. As a result, he declared the maid his wife and the queen the servant. The only way for the queen to resolve the situation was by fasting without any food or water for one day, which a holy man informed her about. From dawn to moonrise, she fasted and was thus able to break the spell. When the king saw her after her fast, he recognised her again and they lived happily ever after. (*Fire* 00:42:49-00:45:20) The explicit and lengthy telling of this legend is supposed to emphasise and probably also to criticise once more the devotion and loyalty many Indian men expect from their wives.

Similar to *K3G*, also the Karva Chauth sequence in this film takes up a large part of the filming time. Radha's telling of the story is vividly illustrated with a depiction of what is going on in Mundu's mind while listening. While paying attention to Radha, Mundu is imagining himself to be the king of the story, whereas Radha is the queen, Sita the maid, Ashok the holy man and Jatin the servant. The entire family, except for Biji, is part of the story he creates in his mind. In contrast, in reality, also on this religious holiday, the family is presented as similarly disrupted as it is on any ordinary day: Jatin only returns from his girlfriend's house in the morning of the religious holiday and both, Ashok and Jatin leave the house immediately after breakfast, as they always do. For them this day is just like any ordinary day. However, the two women do not seem to mind being on their own. In contrast to *K3G*, therefore, they do not find it especially important to celebrate the festivity together with the entire family. Radha and Sita rather offer each other the feeling of being each other's family.

At the breakfast table in the morning of Karva Chauth, they engage in a discussion about devotion and the preservation of certain traditions. Rather than aiming at bringing the family together, the Karva Chauth scene in this film acts as a key sequence in which the women distance themselves from their husbands and their previous way of adhering to traditions: 'Isn't it amazing? We're so bound by customs and rituals. Somebody just has to press my button. This button marked tradition. And I start responding like a trained monkey.' (*Fire* 00:40:37-00:40:51), Sita critically observes her

behaviour. The religious holiday that is presented to the audience is Sita's first Karva Chauth as a married woman. On the one hand she feels the obligation to keep the fast, as it is a long-established social ritual. She claims that '[her] mother would kill [her], and Biji would never stop ringing the bell' (*Fire* 00:40:30), if she did not keep the fast. On the other hand, her rebellious nature works in a different way and she starts to doubt the value and the use of, as well as her reaction and adherence to such traditions.

The Karva Chauth performed by Radha and Sita stands in stark contrast to the way Jatin and Julie spend the day: having dinner at a fancy restaurant with ample exotic food. Clearly, Julie is indifferent to the tradition of fasting on the day of Karva Chauth. Meanwhile the moon has risen and Radha and Sita are performing the conventional rituals with their trays full of candles, sacrificial offerings and petals in a similar way as it was done in *K3G*. The projection of the moonlight onto their husbands cannot be performed because they are not present. The way Radha holds the ring, despite the fact that Ashok and Jatin are not there, makes it seem as if Radha was projecting the blessings onto themselves. According to the way tradition was handed down on Radha in *Fire*, women are only allowed to eat and drink again, not only once the moon has risen but once they get their husband's blessings (*Fire* 00:49:06). Since Jatin is still out with his lover, Radha, who has already received her husband's blessings, lets Sita have some of her water. Thus, Radha temporarily seems to take over the role of Sita's husband and releases Sita from the fast.

The analysis of the religious festivities and rituals and the importance they are given in the films reveals the dominance of such occasions in both productions. However, whereas in *K3G* both, Diwali and Karva Chauth are dealt with at length, *Fire* focuses only on the latter festival. One reason for this might be the fact that *K3G*, as a mainstream Hindi film, has a running time of about twice of that of *Fire* and can therefore incorporate more themes and issues than *Fire*. However, on the other hand, Karva Chauth is a ritual that requires women to do something. In both films the family is one of the major aspects, however, *Fire* is additionally about the situation of women in

India, which might be another reason why the incorporation of Karva Chauth was preferred over Diwali.

The ways these festivities are dealt with in the two films slightly differ from each other. They form a crucial part in both films, however, whereas the director of *K3G*, Karan Johar, praises such traditions, Deepa Mehta in *Fire* analyses them critically and also reflects the hardships of such festivities for certain members of Indian society. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that in both films these festivals form key aspects; moments in which crucial decisions are made that affect the rest of the films.

5 Love and Sexuality

The Indian kinship system, the way in which it functions and the attitudes towards regulations concerning the family, are within the main themes of both films, *K3G* and *Fire*, which are subject to analysis in this thesis. A large number of Indian traditions have become crucial for family life in the course of their development and stand for the togetherness and solidarity of the family, as examined in the previous chapter.

However, also the rather delicate issues of love and sexuality are closely linked to the Indian kinship system, i.e. the family plays an important part in both of these aspects. The family is, as mentioned earlier, an extremely intimate space in which long-established social and religious traditions are followed along similar but nevertheless individual lines. Mostly, however, the family provides an intimate space, in which love and sexuality are in fact complex but certainly central issues (Dwyer, *Visual* 53). They are aspects of family life that are not talked about openly but that nevertheless form an indispensable part of it.

This chapter is going to explore these major but still rather complex issues of love and sexuality and their values for Indian society and film. In order to be able to compare the distinct manners in which love and sexuality are represented by Karan Johar and Deepa Mehta in their films *K3G* and *Fire*, it is necessary to first examine the position of and attitudes towards sexuality within the country in general. Furthermore, the issue of homosexuality, which is important for the analysis of the film *Fire*, will be tackled, as well as the role and consequences of censorship for films and their audience.

5.1 General Aspects

Sexuality can be considered one of the most natural human instincts; nevertheless, it is frequently seen and treated as a taboo issue. The ways in which different social groups deal with sexuality are always strongly dependent on the respective cultural traditions and social values: “The same sexual behaviour can acquire substantially different meanings and consequences in different societies” (Kishwar 209). In comparison to western countries, where sexual relationships before marriage seem to be common practice, women in India are expected to enter their marriages as virgins. Premarital sexual relationships can have far-reaching consequences not only for the women themselves, but for their entire families: In contrast to western societies, “[a]n unmarried girl [in India] who has sexual relations outside of marriage and whose pregnancy becomes known ruins her reputation and that of her natal family, seriously jeopardizing her own and any younger sisters’ chances for marriage” (Lamb, *Saris* 189).

Even though evaluations and judgements of sexual behaviour vary within different countries and societies, sexuality is present within all social groups as it is a natural human instinct. It can further be argued that not only sexuality but also the drive to control it seems to be innate in human mankind. According to Kishwar, “[m]ost societies have tried to regulate sexuality by placing it firmly within marriage and kinship structure” (209). In India, the patriarchal kinship system led to a regulation of female sexual behaviour in particular (209) A woman’s purity is highly valued within society. As mentioned above, she is supposed to enter marriage as a virgin and to remain faithful to her husband throughout their matrimony. (Dwyer, *Money* 49). Within marriage, however, it can be said that sexuality is approved of and in fact desired in order to ensure procreation. Lamb confirms this by stating that “sexuality *within* marriage, if not unduly excessive, [is] auspicious and desirable, both for the sake of pleasure and, even more important, for creating children and carrying on the family line.” (*Saris*188)

It is interesting to note that in the Hindu world, female sexuality is seen as being something impure. As a result, it is generally believed that there is a stronger chance for women than for men to have extramarital affairs. Women are characterised by a certain bodily heat, as Lamb further concludes from her studies:

[A] distinctive characteristic of the female body [is] its 'hot' [...] nature. [...] Both men and women [...] produce heating sexual fluids – uterine or menstrual blood [...] and semen or seed [...]. Both male and female sexual fluids are highly distilled forms of blood derived from the cooking of food within the body. But women have more sexual heat than men, at least during their postpubertal and premenopausal years, as is demonstrated by menstruation, which results from an overabundance of hot blood periodically draining from the body. (*Saris* 188)

This bodily heat leads to the fact that women are said to be more likely to begin an affair than men. The informants of Lamb's study confirmed the fact that this is generally believed by Indians, and especially also by Indian women; however, in their own lives, these very same women claim to have experienced quite the opposite, i.e. that men engage more easily in extramarital affairs than women (*Lamb, Saris* 189).

As far as the perception of the role of sexuality in India by western societies is concerned, there is one book that most people from the West immediately associate with the issue: Mallanaga Vatsyayana's *Kama Sutra*. It is one of the most popular Sanskrit texts in the West (*Dwyer, Money* 26) and according to Sweet, "[i]ts fame [...] rests on its treatment of sex in its more mechanical aspects, although that actually forms only part of its subject matter. It is the only source for most people's knowledge of classical India." (77) In contrast to that, a close analysis of the way sexuality is traditionally dealt with in India nowadays may seem to completely oppose the manner in which this text handles the issue. However, this opposition cannot be said to be entirely true, as first of all, the content of the book is not primarily about "the art of lovemaking" (*Dwyer, Money* 27), as it is perceived in the West. Secondly, the *Kama Sutra* is only one out of countless Indian literary texts and there are many that tackle the topic in a different manner or not at all.

Generally, it can be said that the delicate issue of sexuality is dealt with and represented in rather implicit ways in India. Its subliminal representation and depiction in films is mostly due to the strict censorship that is dominating in India, as will be examined later in this chapter. However, “changing attitudes towards sexual behaviour” (Favero 159) can be observed nowadays. According to Favero, “questions of sexuality [make] social [as well as generational] differences visible and [indicate] that the middle class [has] historically been selected as the repository of proper moral” (159). Thus, not only one approach to the topic exists. Rather, there is a great variety of options of how to represent the role of love and sexuality in films, similar to the many ways in which the issues are regarded by different strata of Indian society. In how far the two films *K3G* and *Fire* represent this difference, will be subject to analysis after an introduction to lesbianism in India, as well as to the censorship of films that are released in the country.

The subject of homosexual relationships, and especially of lesbianism, is generally a delicate one, and also people in India do not differ much in their attitudes towards it than many other countries in this world. Being aware of the strict censorship for films that is practiced in India, one can imagine that the portrayal of homosexual relationships in literature and in films, in particular, is rather controversial. In western society, homosexual love is slowly becoming part of people’s everyday lives and many have come to define their identity through their (homo)sexual orientation. According to Dwyer, in India

the role of sexuality in defining identity is unclear at present. [S]ome people enjoy same-sex sexual activity without wishing to claim a gay or lesbian or even bisexual identity; it is simply that they have sex with someone of the same sex but they expect to marry and live in a heterosexual relationship (*Money* 51).

Even though the identification through one’s sexuality therefore does not yet seem to be as much an issue in India as it is in the west, in bigger cities the formation of gay and lesbian organisations is increasingly visible (52). Some critics argue that “lesbianism [is] quite accepted in India” (Kishwar qtd. in Bachmann 237), whereas others, such as Sen, object to this statement and

respond by claiming that the India in which she grew up must have been a different country from the one described in Kishwar's article. In her middle-class family, she writes: "Homosexuality was a taboo, period! [It] was considered ridiculous, weird, sick and perverted." (qtd. in Bachmann 237)

Shiv Sena, the extreme Right Hindu Party, is terrified of the thought that lesbianism in India could spread further and therefore clearly and fiercely objects to the recognition of homosexual groups and organisations (J. Desai 181). They firmly claim that "homosexuality is Western, whereas heterosexuality is unquestionably natural and Indian" (182) and thus deny its natural development in the past. In contrast to this, Vanita argues that

[i]n the context of South Asia, Michael Sweet and Leonard Zwilling have demonstrated the formulation of sexual categories in Hindu and Jain texts as early as the sixth century B.C.E., it is evident that the *Kama Sutra* (fourth century C.E.), while mentioning casual sexual relations between 'men', also classifies men who prefer men as 'the third nature' (1).

By means of denying the natural existence of homosexual relationships and claiming that it is a result of westernisation, Shiv Sena, who regard themselves as the "guardians of Indian traditions" (J. Desai 187), therefore frantically try to break off discussions about these issues. However, their attempts have not been entirely successful. More and more public media, such as magazines or films openly deal with the issue of same sex relations and people generally seem to develop a certain openness towards homosexuality. (Dwyer, *Money* 187)

In contrast to a slowly rising presence and acceptance of same-sex relationships in India, mainstream Hindi cinema has not yet been able to adapt its way of dealing with love and sexuality to these slowly changing attitudes. The Censor Board, through which every film that is put on the market in India needs to pass, still imposes rigid and strict rules that are difficult to avoid. Despite of these restrictions, some directors manage to release their films with explicit sexual references or scenes, as will become clear after an examination of Indian censorship.

Censorship for Indian films was first introduced in 1918 by the Legislative Council (Ghose 415). According to Gopalan, the two main reasons for this introduction of censorship were “first, to censor film footage that might incite anti-colonial riots; second, to avoid (mis)representations of the West, particularly images of Western women” (377). The former reason was therefore a mainly political one as a result of which especially films that criticised Britain were banned (Ghose 415). The latter reason is confirmed by Gokulsing and Dissanayake, who claim that it was motivated by the desire to preserve the “prestige of the white woman” (*Narrative* 52). During World War II, censorship was tightened further and references to any freedom movements were immediately cut from the respective films. There were only very few directors who managed to veil such allusions and who accomplished to get their films approved despite anti-British references. After independence, censorship “stayed because of a professed concern for the moral well-being of Indian society, something for which the new government felt it was responsible” (Ghose 415). Even though the Film Censor Board of India has become more tolerant over the years, it still continues “to impose restrictions on the depiction of adult sexuality in a weak, though desperate, attempt at maintaining an essentialist and nationalistic distinction between western and Indian character types” (Arora qtd. in Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 53).

Nowadays, “half a century after the departure of the British, Indian cinema is still one of the most heavily censored,” Gokulsing and Dissanayake (*Narrative* 53) argue. There are numerous guidelines

which are modified and amended from time to time, [and which] relate to a variety of subjects. These include child abuse, violence against women, racism, religious sectarianism, communalism, and anti-scientific, anti-national, and anti-constitutional attitudes. There are also explicit guidelines regarding vulgarity and violence. (Ghose 416)

Besides these issues, also sexual scenes or allusions to them are often heavily censored. For a long time, “[k]issing was not allowed in any Indian film, and even embraces were allowed only if they did not offend the very acute moral sensibilities of the Board members” (Ghose 416). Nowadays,

kissing is permitted in films, however, in order to spare people, especially women, the embarrassment it is usually not shown explicitly. In addition to the fact that some viewers might feel a certain discomfort when watching such scenes, many actors and actresses still refuse to take roles that require kissing someone. (419) Gokulsing and Dissanayake point out that “[u]nlike in Western films, overt sexuality is prohibited in Indian films, so much is conveyed through suggestion, innuendo, coded signs and symbols. Songs and dances play a crucial role, eroticism and sexuality often being closely linked with song and dance numbers.” (*Narrative* 28) Whereas kissing is not prohibited, the portrayal of love scenes is officially forbidden to be depicted (Uhl 130). Thus, rather than showing explicit sexual scenes, certain symbolic images have developed: couples who are in love are frequently displayed running around trees or dancing together in beautiful locations. “[D]rops of water on a leaf, two doves huddled together” (416) are further symbols for love and implicit sexual scenes, and opening flowers are often used as a reference to the wedding bed (Dwyer, *Money* 149). Many mainstream film producers, Gopalan argues, use “the withdrawal-of-the-camera technique, [in which] the camera withdraws just before a steamy love scene ensues and the film replaces it with extra-diegetic shots of waterfalls, flowers, thunder, lightning and tropical storms” (378).

The Board of Censors and the actual way in which films in India are censored – with a “lack of clear criteria,” as Gokulsing and Dissanayake (*Narrative* 126) argue – are frequently viewed as controversial. There seem to be no clear standards according to which films are censored:

The absurd double standards operated by the Central Board of Film Certificate (CBFC) are well known. On the one hand, ‘lascivious, lewd song and dance sequences and gratuitous violence routinely escape the censors’ scissors, and Hollywood offerings with torrid sex scenes get the Universal or U rating’ (*India Today*, 2002: editorial). On the other hand, kissing and artistically erotic scenes are cut by the CBFC.” (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 124)

This controversy can be further highlighted by statements made by two famous directors. By comparing the CBFC to the police, the producer and director, Subhash Ghai, for instance, tries to emphasise the necessity of

censorship for films: “There has to be a law, and implementation of the law. There has to be, otherwise we will make pornos [sic], nothing else.” (Subhash Ghai qtd. in Ganti 195) Director Ramesh Sippy, on the other hand, also stresses the downside of censorship: “Debate all the time on issues like this is probably healthy because if you go into an overdrive on censorship, you’ll be curbing any creativity, there’s no question about it.” (Ramesh Sippy qtd. in Ganti 195)

As a result of the extensive cuttings some films, such as Mira Nair’s *Monsoon Wedding* and *Kama Sutra*, had to suffer, Vijay Anand, the former Chair of the CBFC, demanded, within other things, the elimination of censoring and its substitution by ratings as it is common practice for Hollywood films. None of his demands, however, was accepted by the government and many Indians still insist on the “upholding [of] the Indian culture in all its purity” (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 126). Also the filmmaker Shyam Benegal, argues in favour of an abolishment of Indian censorship as it is always a subjective, rather than an objective, decision whether a certain aspect adheres to the rules or not.

It is interesting to note that, as far as foreign films are concerned, explicitly sexual scenes are allowed to be shown to a much greater extent. The reason for this is the “different kind of society [which is depicted in these films] where such things do not attract moral condemnation or censure and therefore can be shown” (Ghose 420). One of the motivations behind this decision, however, is the type of audience of foreign films, which is characterised by “a ‘westernized’ outlook and moral values” (420) and is thus not the intended audience of mainstream Hindi productions.

5.2 *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*

Being a production which is characterised by a number of elements typical of mainstream Hindi films, also *K3G* deals with the subjects ‘love’ and

'sexuality', especially, in a comparatively discreet manner. Like many other films, *K3G* conveys the impression to a non-Indian audience that sexuality is a taboo topic in the country; however, this film only represents one version of Indishness and other films might depict a different image of the issue and its value for society. Nevertheless, it can be argued that even though sexual scenes are not portrayed explicitly in *K3G*, the audience can certainly feel its underlying presence. The viewer is able to perceive a definite sexual tension between the two young couples. Being an innate human characteristic this cannot be denied and is inevitably present in a film that deals with love relationships; and love and sexuality are inextricably linked, as is common knowledge.

As has been previously mentioned, not only sexuality is innate but also the drive to control it. This can be clearly observed in the characters of Rahul and Anjali in *K3G*, as, even though they are deeply in love, no explicit sexual scenes are shown, a fact that will be discussed in more detail below. Married couples are expected to be able to control their sexual desires for their partners. It is therefore a delicate issue for them to show their love for each other in public, which is why it is not considered common practice in India and its mainstream films. Kissing in public only seems to be allowed on the cheeks, hair or neck, as Rahul sets the example (*K3G* 01:02:15 and 02:31:59). Yet, Prasad argues that "the prohibition of kissing scenes [is] based on an unwritten rule; the written rules '[prohibit] excessively passionate love scenes', 'indelicate sexual situations' and 'scenes suggestive of immorality'" (qtd. in Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 80). The depiction of sexual activities in a popular Hindi film is thus heavily frowned upon, which is why most directors of mainstream productions refrain from it. However, even though no sexual scenes are shown in *K3G*, the audience is aware of the existing sexual relationship between Rahul and Anjali, as they get to see the result of their sexual liaison in the course of the film, namely their son Krishi.

In contrast to the relationship between Rahul and Anjali, sexual desires are more clearly perceivable in Pooja. With her light and western-style clothing,

she deliberately provokes men to stare at her and thus voluntarily turns into an object of desire. Partly, she can be said to represent the changing attitudes towards sexuality by the younger Indian generations, as she is characterised by a rather liberal attitude towards sexuality. Her view stands in sharp contrast to that of her sister Anjali and her brother-in-law Rahul, who are horrified every time they see Pooja leave the house wearing mini-skirts, tank tops, high heels and a thick layer of make-up. However, this liberal attitude of Pooja, on the other hand, does not entirely represent the changing attitudes of Indians towards sex. Pooja left India to live in London with her sister when she was ten years of age. Thus, she has been directly influenced by western lifestyle for more than ten years, whereas people who live in India are surrounded by Indian customs. It is a fact that it takes longer for such long-established conventions to change within the country than when a group of people is directly exposed to other cultures and their traditions. Thus, it can be said that whereas Pooja's rather provocative behaviour and way of dressing is not at all considered conspicuous in England, it would be unacceptable in India. This validates Kishwar's argument, which was mentioned earlier, that "[t]he same sexual behaviour can acquire substantially different meanings and consequences in different societies" (209).

A similar situation applies for homosexuality. In England, for instance, the subject is dealt with rather openly. In India on the other hand, as was pointed out above, even though homosexual groups and organisations are slowly coming into existence, they are still not accepted by the great majority of Indians. *K3G* is directed at a mainstream audience who demands to watch a reflection of their traditions in films. Hence, homosexuality is not an issue in *K3G*. Rather than presenting a provocative account of society and directly challenging prevailing Indian conventions, emphasis is laid on the representation of long-established rituals, such as arranged marriages and certain religious festivities, as was discussed in detail in previous chapters.

K3G supports the importance the Indian government places on the "moral well-being of Indian society" (Ghose 415), which was briefly mentioned

above. At first sight one could suspect that this was not the case, especially if one considers the way Pooja's character is depicted. Yet, by looking closely, one becomes aware of the fact that in the course of the film she undergoes a change back to a rather tradition-bound young Indian woman and starts to valorise these conventions again. In her character, the director Karan Johar thus adheres to the rule of "maintaining an essentialist and nationalistic distinction between western and Indian character types" (Arora qtd. in Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 53). Pooja in London shows more features of a western character type, as far as her way of clothing and her attitudes are concerned. As soon as she meets Rohan, however, she becomes aware of the importance of her home country's traditions and values and goes back to following these conventions. In Pooja, but also in Anjali and Rahul, who, at the end of the film also decide to return to India, the audience can directly observe the moral message the director aims to convey with his film: He tries to stress the importance of one's cultural roots and family background, which is something one will always and surely return to. The audience gets the impression that these roots and this desire to return are especially strong in Indians. Pooja has lived in London half of her life and initially does not value the customs of her home country. She finally realises through Rohan that her heart is still Indian and that it is India where she wants to go back to, rather than stay in London.

There is one further observation that can be made in connection with the clear distinction between the depiction of western and Indian women. Those western women who participate in the dance sequences almost exclusively wear short and tight skirts, which are supposed to evoke men's fantasies. In contrast, Indian women are depicted dancing in their saris and thus maintain social conventions. As a result, a clear opposition between east and west is created, with Pooja functioning as the mediator between the two parties. As mentioned above, she is initially presented as a woman with western character traits and western-style clothing, which closely resembles those dresses of the women dancers. Yet, in the course of the film, she undergoes a transition and finally learns to appreciate Indian conventions again. Even though western women are depicted in a rather seductive way, it needs to be

noted here that the male characters do not seriously show interest for them. On the contrary, they seem to clearly prefer and feel attracted to Indian women.

As was shown in the preceding paragraphs, India's rather strict censorship still nowadays exercises an extremely strong influence on the way films are made and on the moral message they convey. It was pointed out above that there is no official law claiming that kissing scenes are prohibited from being shown in Indian productions (Prasad qtd. in Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 80). Yet, this seems to be an unwritten rule, as most mainstream Hindi productions refrain from depicting such scenes. In contrast to this unofficial rule, "overt sexuality is [in fact] prohibited in Indian films" (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 28). However, filmmakers have slowly developed a way in which love and sexuality or sexual tension can be conveyed, namely "through suggestion, innuendo, coded signs and symbols. [Also] songs and dances play a crucial role, eroticism and sexuality often being closely linked with song and dance numbers" (28), as will be elaborated in the following part.

Ganti argues that "[o]ne of the main functions of songs within a screenplay is to display emotion, and in the case of Hindi cinema this is overwhelmingly related to love" (*Guidebook* 80). A couple who is in love with each other frequently communicates this love through songs and dances, as is also the case in *K3G*. The first encounter of Rahul and Anjali takes place during the celebrations of India having won a cricket match and everybody in Anjali's street is singing and dancing (*K3G* 00:35:20). The audience immediately realises that Rahul feels attracted to and is falling in love with Anjali by the way he observes her dancing. Anjali has not yet seen him and it will take some time for her to fall in love with him. Nevertheless, this scene can be considered the first scene of physical attraction on the part of Rahul.

An even more significant scene, in which a lot of emotion, as well as sexual attraction from both sides are involved, is the first date of Rahul and Anjali, in which they drift off into their secret desires. Rajabali claims that "[w]here an emotion becomes intense, usually a song helps to underline it. It also cuts

away the need for verbalization through dialogue and creates a mood that cues the viewer in to [sic] the state of mind of the characters or the narrator” (qtd. in Ganti, *Heart* 294). Supported by initially a muted extra-diegetic song, Rahul implicitly confesses his love for Anjali on their first date and gently kisses her on her hair. Surprised but happy she runs off and in the very next shot the two protagonists can be found in the middle of the deserts of what must be Egypt, concluding from the pyramids in the background of the scenery (K3G 01:02:22).

All of a sudden, the audience finds itself amidst a dream sequence in exotic Egypt, which in fact only takes place in Rahul’s and Anjali’s minds. According to Gokulsing and Dissanayake, “[t]hese dream sequences provide the freedom to indulge in the exploration of forbidden pleasures which include the display of the female body as well as the expression of sexual desire” (*Narrative* 81). Now, no more words are needed as the characters’ emotions and feelings for each other are implicitly conveyed through the lyrics of the song as well as through the characters’ actions, movements and gestures. In this dream sequence Rahul and Anjali get physically closer to each other than in any other scene of the film. They flirt, touch, embrace and dance with each other and confess their feelings within the lyrics of the song. The romantic and exotic setting – a sunset in the desert and the lake in which they bathe – provides the ideal background for such a scene. By means of this setting, romantic feelings are reinforced and the two characters come very close to kissing each other on the lips.

Ganti argues that

[s]ongs are part of an elaborate system of allusions to, rather than explicit portrayals of, sexuality and physical intimacy in Hindi films as filmmakers navigate the perceived moral conservatism of their audiences, as well as the representational boundaries set by Indian state through its censorship codes (*Heart* 294).

Thoraval goes even further and claims that there is a certain “*orgasmic* function of [...] songs and dances, sometimes very lascivious and even suggestive of the sexual act in the context of a cinema which his otherwise

heavily censured" (66). Ganti is right in arguing that such scenes are often allusions to sexuality; however, some of the songs, together with the movements of the characters are strongly suggestive and provocative and clearly point towards sexual acts, which cannot be portrayed explicitly in mainstream Indian cinema.

In *K3G*, it is, to a large extent, through the dance and the respective movements that Anjali's body and her femininity are strongly accentuated. Virdi supports this claim and adds that in such scenes

[t]he focus is particularly on the heroine, the fetishized female sexualized through close attention to her costumes, graceful body movements, and carefully angled shots that heighten scopic pleasure. Whether the heroines lie languorously across the screen, roll down hilly slopes, or frolic playfully with the hero, they feign an unawareness of their sexualized bodies and the camera's voyeuristic gaze. (146)

As a result, Rahul hardly seems to be able to control his sexual desire for Anjali. He repeatedly kisses her on the neck while the wind blows through her long hair – a further seductive element in the film (*K3G* 01:06:43). Yet, the same desire can be felt within Anjali. She expresses her yearning for him in the lyrics of her song: 'The colours of our souls have melted into one. I can't say which of me is in you and which of you is in mine.' (*K3G* 01:06:56) Especially the latter sentence is clearly ambiguous. It does not only refer to their souls but is obviously a sexual reference.

However, the most interesting scene as regards the implicit, but still highly suggestive, conveyance of sexuality is the wet sari scene. First, Rahul surfaces from the lake. In fact, he is fully dressed but his wet shirt, which sticks to his body, seems to reveal every single one of his muscles. Not much later, the audience also gets to observe Anjali lying in the shallow water, and finally both characters caressing each other in the lake, with Rahul nearly lying on top of Anjali (*K3G* 01:07:29). According to Richards, such wet sari dances, which are fairly frequent in mainstream Hindi films, "[allow] for a very provocative and sexually tantalising exposure of the female body" (qtd. in Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 81).

Finally, there is one further association with love and sexuality, which is reinforced in the film. According to Ganti,

[r]ain, associated with fertility and rebirth, has always been invested with erotic, sensual significance in Hindu mythology, classical literature, and music. Indian classical music has many songs in which the anticipation of the monsoon rains is likened to a person's anticipation of his or her lover. (*Heart* 299)

Rain is also an issue in *K3G*: The dream sequence ends almost as abruptly as it started and suddenly Anjali finds herself standing in the middle of a crowded street, rain pouring down on her (*K3G* 01:08:43). Thus, this scene can be regarded as an indicator for the fact that Anjali and Rahul are going to be a couple in the future, despite certain difficulties.

As one is able to see in this analysis of *K3G*, there are various ways in which sexual tension or sexual acts can be implicitly portrayed without breaking the rules of censorship. In fact, no nude scenes are included in this film. However, it is argued here that some of those sequences that were described in this chapter are nevertheless highly suggestive and come close to the actual and explicit portrayal of sexuality.

5.3 *Fire*

The analysis of family structures, as well as of the adherence to certain Indian traditions, shows not only differences but also several similarities between *K3G* and *Fire*. As far as love and sexuality are concerned, *Fire* seems to represent an entirely different situation as *K3G*. The following section is going to tackle the film *Fire* and its way of dealing with love and sexuality and will thus reveal the parallels and distinguishing features of the two films with reference to the depiction of these subject matters.

Similar to *K3G*, love and sexuality are depicted to be taboo issues for Indian society in *Fire*. However, the way in which these themes are represented in

the two films stand in sharp contrast to each other. As was analysed in the previous chapter, the director of *K3G* adheres closely to the rules of censorship and does not allow any explicit references towards or depictions of sexual acts or even sexual intercourse. In Deepa Mehta's film, it remains clear that sexuality, and homosexual relationships, especially, are everything else but readily accepted by Indian society, not to mention the fact that one does not openly talk about it. However, besides that, Mehta also manages to effectively challenge the taboo aspect by not adhering to prevailing conceptions on the subject by Indian society and to conventions about its depiction in films. Thus, in *Fire* Mehta conveys the fact that sexuality is a taboo issue for society, but she herself, as a director, deliberately refrains from treating these subjects as such and portrays explicit sexual scenes in her film.

One example of Mehta's rather open approach to the general taboo issue of sexuality takes place between Jatin and Sita, when the latter loses her virginity to her newly wed husband. In this scene, the woman is depicted fully clothed, whereas Jatin is lying on top of her – the camera focusing on his naked upper part of the body. The sequence is highly unemotional: Sita submits herself to the act, whereas Jatin turns away from her, right after having ejaculated, showing no emotions. Dutifully, but in a factual tone, he asks her if she is okay and explains to her that she should not be worried if she bleeds because 'it happens the first time' (*Fire* 00:24:38). In fact, later in the film he even seems to be relieved when Sita one time neglects his attempt at sleeping with her, as he regards sexual intercourse with her as no more than a duty.

Jatin does not properly carry out the duty that is expected from a husband in traditional India, which is one of the reasons why his wife Sita turns to her sister-in-law Radha for love and sexual fulfilment. The two women have found each other and share the attitude that sex is something beautiful between two people, something which allows them to express their love for each other. When they are finally caught by Ashok, Sita makes a remark that proves particularly significant in order to show that sexuality, and

homosexuality, especially, are taboo issues for Indian society: 'There is no word in our language that can describe what we are, how we feel for each other.' (*Fire* 01:29:35) In *Fire*, the homosexual relationship between Radha and Sita is one of the main issues. By means of Sita's statement, it becomes clear that same-sex relationships are generally not accepted in India. Homosexuality has been silenced in India for a long time. Thus it can hardly be perceived or decoded by the heterosexual mind. By explicitly making this issue a subject of her film, however, Deepa Mehta forces the dialogue and thus forces people to talk about the matter. A result of the release of the film in India in 1998 was a heated debate, which even led to violent attacks, between two parties. On the one hand, there were those who regarded the issue of homosexuality as a natural human drive and who thus argued in favour of showing the film. On the other hand, Shiv Sena followers, especially, demanded the immediate withdrawal of the film from all cinemas, as, according to them, lesbianism was not an issue that concerned Indian society. (Bachmann 234) The film therefore managed to spark off "India's first major public discussion about lesbianism" (235), which may be a first step towards a more liberal attitude on the issue or at least towards the possibility of an open dialogue.

Nevertheless, sexuality is generally a taboo issue in Indian society and only desired and considered appropriate within marriage in order to ensure procreation (Lamb, *Saris* 188). In *Fire*, Ashok's character is truly representative of this prevailing Indian attitude. He has adopted this attitude from his swamiji, who confirms this position of sexuality in India by stating that '[t]he only reason to have a sexual relationship is to have sons that will carry on the family name' (*Fire* 01:22:20). The reason why Ashok no longer engages in sexual intercourse with his wife is her infertility, which, according to his as well as his swamiji's opinion, renders sexual intercourse superfluous. As a result, Ashok expects his brother Jatin to properly fulfil his duties as a husband and to produce offspring for the family. According to Ashok, it is thus not necessarily sexuality itself that is frowned upon but rather desire, which 'is the root of all evil' (*Fire* 00:14:15). Thus, sexuality is in fact performed, preferably within marriages; however, it is nothing one openly

talks about. This is the reason why Ashok never manages to actually pronounce words such as 'sex' but rather uses euphemisms or paraphrases and talks about one's 'duty as a husband' (*Fire* 00:22:55).

It was argued above that not only sexuality is innate, but also the general tendency to control it. Radha, after finding out about her infertility, is forced into celibacy, whereas Ashok voluntarily practices self-control according to Gandhian principles, i.e. "as a form of regulated rather than repressed sexuality" (J. Desai 165). Hence, one can notice the urge to control and regulate sexuality within Indian society, which has its roots in history. However, one must not forget that Ashok's celibacy, i.e. the controlling and regulation of his sexual desires, are voluntary. This is not the case for Radha's sexual life as she is forced into celibacy by her husband's decision. The vow of celibacy that Ashok makes means for Radha that she is not even allowed to touch him in order to console him after his fight with Jatin. When she puts her hand on his shoulder, he simply takes it and places it back on her lap. Radha, thus, is not even allowed the slightest contact with her husband's body. (*Fire* 00:23:50) Even though Ashok is aware that the situation is difficult for his wife – as is visible in the following comment: 'Forgive me, Radha. My choices have made life difficult for you' (*Fire* 00:23:55), he does nothing to change their relation and thus to make her feel better.

Women's sexuality needs to be controlled especially and is, if at all, clearly to be placed within marriage only, just as the scholar Kishwar argues (209). The fact that sexual intercourse by female members of Indian society is only accepted within a marriage can further be seen in Jatin and Sita's relationship. As was already pointed out earlier, Jatin expects Sita to still be a virgin, whereas he, on the other hand, does not make a secret of his relationship to Julie and consequently openly displays his sexual experience. It needs to be emphasised again in this context that obviously only female sexuality needs to be regulated and controlled, whereas men are allowed to be sexually experienced when they enter marriage. This is one aspect in Mehta's film that is fiercely criticised. A further argument is the fact that the

two sisters-in-law engage in a homosexual relationship, which, for many, is even less acceptable than an extramarital but heterosexual affair. Upadhya interprets the lesbian relationship between Radha and Sita as functioning “as a model of resistance to male control of female sexuality, a model that is open to all women, homosexual or heterosexual” (qtd. in Bachmann 237). However, lesbianism is not only about resisting male control, as this view depicts homosexuality as ‘unnatural’ and again validates the strength of heterosexuality as the norm.

According to the results of Lamb’s studies, which were mentioned earlier, the majority of Indians believes that there is a stronger chance for women to get involved in an extramarital affair than for men. The fact that most people have in fact made the opposite experience in their own lives does not change this assumption in any way. Also the film *Fire* does not necessarily help to correct the issue; yet, the circumstances of the two women need to be taken into account before confirming any prejudices. Both women are neglected by their husbands and are therefore, not only sexually but also personally, not fulfilled in their marriages. The neglecting behaviour of their respective partners causes them to seek the closeness of someone else. J. Desai argues that “[w]omen, caught within the repressive structure of the family, can seek only solace and love in each other for lack of a better alternative” (162). What Deepa Mehta is trying to convey is that “the film is about choices, rather than about lesbianism” (172), “[a]nd within that, a certain, very important aspect of it is about a choice that they make, which is a lesbian choice” (Interview by Kass Banning with Deepa Mehta qtd. in Levitin, *Introduction* 278). Radha and Sita therefore choose each other in trying to find a way out of their misery.

As has been indicated above, the relationship between Jatin and Sita stands in sharp contrast to that of Radha and Sita. The two sisters-in-law bond immediately after their first encounter. They massage each other’s feet, an act that is extremely interesting, regarding Uberoi’s comment that feet are “erotic objects of the camera’s/the male gaze” (116), i.e. in this case of the female gaze (*Fire* 00:55:24). Giving each other the tenderness and erotic

feelings that they are missing in their relationships, the two women slowly come closer to each other and develop an affectionate relationship. Furthermore, they oil each others' hair and it can generally be said that their relationship is characterised by closeness and intimacy. Their sexual activities are affectionate and tender and depicted in more detail than those of Jatin and Sita.

The only scene of nudity in the film takes place between Radha and Sita. In this scene, what further produces a romantic atmosphere are the nets hanging from the ceiling, functioning as veils. (*Fire* 01:27:15) According to Uhl, in mainstream Hindi films, veiled female bodies are said to have a more arousing effect than entirely naked bodies. In *Fire*, Mehta mixes nude scenes with those in which the women's bodies are partly hidden behind the veils and thus creates a romantic and erotic sensation between the two sisters-in-law.

If one compares *Fire* to *K3G*, which uses a number of symbols and innuendos to convey sexuality, sexual scenes seem to be shown very explicitly in *Fire*. Nevertheless, the film also makes clear that generally, sexuality is considered a taboo topic in Indian society, as mentioned above. The sexual scenes that are depicted in the film are not only those between the married couple Jatin and Sita, but also those between Radha and Sita. Especially the latter sequences include kissing on the lips and even nudity (*Fire* 01:27:50). It was argued earlier that kissing scenes in films are in fact permitted but usually not shown. Scenes of nudity, in contrast, are prohibited by law to be depicted in films (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Narrative* 28). Even though *Fire* shows explicit scenes of sexuality, it nevertheless managed to get through the strict censorship codes. Hence, it seems as if the Board of Censors has not been as strict when releasing this film, as it is conventionally with other Indian films.

Binford claims that many "New Cinema films have tested and sometimes extended the boundaries of censorship, especially in relation to politically and socially sensitive subjects [...]" (153). *Fire* can be said to be one of these films that have challenged the rules of censorship and managed to be put on

the Indian market. In some of these cases, as Binford further argues, “censorship liberalization has probably been eased by the fact that most New Cinema films reach only limited, minority audiences” (153). Deepa Mehta, as well as the Board of Censors thought that *Fire* would not reach the mainstream audiences in India; however, a heated debate arose over the film after its release. The fact that such a major discussion was not expected could thus be one of the reasons why such scenes of nudity were permitted. In addition to that, it was argued above that the Board of Censors has become more tolerant recently. An indicator for this could be the fact that *Fire* passes censorship even though it fiercely and explicitly criticises certain Indian conventions (arranged marriage, as well as certain religious traditions) and depicts homosexuality and nude scenes. However, the film was released with only few cuts. The only two demands were the change of Sita’s name to Nita (G. Patel 223) and the changing of the scene in which Mundu masturbates while watching the *Ramayana* (J. Desai 176). The fact that nothing else had to be changed, could to some extent also be due to the fact that it is partly a foreign film. Foreign films are only more easily released in India because they “depict a different kind of society where such things do not attract moral condemnation or censure” (Ghose 420); a fact that is, however, not true for *Fire*, as it portrays the life of an initially seemingly rather traditional Indian family.

One can see from the above discussion that the reasons for the initial release of the film are not entirely comprehensible. Some, Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray within others, opposes the film and blames the Board of Censors for having put the film on the market “hastily” (J. Desai 180). Thackeray claims that “such films should be made in the West as lesbianism does not suit India” (180) and that “lesbianism is a pseudo-feminist trend borrowed from the West and is no part of Indian womanhood” (Bachmann 239). Others strongly approve of the film and have done so right from the beginning, claiming that “the screening of the film should be allowed on the grounds of freedom of expression and an opposition to Hindu right-wing appropriation of women’s sexuality” (Gangoli 61). The heated discussions this film provoked can be said to go back to a certain fear of modernisation, a fear of the spread

of westernisation, and especially of lesbianism, as well as a fear of the decline of long-established Indian traditions and customs. Many people were alarmed and tried to prevent the spread of a sexually autonomous woman, a picture of the woman that Deepa Mehta supposedly presented in the film.

6 Conclusion

This thesis aims to analyse the most important themes and topics of the two Indian productions *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, by Karan Johar, and *Fire*, by Deepa Mehta. Even though the ways in which the films are made differ greatly from each other, the family, certain Indian traditions and the issue of love and sexuality could be identified as the main subjects of both films. The fact that all these themes are also crucial issues for the daily life of most Indians is considered the main reason for the choice of similar themes by both directors. Each chapter of this thesis thus first provides an introduction into the respective theme, i.e. the value of the family, of certain traditions and of love and sexuality, respectively, for Indian society in general are examined at the beginning of each chapter. This exploration of prevailing social conventions, with regard to the above mentioned themes, provides the framework for the analysis of the two films.

An investigation of prevailing family structures in India shows that the nuclear family type, i.e. parents and their unmarried children sharing a household, is the most common kinship structure in India. However, it is the joint family that is of highest social and personal value for the majority of people. Living together in a large, extended family is seen as providing the individual members with many advantages, the most important of which is social security. The protagonists of *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* form a nuclear family, i.e. the type of family structure that outnumbers the joint family. Nevertheless, the Raichands are presented as being very close to and important for each other. They highly value each member of the family and the temporary disruption causes great concern for everybody. Even though the two grandmothers do not live in the same house, they are constantly present. Thus, a picture of an extended family is depicted where there is in fact a nuclear family. This impression that is created reinforces the high value that is given to the joint kinship system in India, which is often feared to decline due to western- and modernisation. In *Fire*, on the other hand, the

kinship structure is clearly patrilineal and joint, and the film thus represents the 'ideal' picture of the Indian family. The two sisters-in-law both marry into their husband's household and come to live with them. However, Deepa Mehta challenges Indian family conventions, which results in the final breakup of the joint kinship system. It is furthermore interesting to note that in both films the authority remains, according to tradition, within the oldest male members of the family.

There are a number of Indian traditions that have found their way into the two films, one of which is the practice of arranged marriage. This practice is still prevailing within many parents in order to ensure an appropriate marriage partner for their children. In *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, Yash, as the person who exercises power over his family, means to arrange the marriage of his son Rahul. Yet, he finally needs to accept his son's love marriage to a girl from a lower social stratum. Also the two marriages in *Fire* were arranged and fail in the end. Both films therefore point towards a process of modernisation that slowly substitutes arranged by love marriage also in India. Further traditional aspects that are addressed in the films are the role of the mythologicals *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, which are reflected in various situations in both films and provide underlying stories for the films, and certain religious festivities. In *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* it is Diwali, the festival of lights, which is the most important spiritual celebration in the film, but also Karva Chauth plays a crucial role. Diwali, especially, stands for the togetherness of the family and is thus a crucial element of the film. In *Fire*, Karva Chauth is granted more attention, as it marks the point in which Radha and Sita come closer to each other and start turning away from their husbands.

Finally, love and sexuality, which are generally considered taboo issues in India, are important themes in the films. Karan Johar in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* uses a number of innuendos, symbols and metaphors in order to implicitly portray sexual attraction and intercourse. Censorship does not allow for a mainstream Hindi film to explicitly show such scenes. Deepa Mehta, on the other hand, challenges these rules and conventions and scenes of nudity

and sexual acts can be directly observed by the audience. Nevertheless, it remains clear to the viewer that sexuality is a taboo issue and nothing to be openly talked about. As a result of her showing such scenes, *Fire* was fiercely criticised by certain groups of people in India and cinemas had to withdraw their films from the screens.

At first sight, the two films appear to show entirely different characteristics. Whereas *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* is a film that features many elements that are traditionally considered mainstream Hindi elements, *Fire* can rather be allocated to Indian art or diasporic cinema, which departs from traditional ways of filmmaking. Nevertheless, there can be identified certain similarities. This is especially visible in the choice of themes, which are similar in both films. The ways of realising them, on the other hand, are individual and implemented differently by the two directors.

7 German Abstract

Die vorliegende Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit den beiden indischen Filmen *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (Regisseur Karan Johar, 2001) und *Fire* (Regisseurin Deepa Mehta, 1996) sowie mit den Themen die die Filmemacher in ihren beiden Produktionen behandeln. Obwohl Karan Johar und Deepa Mehta durch sehr unterschiedliche Arten Filme zu machen charakterisiert sind, lassen sich klare Übereinstimmungen bei den Hauptthemen ihrer Filme erkennen. So spielen vor allem die Familie, indische Traditionen und die Liebe und Sexualität in beiden Produktionen eine wichtige Rolle. Während die Wahl der Themen daher einerseits sehr ähnlich erscheint, zeigen sich in deren Umsetzung andererseits nicht nur Ähnlichkeiten sondern auch grundlegende Unterschiede.

Die Grundlage der einzelnen Kapitel, von welchen sich jedes mit einem der oben genannten Themen befasst, bildet eine Analyse der jeweiligen Themen und deren Relevanz für die indische Gesellschaft. So wird zuerst die Familie mit ihren typischen Strukturen, sowie ihrer Rolle in der Gesellschaft analysiert. Doch auch alte indische Traditionen wie die arrangierte Heirat, das wiederholte Rezitieren von spirituellen Mythen (wie unter anderem das *Mahabharata* oder *Ramayana*) oder das Feiern bestimmter religiöser Festlichkeiten sind sowohl für die Bevölkerung als auch für die Filme von großer Bedeutung. Letztendlich beschäftigt sich diese Arbeit mit den Themen Liebe und Sexualität, welche in Indien zumeist als Tabuthemen gesehen werden. Dieses grundlegende Wissen, das sich der Leser oder die Leserin in diesem jeweils ersten Teil der Kapitel aneignet, wird in Folge auf die beiden Filme umgelegt. Es wird analysiert, in wie weit die Produktionen den Umgang der Gesellschaft mit den Themen ‚Familie‘, ‚Indische Traditionen‘ und ‚Liebe und Sexualität‘ reflektieren, in welcher Hinsicht sich Gemeinsamkeiten zeigen und worin sie sich unterscheiden.

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