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The Economies of Love: Love Marriage, Kin Support and Aspiration in a South Indian Garment City

Abstract

The paper considers narratives and experiences of love marriage in the garment city of Tiruppur in Tamil Nadu, south India. As a booming centre of garment production, Tiruppur attracts a diverse migrant workforce of young men and women who have plenty of opportunity to fall in love and enter marriages of their own making. Based on long-term ethnographic research, the paper explores what love marriages mean to those involved, how they are experienced and talked about, and how they shape post-marital lives. Case studies reveal that a discourse of loss of post-marital kin support is central to evaluations of love marriages by members of Tiruppur's labouring classes. Such marriages not only flout parental authority and often cross caste and religious boundaries, but they also jeopardise the much needed kin support that youngsters need to fulfil aspirations of mobility, entrepreneurship and success in a post-liberalisation environment. It is argued that critical evaluations of love marriages not only disrupt modernist assumptions of linear transformations in marital practices, but they also constitute a broader critique of the neoliberal celebration of the 'individual' while reaffirming the continued importance of caste endogamy, parental involvement and kin support to success in India's post-reform economy.

Introduction: studying love and love marriage among India's working classes¹

In a recent review Donner writes that 'romantic courtship and companionate marriage are not social givens that appear with modernity, but they represent narratives which situate social actors in relation to modernity'.² While in India love marriages have been considered a sign of modernity, accompanied by practices of romantic courtship and close conjugal bonds, such representations reflect misleading assumptions about linear transitions and wrongly suggest the prevalence of uniform practices and values across the socio-economic ladder. Rather, as romantic love and companionate marriage have become increasingly global ideals,³ scholars have begun to ask how they are 'variously localized in ways that disrupt older social transformations'⁴ and made to fit with particular class practices and aspirations in the context of post-liberalisation India.

Kishwar already challenged the idea that love marriages simply reflect a progressive practice in opposition to the traditional arranged marriage, from the perspective of a feminist interested in the empowerment of women and the agency

¹ The research upon which this paper is based was supported by an ESRC-DfID research grant (RES-167-25-0296). I am grateful to Priya, Arul and Muthu for research assistance in the field. The paper was presented at the European Conference for South Asian Studies in Lisbon, 2012, and benefited from comments by the participants. Thanks also to Grace Carswell, Henrike Donner, Chris Fuller, Filippo Osella, Jonathan Parry and Gonçalo Santos for detailed feedback. All shortcomings remain my own.

² Donner, H. (2012). Love and Marriage, Globally. *Anthropology of This Century* Vol. 4, May 2012.

³ Hirsch, J. S. and H. Wardlow. (2006). *Modern Loves: The Anthropology of Romantic Courtship and Companionate Marriage*, University of Michigan Press, Michigan.

⁴ Thomas, L.M. and J. Cole. (2009). 'Introduction: Thinking through Love in Africa' in Cole, J. and Thomas, L.M., *Love in Africa*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p.4.

afforded by different types of marriage.⁵ More recently, Grover has argued for the need to understand the meanings and impacts of love marriages for those involved by shifting the enquiry onto the post-marital phase, during which emotional, practical and material developments shape men and women's experiences of the marriage they entered.⁶ Grover's own research focused on women's lived experiences of love marriages and arranged marriages, and reveals that rather than constituting opposing categories, post-marital conjugal relations always 'elicit complex and heterogeneous responses from natal kin'.⁷ Such responses in turn shape women's experiences of marital life as well as their evaluations of self-chosen unions. In the case of Grover's research on low-income settlements in Delhi, she found that 'the type of marriage into which a woman enters affects her access to post-marital support'⁸ and that the nature and extent of post-marital kin support were crucial in shaping women's experiences of marital life and of the marriage they had entered into.⁹ One particularly interesting conclusion of Grover's study is that love marriages were less likely to result in marital breakdown and divorce in the colonies she studied, not because there was more gender equality or women were more empowered, but because in such marriages women are more likely to be 'deprived of the option of seeking parental shelter and support'.¹⁰

In this paper I pay heed to Grover's call to shift attention to the post-wedding phase of love marriages and explore how parental approval and kin support are central to the shaping of a couple's post-marital lives.¹¹ I consider people's narratives and lived experiences of love marriages in Tiruppur, a thriving garment manufacturing city in western Tamil Nadu that has boomed uninterrupted following economic reform in the 1980s and trade liberalisation in the 1990s.¹² The focus is on Tiruppur's working classes, which consist of locals, temporary migrants, commuters and settled migrants. These working classes are made up of men and women from a variety of caste and religious backgrounds, including a sizeable proportion of lower castes and Dalits. While most are Tamilians, the workforce includes a growing group of migrants from both neighbouring states and further away. In what follows, I examine how love marriages come about and are experienced as well as the ways in which they are talked about and evaluated among members of this urban working class. While much of the literature on love marriages has analysed them from a women's perspective,

⁵ Kishwar, M. (1994). Love and Marriage. *Manushi*, 80, 11-19.

⁶ Grover, S. (2009). Lived experiences: Marriage, notions of love, and kinship support amongst poor women in Delhi. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 43:1, 1-33.

⁷ Grover, Lived experiences, p.1.

⁸ Grover, *Marriage, Love, Caste and Kinship Support*, p.10.

⁹ Grover, Lived experiences, p.5.

¹⁰ Grover, *Marriage, Love, Caste and Kinship Support*, p. 10.

¹¹ This paper is based on long-term ethnographic research carried out over a total of more than 20 months since 2000 in and around the city of Tiruppur in Tamil Nadu. The research included, among other methods, extensive semi-structured interviewing, the collection of detailed life histories and different forms of participant-observation in garment factories.

¹² Corbridge, S., J. Harriss and C. Jeffrey. (2013). *India Today: Economy, Politics and Society*. Polity Press, Cambridge (Ch. 2).

this paper seeks to complement current research from the perspective of men talking about and living through love marriages (although a woman's voice is presented too). It explores love marriages with reference to similar issues of post-marital support and assistance as discussed by Grover in the context of low-class women's experiences in Delhi.¹³

Furthermore, it is argued that a study of love marriages provides valuable insights into people's engagement with – and critique of – contemporary values of individualism, entrepreneurship and 'enterprise culture' that drive much of India's post-liberalisation economy.¹⁴ Indeed, Tiruppur garment workers evaluate marriages in terms of the 'family support' and material assistance they enable or put at risk. They emphasise that in order to be successful in post-liberalisation Tiruppur, one needs to mobilise as much parental and kin support as possible, and the arranged (endogamous) marriage is seen as the best guarantee to access such parental approval and material support. Young men's narratives and experiences of post-marital life thus project a view of the arranged marriage as better suited to the demands and pressures of India's contemporary 'enterprise culture'. Love marriages, by contrast, are presented *and* experienced as undermining one's chances of obtaining the kin support that is so much needed to achieve 'success'. As such, men's accounts constitute a broader comment on the persistent importance of caste endogamy, parental involvement and post-marital kin support to individual success, particularly in a contemporary economic climate that extols upward mobility, entrepreneurship and personal betterment. What they say is that you can't actually pull yourself up by your own bootstraps and that behind every successful man is a stable marriage and a supportive family. The experiences of love marriages presented here thus produce a rather conservative sense of self, one that is embedded within family relations and support networks and that acknowledges the importance of kin support to success and mobility. Put differently, popular representations of love marriages and post-marital lives engender a kind of ideological rejection of the neoliberal concept of the autonomous, enterprising 'individual', or of contemporary notions of success that value individual achievement over wider kin and caste support networks.¹⁵

But let us first situate the love marriage within south India's wider matrimonial landscape. Popular discourse in Tiruppur, as elsewhere in India, presents marriages in largely dichotomous terms of arranged versus love, and this oppositional conceptualisation continues to exert a powerful influence on how marriages are assessed and experienced by those involved.¹⁶ Arranged marriages 'are typically caste-endogamous alliances initiated by parents',¹⁷ involving family, and accompanied by ever increasing gifts of gold, cash and other commodities. Love

¹³ Grover, *Marriage, Love, Caste and Kinship Support*, p.2-3.

¹⁴ Gooptu, N. (ed.) (2013). *Enterprise Culture in Neoliberal India: Studies in Youth, Class, Work and Media*, Routledge, Oxford; Plummer, K. (1994). *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds*, Routledge, London.

¹⁵ Gooptu, N. (2013). 'Introduction' in Gooptu, N. *Enterprise Culture in Neoliberal India: Studies in Youth, Class, Work and Media*, Routledge, Abingdon.

¹⁶ Donner, H. (2002). "One's own marriage": Love marriages in a Calcutta neighbourhood. *South Asia Research*, 22:1, 79-94; Donner, Love and Marriage, Globally; Grover, Lived Experiences.

¹⁷ Grover, *Marriage, Love, Caste and Kinship Support*, p.3.

marriages, by contrast, 'are self-chosen unions preceded by pre-marital relationships based on love, which may or may not contravene caste-endogamy norms'¹⁸ and which may or may not get parental approval. The Tamil terms used are *kalyaanam* (marriage) for the normative or arranged marriage, and *kaadal kalyaanam* (love marriage) for its opposite form, for which usually the English 'love marriage' is used. This popular dichotomous representation echoes what Donner found among urban middle-class groups in Calcutta, where love marriages are perceived in opposition to the arranged norm and called 'one's own marriage' or, in Grover's terms, 'self-chosen union'.¹⁹

However, the reality and diversity of marital arrangements cannot be captured by this simple dichotomy, and variations on the ideal-types are many. What has now come to be known as the 'love-cum-arranged marriage' constitutes an increasingly important in-between form, in which partners select each other and initiate the marriage but where parental approval and involvement - usually marked by a conventional family wedding and gift exchanges - turns the marriage into the normative alliance it is supposed to be. Such parental approval is likely to be given when caste-endogamy is observed and the alliance makes good economic sense, that is, when the status aspirations of the families involved are not challenged by the union. Even though the couple may have chosen each other, they will have obtained parental consent, even if only after protracted arguments and disagreements. This parental approval - albeit after the event - is what makes love-cum-arranged marriages resemble arranged marriages in that - crucially - the alliance is ultimately accepted by the respective families, a wedding is organised with parental involvement, gifts are exchanged, and the couple enjoys the support from kin on both sides.²⁰ Very often, parents have a strong interest in turning such self-chosen unions into marriages that can formally be presented as 'arranged', especially when caste endogamy has been respected and when aspirations of class and status are not jeopardised. Approval might also follow when parents are presented with a pregnancy and a hurriedly arranged marriage can prevent the families from losing face. Moreover, parents under financial duress - of which there are many among Tiruppur's labouring classes - tend to be more inclined to turn a self-chosen union into a 'love-cum-arranged marriage' as it may allow them to keep down the size of the dowry and the cost of the wedding. In Tiruppur, such love-cum-arranged marriages are usually not publicly presented as 'love marriages' at all, but rather as 'arranged' or approved marriages. They also attract much less comment later on as post-marital lives resemble those of the arranged marriage. This differs quite strongly from what Grover found in Delhi slum settlements, where love-cum-arranged marriages are more like love than arranged marriages in their consequences for post-marital lives.²¹

Fuller and Narasimhan, on the other hand, use the term 'companionate marriages' to refer to the rise of a type of marriage among middle-class Tamil Vattima

¹⁸ Grover, *Marriage, Love, Caste and Kinship Support*, p.3.

¹⁹ Donner, 'One's own marriage', p. 83; Grover, *Marriage, Love, Caste and Kinship Support*, p.3.

²⁰ Donner, 'One's own marriage'; Fuller, C.J. and H. Narasimhan. (2008). Companionate Marriage in India: The Changing Marriage System in a Middle-Class Brahman Subcaste. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 14:4, 736-54.

²¹ Grover, *Marriage, Love, Caste and Kinship Support*, p. 207.

Brahmans, in which couples try to find out whether they will be congenial companions in marriage without necessarily selecting each other or ‘falling in love’ before marriage.²² This form of ‘companionate marriage’ and the courtship that proceeds it have become increasingly popular among the wealthier Gounder families in Tiruppur too, but they are much less prevalent among the city’s labouring classes.²³ The romantic unions and love marriages among Tiruppur’s working communities often flout the ideal of caste endogamy, cross religious boundaries, and disregard parental authority as well as differences of wealth and status. Such marriages remain impossible for parents to approve of, neither can they be turned into a ‘love-cum-arranged’ format that obtains family consent. They often result in a long-term break with the families on one or both sides.

It is this love marriage that fuels debate in Tiruppur today and that is seen as highly transgressive. Such love marriages defy the patrilineal and patrilocal norms of south Indian kinship relations,²⁴ and go against the status aspirations and elaborate gift exchanges that accompany normative marriage practices in south India today. While obviously being driven by members of wealthier caste groups and with the amount of dowry varying substantially according to a family’s economic standing, today the giving of dowry has become a widespread, normative practice in Tamil Nadu.²⁵ Recent research by Srinivasan has shown that the arranged marriage form, marked by soaring dowries and ever-increasing status competition, has become the norm across castes and classes in south India.²⁶ The local use of ‘dowry’ includes both *stridhanam* or gift to the bride, and ‘bridegroom-price’ or gifts paid to attract a suitable partner.²⁷ Paying dowry has become a key strategy across social groups for attaining and expressing wealth and status in a context marked by rapid economic change, rising aspirations and competitive consumption. With status itself being a premium social value, arranged marriages and rising dowries have become the vehicles for acquiring ‘status and prestige, high life-style, and mobility’.²⁸ Crucially, love marriages forgo any gift exchange at the time of marriage and are thus also excluded from the status and wealth increases that any such exchanges may produce.

Tiruppur: a post-liberalisation working environment

²² Fuller and Narasimhan, *Companionate Marriage in India*, p.748.

²³ De Neve, G. (2011). “‘Keeping it in the family’: work, education and gender hierarchies among Tiruppur’s industrial capitalists’. Donner, H. *Being Middle-Class in India: A way of life*, Routledge, Abingdon.

²⁴ Kapadia, K. (1995). *Siva and Her Sisters: Gender, Caste and Class in Rural South India*, Westview Press, Boulder.

²⁵ Srinivasan, Daughters or Dowries?; Srinivasan, S. and Bedi, A.S. (2007). Domestic Violence and Dowry: Evidence from a South Indian Village. *World Development*, 35:5, 857-880.

²⁶ Srinivasan, S. (2005). Daughters or Dowries? The Changing Nature of Dowry Practices in South India. *World Development*, 33:4, 593-615.

²⁷ Caplan, L. (1984). Bridegroom Price in Urban India: Class, Caste and ‘Dowry Evil’ Among Christians in Madras. *MAN*, 19:2, 216-33.

²⁸ Srinivasan, Daughters or Dowries?, p.603.

Located in India's southern state of Tamil Nadu, Tiruppur produces readymade knitted garments (T-shirts, pyjamas, etc) for both domestic and export markets, selling itself as the 'knitwear capital' of India. The Tiruppur region forms one of the largest garment manufacturing clusters in South Asia today, having grown consistently since the early 1970s. Annual exports from Tiruppur were valued in 2009-10 at around \$2.5 billion, making it a prime foreign exchange earner. Estimates suggest that there are at least 7,000-8,000 production units in Tiruppur, employing more than 400,000 workers, but real employment numbers may well be higher. Over the last two decades, the city massively expanded from a population of 235,661 in 1991 to 444,543 in 2011, while the wider urban agglomeration grew even faster in the last decade from 550,826 residents in 2001 to an impressive 962,982 in 2011, making it the 5th largest urban agglomeration in Tamil Nadu.²⁹ With a population rise of 28.7% in 2001-2011, Tiruppur district had the second highest population growth rate in the state, only just below that of the Chennai region.³⁰

Much of this growth is accounted for by a large and continuous influx of migrants attracted by Tiruppur garment jobs as well as by rising employment opportunities across the district.³¹ While in the early days the workforce mainly consisted of locals born and brought up in Tiruppur itself, the town began to attract workers from the rural hinterland during the 1950s and 60s, and longer distance migrants from the southern districts from the 1970s onwards.³² Our survey of 300 Tiruppur garment workers, conducted in 2008-9, revealed that by far the majority (74%) were migrants (including settled and more recent migrants, and migrants from within and outside the state), while 9% were commuting from the area around Tiruppur, and 17% were from Tiruppur itself.

Today, Tiruppur is a crowded city with an increasingly diverse labour force. While the majority of migrant workers come from within the state, they hail from a variety of religious and caste backgrounds. Some sections of the industry, like knitting and dyeing, tend to recruit workers from low-caste communities, other sections such as the garment units - where cloth is cut, sewn, checked and packed – recruit across religion, caste and class groups. The garment shop floor is therefore a very mixed social space, with Tamils, Malayalees and Manipuris working side by side. Garment units recruit men and women in equal numbers, and while either gender may dominate particular production spaces, most workplaces are gender-mixed with men

²⁹ Census of India. (2011). Available at: http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/paper2/data_files/India2/Table_3_PR_UA_Cities_1Lakh_and_Above.pdf; http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/prov_data_products_tamilnadu.html [Accessed 18 October 2013] ; Census of India (2001). Available at: http://www.censusindia.gov.in/towns/tn_towns.pdf [Accessed 18 October 2013].

³⁰ Census of India. (2011). Available at: http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/prov_data_products_tamilnadu.html [Accessed 18 October 2013].

³¹ Carswell, G. (2013). Dalits and Local Labour Markets in Rural India: Experiences from the Tiruppur Textile Region in Tamil Nadu. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 38:2, 325-338; De Neve, G. (2014). Entrapped Entrepreneurship: Labour Contractors in the South Indian Garment Industry. *Modern Asian Studies*, 38:5, 1302-1333.

³² Chari, S. (2004). *Fraternal Capital: peasant-workers, self-made men and globalization in provincial India*, Stanford University Press, Stanford; De Neve, G. (2003). Expectations and rewards of modernity: Commitment and mobility among rural migrants in Tirupur, Tamil Nadu. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 37:1&2, 251-280.

and women working alongside each other, especially on the tailoring lines, which form the ethnographic setting of this paper.

Not only do factories attract a mixed labour force, so does the wider urban agglomeration where thousands of migrants have settled over the last decades. Some come and go for periods varying from a few months to several years, while others settle permanently in the city and its peri-urban surroundings. The majority of garment workers live in what are locally known as ‘workers’ lines’, or lines of one-room houses built by employers and local landlords for the migrant labour force. These workers’ lines are crammed places, equipped with only very basic shared amenities, where often large families live in close proximity to each other. Like the factories themselves, these lines are mixing places for migrant workers of different regional and social backgrounds. Married workers tend to live in nuclear households, usually consisting of a couple and their unmarried children, and they often live near their parents or siblings. While some migrants have relatives living in town, many have not. It is common in Tiruppur to see both married women and unmarried daughters employed in garment work.³³ The ideal of the male breadwinner, however, remains strong and workers who manage to climb up the ladder and establish themselves as contractors, or in rarer cases as manufacturers, always seek to withdraw their wives from paid employment, even though they may still recruit them to work either at home or in their own unit.³⁴ Unmarried male migrants typically share accommodation with friends and co-workers, while single female workers are usually provided rooms by their employers or live in the hostels of larger companies. Tiruppur is thus a typical example of those working and living environments that provide young men and women with ample opportunity to mingle prior to marriage, and where parents have little control over the movements of their sons and daughters across the city and workplaces.³⁵ While it is not possible to provide numbers of love marriage rates in Tiruppur, its prevalence is certainly high and every garment worker I spoke to knew of at least one love marriage in their extended family or knew at least one friend or co-worker who had entered a self-chosen union.

Moreover, contemporary expectations of upward mobility through entrepreneurial success intensify pressures on young men and women, whether single or married, to go out and work, even if it involves employment in companies and at hours that might compromise women’s dignity and their family status. Like other special export zones and thriving industrial clusters, Tiruppur is a prototypical child of India’s economic reform.³⁶ It is the product of fast-track economic growth - stimulated by liberalisation

³³ Carswell, G. and De Neve, G. (2014). T-Shirts and tumblers: caste, dependency and work under neo-liberalisation in South India. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 48:1, 103-131.

³⁴ Vera-Sanso, P. (1995). Community, seclusion and female labour force participation in Madras, India. *Third World Planning Review*, 17:2, 155-167; Lessinger, J. (2002). Work and Love: the Limits of Autonomy for Female Garment Workers in India. *Anthropology of Work Review*, 23:1&2, 13-18; Osella, C. and Osella, F. (2006). *Men and Masculinities in South India*, Anthem Press, London; De Neve, Entrapped Entrepreneurship.

³⁵ Shah, A. (2006). The Labour of Love: Seasonal migration from Jharkhand to the brick kilns of other states in India. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 40:1, 91-118; for a discussion of similar spaces of male-female interaction in rural contexts, see Osella, F. and Osella, C. (1998). On flirting and friendship: micro-politics in a hierarchical society. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 4:2, 189-206.

³⁶ Cross, J. (2014). *Dream Zones: Anticipating Capitalism and Development in India*, Pluto Press, London.

policies and export dependency since the 1980s - and is built on the competitive advantage of cheap labour. Workers are attracted to the city and the industry by promises of making quick money and expectations of upward mobility, or what Cross has called an 'economy of anticipation'.³⁷ They are driven by aspirations of entrepreneurship and dreams of a better life, and do not easily shy away from hard work. However, while they seek to emulate the success of those who thrived in Tiruppur before them, they are faced today with the reality of a highly unpredictable employment market, low job security, and wages that fail to meet the high cost of living in the city. It is a place where many end up struggling. A few climb up the latter and establish themselves as contractors or, if they are very lucky, as manufacturers. Many merely manage to subsist on garment work by moving between short-term contracts and avoiding long periods of unemployment. A good number, finally, decide to return home after a few months or years in the city. In such a context, family support is crucial, not only to materialise one's more ambitious aspirations, but often just to make ends meet when income flows are irregular and unpredictable.

Tiruppur has become a place that the more sceptical commentators, and especially the locally better-off Gounder industrialists, bemoan as a site of immorality and decay, embodied in the social practices of lower caste migrants. Employers and factory owners routinely make sweeping statement like '50% of marriages in Tiruppur are love marriages' or 'in Tiruppur everyone just gets a love marriage these days'. This is usually followed by a commentary on the city's new working classes and how their sexual and marital practices form a threat to what industrialists perceive as 'traditional' Tamil family values. Love marriages, pre-marital sex, extra-marital affairs and prostitution are often mentioned in the same condemnatory breath. Moreover, local and state-level media are replete with reports on Tiruppur's high levels of violence (domestic and workplace-based), alcohol consumption, HIV-AIDS, indebtedness, bonded labour, and, perhaps above all, shocking numbers of suicide. These are commonly presented as the 'social ills' of Tiruppur and commented on in terms of the broader moral decline they represent. However, it is also a place where garment workers produce their own narratives of love and love marriages in order to give meaning to their working lives, produce their own critique of the post-reform transformations that engulf them, and express their own understanding of the role of marriage and family in struggles for mobility and success.

In what follows I sketch four vignettes of love, marriage and working lives among Tiruppur garment workers that illustrate some narratives and experiences of marriage and conjugality, as well as some of the idioms through which marital lives are recounted and made sense of. I start with Senthil, a man in his late twenties whose love marriage shaped much of his adult life.

Senthil and Sushila: The perils of a secret love marriage

Senthil worked as a labour contractor in a small export company in the centre of Tiruppur when I first met him in early 2009. Born and brought up in Tiruppur in a local high-status Naicker family, he was introduced to tailoring at a very young age while assisting his father after school and during holidays. At the age of 16, Senthil worked for a year in a hardware manufacturing company in Bangalore, but he soon

³⁷ Cross, *Dream Zones*, p. 1.

returned to Tiruppur to complete his schooling and at the age of 18 took up a job in a garment company as a skilled tailor. As a bright young man and with the support of his parents who encouraged him to carry on studying, he started a degree at Ooty's Government Arts College, from where he graduated in 2004 with a BA degree. On his return to Tiruppur all hell broke loose when he revealed, first to his older brother and then to his parents, that three years earlier he had married a Muslim woman with whom he had a three year old daughter!

It was late one evening that Senthil told me about the three loves of his life. After a couple of romantic flirtations that didn't lead to anything, he fell in deep love with a young Muslim woman who was to become his wife. 'I fell in love with Sushila when I was 18 and we were working in the same garment company. She was a tailor too. We used to work on the same line and we often had to talk to each other about the work, and so had plenty of opportunity to get to know each other!' Their encounter quickly turned into a serious relationship which they were both committed to. By the summer that same year they got married, just before Senthil left to Ooty to start his studies. As Sushila was already three months pregnant by that time, it was clear that marriage could no longer be postponed - they hastily tied the *tali* in a temple just outside Tiruppur. While Sushila's mother was aware of the pregnancy and the marriage, everything was kept from Senthil's parents out of fear of their reaction. The main reason for this is that Sushila comes from an impoverished Muslim family who had migrated to Tiruppur for work whilst Senthil belongs to the local higher caste Hindu Naicker community. Sushila's father had died and her mother and brother, like herself, had been forced to take up garment work in town. While Sushila's family disapproved of the way things had gone, her mother looked after her during her pregnancy and when her daughter was born. Senthil, on the other hand, left for college in Ooty immediately after the marriage but used college holidays to work and earn money for his wife and her family.

As soon as he completed his degree and returned to Tiruppur, he told his brother, who, completely flabbergasted, informed his parents of Senthil's marriage. His father's – and indeed entire family's - reaction was understandably one of disbelief, outrage and betrayal. 'If she had been of the same caste, they could have accepted it', Senthil explains, 'but a Muslim girl ...'. And that too an uneducated girl, from a poor migrant family from Madurai, who had lost her father at a young age and worked as a tailor in the industry. Upon hearing of the love marriage, all communication broke down between father and son, and on his return from Ooty in 2004 Senthil returned to work as a tailor to provide for his wife and daughter. Senthil not only lost all contact with his own family, but also his father's support, which he needed to establish himself as a tailor contractor in the industry. He ended up living with his wife and daughter in a small one-room flat next to his mother-in-law, in a poorly maintained government block.

For Kumarasamy, his son's love marriage shattered an already fragile dream 'to come up in life'. Coming from a well-respected local Naicker family, Kumarasamy himself worked for more than 40 years in garments, first as a tailor and later as a successful contractor. Over the years, he carefully invested his savings in land, on which he built workers' houses, and educated his two sons, for whom he had great plans. While initially he hoped to get his sons into government jobs, the donations asked for a police post amounted to a few hundred thousand rupees and so those hopes were quickly replaced with more realistic aspirations within the industry. Given the opportunities in Tiruppur and the garment skills they availed of, his next ambition was to enable his sons to set themselves up as labour contractors and

ultimately become manufacturers and exporters. This simple, yet increasingly hard to attain, transition from worker to employer remains probably the most powerful male dream in Tiruppur today.³⁸

Yet Kumarasamy ended up ‘not being lucky’, as he calls it. He openly admitted his disappointment to me and his sense that life is a perennial uphill struggle: ‘We have not come up in life’, he explains, ‘we have no luck (*adishtam illae*) and no money ... My brothers are all doing well, they all have their own garment companies and rice mills, and some of them have businesses worth Rs 50-100 million. Only we haven’t made it ... we haven’t had any luck! Nowadays one needs more than Rs 2 million to start up a company, but we haven’t got that.’ Senthil’s secret love marriage to a Muslim girl certainly caused a major set-back to his father’s plans, and is repeatedly mentioned by his father when he talks about having ‘no luck in life’. Kumarasamy does not hide his feelings about his sons. He repeatedly told me that Senthil shows little respect, and his defiance of parental authority is something Kumarasamy finds hard to forgive him for: ‘Senthil is a playful boy, he is not very serious, he doesn’t listen, ... but his older brother is very hard working and very serious ... he is looking after three contracts at the same time, and doing very well!’ Senthil’s brother, Rajan, was indeed managing several teams simultaneously and had acquired a name as a successful cutting contractor.

Kumarasamy always discussed Senthil’s marriage in opposition to that of his older son, who he pointed out had a ‘good’ marriage, that is, an arranged marriage. Rajan was married in 2007 to a woman from a nearby village whose parents have land and property. Because of this arranged marriage, Kumarasamy emphasised, Rajan now receives a lot of ‘support’ from his wife’s family, including money to buy a plot of land, which Rajan purchased in 2009 and on which he planned to build a house. Kumarasamy often repeated that support of one’s family - on both sides - is crucial for young couples to manage married life in Tiruppur. This support, he explained to me, ‘is something Senthil has not got, and that’s why he can’t come up in life.’ Senthil himself explained in very similar language that because of his love marriage, he and his wife get no support from either of their families and are therefore unable to buy a property or start up a business. While there is some truth in this, the lack of support from his wife’s family has as much to do with their own poverty. Senthil’s widowed mother-in-law and his still unmarried brother-in-law are struggling to keep their own heads above water, and have very little to pass on to Senthil anyway. Importantly, rhetoric and practice of family support do not necessarily dovetail, and much of the rhetoric itself reproduces norms rather than realities. As we will discuss below, even under arranged marriages family help does not always materialise, while not all love marriages necessarily result in the wholesome withdrawal of family support either, as we see in Senthil’s case below.

Once the news of his love marriage had reached his parents, all communication with Senthil stopped and Senthil did not see his family for over 3 years. By 2007, however, Senthil and his parents began to communicate again – much of it, as I understand, thanks to the mediation of his brother. Gradually, the relationship with his parents was restored, even though Kumarasamy told me that he never visits Senthil’s house and has no contact with Senthil’s in-laws. In any case, after a while

³⁸ Chari, S. (2004). *Fraternal Capital: peasant-workers, self-made men and globalization in provincial India*, Stanford University Press, Stanford; De Neve, G. (2003). Expectations and rewards of modernity: Commitment and mobility among rural migrants in Tirupur, Tamil Nadu. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 37:1&2, 251-280.

Senthil and his father began to work together as labour contractors. To do well as a labour contractor in Tiruppur, family support is indeed crucial and the chances of succeeding as a contractor are greatly enhanced if several family members pool their skills, expertise and resources.³⁹ Senthil acknowledges that his father's experience and support are vital to his own development, while his father similarly knows that he needs the education and energy of his sons to develop. By the time I got to know them in January 2009, Senthil and Kumarasamy were taking regular contracts in Modern Fashions, a small export company in the centre of Tiruppur, and they were working well together, with both Senthil's wife and mother joining in whenever they were short of tailors.

Kumarasamy's repeated statement that Senthil gets 'no help' from anyone as well as Senthil's own complaints that love marriages lead to a collapse of family relations form a strong and widely shared view in Tiruppur today, irrespective of whether they may in fact receive such support. While there is no doubt that Senthil's love marriage has made his own father much less forthcoming with financial assistance, Senthil does get important support from his father in a number of ways. One is help in managing the contracts – Senthil and his father jointly manage the contracts and the team of tailors they recruit. The other relates to the way in which the income from these contracts is divided: of the roughly Rs 4,000 per week that they earned in early 2009, only Rs 1,000 went to Kumarasamy, who explained 'I don't need more than that, but Senthil has more expenses, so he can keep it [the balance]!' Finally, despite an initial absolute break with his parents, Senthil is now interacting again with many members of his close and extended family.

So, why is the rhetoric so strong? Why do informants link love marriages with the removal of family support and the breakdown of family relationships? The rhetoric, I argue, reflects a number of issues that converge in love marriages. First, highly valued parental authority is flouted. Kumarasamy was hoping to marry Senthil to a cross-cousin whose father is a well-off mill owner, but Senthil's autonomous actions meant that these plans had to be discarded and that Kumarasamy lost face vis-a-vis his relatives. Second, love marriages cross customary boundary rules. Senthil's marriage was not just inter-caste, but it crossed religions too. In addition, Senthil had chosen a partner from a poor and low-status migrant background, who was considered most ill-suited by an aspirational local family. Senthil's self-chosen alliance was thus a union that his parents struggled to accept for many reasons. What Kumarasamy tried to get across is that if Senthil had had a 'proper' marriage (that is, arranged by parents, caste-endogamous, within their religion and with a family of equal economic status), the couple would have been able to enjoy the support of a much wider network of relatives on both sides, who would have been willing to collaborate in joint enterprises or lend money for new business ventures. Today, however, Senthil is struggling with parents who feel let down, an uncle upset about broken marriage plans for his daughter, and in-laws who struggle to sustain themselves, let alone help Senthil. The result is not so much a lack of immediate support from parents – as Senthil now gets his father's help anyway - but a foregoing of a much wider circle of trust, recognition and assistance that Senthil could have enjoyed had he not pursued his self-chosen union. In this sense, the narrative of family support is powerful precisely because it constitutes a narrative of a struggle for upward mobility in an environment that is competitive and uncertain and in which social relations and support networks remain key to any form of 'success'. While an arranged marriage

³⁹ Chari, *Fraternal Capital*; De Neve, *Entrapped Entrepreneurship*.

does not in itself provide an unconditional guarantee for family support, it is clear that a love marriage jeopardises those networks that are vital to prosper in a challenging post-liberalisation environment.

Soundaraj and Mohan: Contrasting marriage experiences

Soundaraj was 24 when I first met him in early 2009. He worked for his cousin, Mohan, a contractor who led the team of Singer tailors at Modern Fashions where also Senthil was employed at the time. When I first spoke to Soundaraj, he mentioned within minutes of talking about tailoring work: 'I had a love marriage!' He said it with a broad smile on his face, clearly to elicit a reaction. I asked him what had happened. Soundaraj had dropped out of school in class ten and started working in a steel workshop in Madurai, where his family was living. Next to the workshop lived a Muslim girl, Amira, who he got to know and fell in love with. His father found out about the courtship and gave him several warnings to drop the relationship. Belonging to the landed caste of Soliya Chettiyars and with his father as an experienced tailor, an inter-religious love marriage was out of the question. But Soundaraj ignored the warnings and went to register the marriage in the police office anyway, using a duplicate age certificate for his wife that stated that she was 18 when in fact she was only 17. He was already 22. Soundaraj was afraid that without such a certificate, his wife's family could file a case against him for kidnapping the girl.

It was a few days later that Soundaraj further elaborated on his love marriage, this time in the presence of his cousin, Mohan. He said his parents were furious on hearing he had eloped with Amira and they refused to help the newly married couple in any way. To get away from the accusations and arguments, Soundaraj decided to move to Tiruppur, where he had relatives. While his own father cut all contact with him, his uncle and his cousin (Mohan) who lived in Tiruppur helped him by teaching him tailoring, of which he had already learned the basics at home. He soon managed to earn a living in Tiruppur, which was much needed as his wife was about to have a baby. At the time I met Soundaraj, two years after the marriage, he was still in Tiruppur and continued to have only limited contact with his parents. Since the birth of his daughter, he had started visiting his parents again, but they still refused to accept the marriage. Neither does Amira go to see his parents in Madurai. Amira's parents too rejected the marriage, but as they were quite poor and without a regular job, her parents moved to Tiruppur too where her father now works in the packing section of a garment company. But work wasn't the sole reason for their move, Soundaraj is keen to point out, 'they wanted to keep an eye on me!' What is more, Amira's parents forced the young couple to live with them while at the same time refusing to speak to Soundaraj or to accept him as their son-in-law. Soundaraj says living with them is hell. Asked why they don't move out and live on their own, he replies: 'If you give me a room, I'll be there within a minute! But I can't afford to live on my own in Tiruppur, it's too expensive.' Moreover, with an 8 month old baby, he feels it would be too difficult to leave his wife on her own. But, he says, as soon as he is earning a little bit more, they will rent a place of their own and move out. But, he adds, 'we don't get any support from either side!' Asked what he means with 'no support', he explains that they get no financial help from any of their relatives. Amira's parents recently promised some money and gold but these are only words, he says. As with Senthil, a self-chosen union that defies caste and religious boundaries and sidesteps parental authority is bound to be met with fierce disapproval.

At this point Mohan intervenes and tries to explain by reflecting on his own situation: ‘Look, when I got married my wife got 12 sovereigns of gold and I got 2 sovereigns. I also received Rs 10,000 from my in-laws and from an aunt of mine I got Rs 15,000. When my daughter was born I got Rs 2,000 from my father, and so on.’ Mohan continued with a list of relatives who either had given him support at some point in the past or who he feels he can approach any time in case he is in need of help. Those relatives include not only his aunts and uncles on his parents’ side, but also his father-in-law and various relatives on his wife’s side. ‘That’, he stresses, ‘is what Soundaraj hasn’t got! Nobody will give him any support!’ And Soundaraj replied with an affirmative nod. While Soundaraj’s in-laws are helping his wife in her day-to-day routines by looking after the baby and cooking together, they are unwilling to give Soundaraj any financial support and keep a close eye on his movements. Back in Madurai, his own parents welcome him again in their house since his daughter was born, but they still refuse to accept his wife or to offer a helping hand. What remains completely beyond reach for Soundaraj and Amira is the sort of family support needed to establish themselves in Tiruppur and come up in life. Soundaraj and Mohan continued the conversation with reflections on how love marriages are received by parents and relatives. While they acceded that once there is a baby, parents often become a bit more accepting, they also agreed that love marriages are more easily accepted among poor and rich families, but that for ‘medium’ families - among which they included their own - they always pose a major issue. Soundaraj said that while love marriages are happening more often these days, they have not become more acceptable among ‘medium’ families, especially when they cross caste and religious boundaries. In a context where wider support networks are key to survival and upward mobility, as in the Tiruppur garment industry, love marriages risk jeopardising the support that kin may otherwise be able to offer. Given a second chance, Soundaraj concedes, he would go for an arranged marriage and never a love marriage again.

His cousin, Mohan, who I got to know very well during the course of my fieldwork, is a prototype of the post-liberalisation subject: hard working, ambitious and keen to improve himself through entrepreneurial activity. Key to this aspirations is family support, and Mohan considers his arranged marriage as central to accessing such support. Comparing himself with Senthil and Soundaraj, Mohan firmly believes that his arranged marriage is key to his life trajectory to date as well as to his future ambitions. Mohan’s family too came to Tiruppur from Madurai, where his father’s tailoring shop was losing business in the early 1990s and the family got into debt, not least because of his father’s continuous drinking. In his early 20s, Mohan was married to Shanti, a young woman from Madurai whose parents had also settled in Tiruppur more than 20 years earlier. Mohan sees his father-in-law as a crucial source of support, and, to some extent, with good reason. At the time of their wedding Mohan received both gold and cash, and he often points out to me that: ‘I would not have had this support if I had gone for a love marriage!’ These and other wedding gifts enabled Mohan to buy a motorbike and start as a labour contractor around the time of his wedding. The marriage and the exchanges that came with it allowed him to move up from tailor to contractor. Mohan’s father-in-law then told him that he would give him Rs 500,000 to start up his own business. In the end he was unable to cough up the money, but Mohan keeps mentioning a big real estate deal that his father-in-law is about to strike, and he remains confident that one day some money will come his way and allow him to start a business. Mohan therefore maintains excellent relationships with his in-laws, manifested in regular visits to them to pay

due respect, and, of course, to enquire about ‘the deal’. ‘My wife’s sister’, Mohan is keen to contrast, ‘had a love marriage, so they don’t get any support at all from my father-in-law!’

As a settled migrant, Mohan has a wide network of family support both in Tiruppur, where many of his relatives have moved to, and back in his native place in Madurai. As described elsewhere,⁴⁰ Mohan’s own career has had its ups and downs over the years, and he has moved back and forth between being a contractor and an ordinary tailor. However, when I met Mohan again at the end of 2011, he was doing well as a contractor in a larger company. He had moved out of the small one-room workers’ line in which he used to live and settled in a more spacious rented house with 2 large rooms, a bathroom, kitchen and outdoor courtyard. He proudly showed me around and said that the house was a sign of his ‘development’ and his increased status. He had already purchased 4 sewing machines and was hoping to start up his own unit some time soon. The money promised by his father-in-law had still not materialised, but it is clear that smaller bits of family support have helped him on his way.

Soundaraj and Mohan’s contrasting experiences of marriage allow us to reflect further on the links between rhetoric and experience. In many cases, popular narratives that associate arranged marriages with family support closely align themselves with actual post-marital experiences. Mohan as well as Senthil’s brother, Rajan, certainly did well at the time of their marriage and used the dowry gifts to establish themselves in the industry. While in Rajan’s case this was later followed up with further financial support to buy land, in Mohan’s case a long promised donation failed to materialise, yet he certainly has a wide kin network to appeal to whenever needed. Reversely, there is no doubt that the self-chosen unions of both Senthil and Soundaraj have restricted their support networks in a number of ways. Their self-made unions led to an immediate breakdown in family relations, they failed to benefit from the usual gift exchanges at the time of marriage – not in the least the increasingly substantial bridegroom price – and marrying into considerably poorer families further reduced rather than expanded their post-marital chances of affinal support. Even though Soundaraj did end up with the support of his extended kin in Tiruppur which allowed him to establish himself as a skilled tailor, and even though Senthil ended up reconciling with his parents and enjoying his father’s assistance as a labour contractor, both share an explicit bitterness about the post-marital hardships they suffered due to their self-made marriages. Both too contribute to the reproduction of a strong popular rhetoric about the importance of the arranged marriage to access vital support networks.

Such narratives reveal deep-seated fears about the loss of kin support in case of self-arranged marriages. They also reveal wider anxieties about class position, mobility, aspirations and social expectations in a context in which the market produces vulnerabilities and uncertainties that many find hard to cope with on their own. The narratives, thus, need to be read as commentaries on one’s place in the world. And, as commentaries, they constitute a powerful public rejection not so much of the contemporary ‘enterprise culture’ per se, but of its emphasis on autonomous, individual achievement rather than networked collaboration.⁴¹ Indeed, it is not the post-liberalisation, enterprising individual who is revered in young men’s narratives on marriage in Tiruppur. Rather, it is kin and friendship networks, parental approval and kin support that are presented as key to success in today’s competitive market.

⁴⁰ De Neve, *Entrapped Entrepreneurship*.

⁴¹ Goptu, ‘Introduction’.

Interestingly, while Senthil, Soundaraj and Mohan have all received various types of family support, their narratives define support in predominantly monetary terms, largely ignoring other forms of family assistance they enjoyed. This is itself a reflection of Tiruppur's enterprise culture in which progress and mobility – reflected in one's ability to earn more, rent a larger house or set up a bigger business – is increasingly conceived of and evaluated in monetary terms.

Jeganathan: Love at the margins of marriage

Love can interfere with life in Tiruppur in a number of different ways, as is transparent from Jeganathan's account of his time spent in Tiruppur. I met Jeganathan in Pusaripatti, his native village in Madurai district, to which he had just returned a few months earlier after 7 years in Tiruppur. As an experienced singer tailor trained in a retail shop in Madurai and a member of the landed Thevar community, Jeganathan took up work in Tiruppur in 2002 at the age of 23. 'More than 100 people from about 30 families in the village are now in Tiruppur', he explained, 'so I too got there following a village friend'. In 2003, he entered an arranged marriage with a girl from the same village whose parents were already based in Tiruppur. 'For several years, we were happy. We saved a lot and had a good life. But then I got into bad habits. In Tiruppur people earn a lot and spend a lot. I already drank in the village, and in Tiruppur I earned a lot so I drank even more. I earned Rs 500 per day, drank Rs 200 and gave Rs 300 to my wife.' Although he clearly earned well, the money disappeared quickly, and Jeganathan admits being won over by consumerist desires. 'I had strong desires. If I saw a cycle I wanted a cycle too, if I saw a motorbike, I wanted a motorbike too, and if I saw a car, I wanted a car too...! Like that I spent a lot and always wanted more.'

Apart from wasting a substantial part of his income on alcohol and various commodities, Jeganathan also got himself into a troublesome money lending business. He started to use the Rs 200,000 that he had saved in a chit fund (*seettu*) to lend money to people. For a while it went well, but soon he was taken advantage of by several people who never returned the money they borrowed from him. His business went down rapidly and he even ended up having to sell his Rs 36,000 motorbike for peanuts. Not only did he lose all his savings but he also got involved in many verbal and physical fights which ultimately left him feeling 'very ashamed (*kavala*)'. At some point, Jeganathan also started to work as a labour contractor, in the hope of making even more money, but he soon failed to manage the contracts and had to give this up too. This, he admits, was largely due to the many distractions in Tiruppur that took his attention away from work.

It was only in a later conversation that Jeganathan opened up about one particular distraction that affected his life in Tiruppur: 'I had to buy everything for my household but not just for one household but for two households... I kept another woman too and I spent a lot on her.' Having fallen in love with another woman and having kept her as a mistress, things deteriorated quickly at home. As the woman had no money, he spent large amounts on her rather than on his own wife and two daughters. 'Over a two-year period I spent more than Rs 80,000 on her. I used to have all the meals in my own house, but then instead of going to work, I used to go to her house... Sometimes I worked but often I was idle too.' Jeganathan considered this extra-marital relationship as one of the main causes of the mishaps that marked his life in Tiruppur. The upshot of it all was twofold. Once his wife found out about the relationship, she informed her own parents and her in-laws, who all urged Jeganathan

to leave Tiruppur and move back to the village. She herself packed up immediately and returned with the children to Pusaripatti, leaving Jeganathan behind in Tiruppur. The second outcome was a loss of reputation and trust, not so much because of the affair per se, but because he was also drinking, neglected his work and failed to look after his money lending business. ‘Once people found out’, Jeganathan told, ‘nobody trusted me anymore. Before I had a very good reputation (*nalla peyr*, a good name) and everyone used to trust me. But because of that contact, people lost all trust in me.’ Whether it is the affair itself that spoils his name is however a moot point. Extra-marital relationships, even where they are publicly known, do not necessarily spoil a person’s business name. However, Jeganathan’s simultaneous spendthrift, lack of diligence, and his negligence of job and money certainly turned him into an easy victim of deceit and disdain, which further accelerated his decline. His floundering reputation was no doubt also affected by a neglect of financial responsibilities towards his wife and daughters, which ultimately led to the withdrawal of his relatives’ sympathies too. In retrospect, Jeganathan himself associates his loss of reputation and success in Tiruppur with his love affair and with the ‘bad habits’ that accompanied it.

The sudden departure of his wife, mounting family pressures, and an intense feeling of shame (*kavala*) made him realise that he was about to lose everything he had. ‘I thought we should be doing well and earning properly again, and so I decided to return to the village and start up again over here. It was money that took me to Tiruppur, but now I am confident that I can make a good living and come up here itself.’ Having been overcome with shame, Jeganathan realised that he needed to work hard to salvage his reputation and regain the trust of those close to him, yet redeeming his name and leaving Tiruppur were not all that easy. He therefore stayed on for another 8 months during which he worked hard to settle his debts in Tiruppur and to save enough to re-start life in the village. As Tiruppur and Pusaripatti are closely connected through networks of kin, caste and migration, both good and bad news travels between these places at the speed of light. Migrants’ reputation - including their marital history - quickly spreads across places, and Jeganathan could not have hoped to regain people’s trust back in the village without making good in Tiruppur first. That is why he had to clear his debts before moving back to Pusaripatti. ‘People here knew about it all [the affair, the bad habits, etc] and no longer trusted me... But now they are telling me to be good again, and what saves me is the fact that I work hard again and have very good tailoring skills.’

Indeed, back in the village, Jeganathan pulled himself together again. He began working for a tailor but as soon as people saw his skills they encouraged him to set up his own business, and so he started a small tailoring shop with two machines on the main village road. Slowly, he is seeking to rebuild his reputation and to develop his trade. He muses at the machine of his small shop: ‘It is better here ... when we had lots of money [in Tiruppur] we had a very good time, but when there was no money we had a very bad time ... now we have less income but we are happier again ... I am confident that I will be able to earn good money here itself!’ Clearly, money matters, and in contemporary Tamil society considerable social importance is attached to a man’s responsibility not only as provider for his household but also as a person who nurtures an enterprising spirit and mobilises all possible social networks and family resources in order to provide his children with a better future. This is exactly the male ideal that Jeganathan now seeks to fulfil. Today, he is carefully planning for the future: saving money through life insurance policies as well as through the giving of *seeru*, or ritual gifts, to family members. *Seeru* appears central to his strategy for investment: ‘Over the last years I have spent lots on my younger sister’s wedding and

on *seeru* knowing that when I organise *kadu* (ear piercing ceremony) for my own daughters next year, I will get lots of money back that I will be able to invest.’ It is this money that he is planning to use to buy a plot of land, develop a showroom in the village, and start trading ‘seconds’ clothing from Tiruppur. The string of ritual exchanges Jeganathan now engages in seems to play a dual role: they are key to the re-consolidation of kin networks and the regaining of trust and respectability, while at the same time generating capital for his revived entrepreneurial aspirations.

As an enterprising subject, Jeganathan was attracted by the financial promises and apparently unlimited opportunities of Tiruppur’s garment industry. However, it soon turned out that life in Tiruppur had many temptations, and a series of ‘bad habits’ - including an extra-marital affair, continuous money squandering, and a dwindling commitment to work - led to the rapid collapse of trust and reputation, and turned a set of promising business ventures into a debt-ridden disaster. Jeganathan’s Tiruppur debacle made him realise that the trust, approval and support of family and friends remain key to success in the market. Back in the village, Jeganathan began to consciously invest in regaining the trust of relatives and to re-orient himself to the family. Family support networks, consolidated through investments in weddings and ritual gift giving, are now key to Jeganathan’s strategy to create a better life for his wife and daughters back home. Revealingly, while Jeganathan recognises that drinking, wasting money, consumerist desires and neglect of his business all contributed to the loss of his good name, people’s trust and family support, he puts his extra-marital affair at the centre of his narrative about his misfortunes. As such, his narrative is one in which love – here embodied in an extra-marital relationship – is mobilised as an idiom to reflect on the challenges thrown up by India’s post-liberalisation environment. This environment promotes enterprising individuals, driven by strong aspirations, determination and hard work. Individuals’ personal narratives, by contrast, while not rejecting the enterprising ethos of post-liberalisation capitalism, focus as much on the importance of kin and other social networks without which it remains hard to succeed in a precarious market.

Ajit and Amely: Gendered narratives of emotional and material support

It need not surprise us that narratives of love marriages are strongly gendered. Whereas men reflect on how a love marriage affects their careers and reputations, women tend to foreground the emotional aspects of the post-marital loss of kin support.⁴² The narratives of Ajit and Amely, who arranged their own marriage in Tiruppur, reflect some of the different ways in which men and women experience and narrate their post-marital lives. As soon as I was introduced to them on the veranda of their rented one-room rooftop house in the centre of Tiruppur, Amely mentioned to me that theirs was a love marriage. Without prompting she began to tell her story. ‘We met in Tiruppur where he was already working as a contractor and I visited the place to see some friends. We saw each other and immediately fell in love.’ They arranged their own marriage soon after, but suffered from the strong disapproval of both families, especially hers. ‘His parents are nice people and they are understanding and they have accepted us now. But my father was completely against the marriage because of the religious differences. He is a Hindu Nayar while we are Roman Catholics. But I am the only daughter, you see.’ While the families’ different religious backgrounds no doubt played a role in their families’ assessment of the love

⁴² Grover, Lived experiences; Grover, *Marriage, Love, Caste and Kinship Support*.

marriage, other factors played a role too. As lower-caste Roman Catholics Amely's family was of a lower status, yet at the same time they were a wealthier family than Ajit's. Her parents own a good amount of land near Sabrimalai and she grew up in Muscat, where her father worked and where she was educated at an English medium school. 'My father now runs a finance business in Kerala and is well off. I too completed a Bachelors degree in Commerce. But all that is more important to them than accepting my marriage!' Moreover, since her sister passed away along with her husband in a car accident, she has been the only daughter to her parents and they clearly expected her to conform to their marriage plans for her. Just like they had married Amely's sister to a college lecturer, they had grander aspirations for her than an alliance with a tailor with only secondary education.

Amely is deeply saddened by the fact that she has not seen her parents since her marriage four years ago. She complained bitterly about how hard it is to be separated from her family. She has not even been home since the birth of her now 14 month-old son. Life in Tiruppur has been hard for her. Initially she worked for a couple of years in a checking section in order to build up some savings, but since the birth of her son she has been at home looking after him as she has no relatives to call on. 'When we started in Tiruppur, we had nothing. Now I am okay in Tiruppur and I got used to the place.' While Ajit currently does quite well as an ironing contractor and earns a decent wage, they still live in a one-room rented house. Everything they now own, including everything they needed for the baby, they had to pay for themselves as they did not receive anything at the time of their wedding and neither family contributed to the setting up of their household. Amely's account is one of sadness and suffering in the wake of a love marriage that tore her away from her family and landed her in Tiruppur with neither emotional not material support.

Ajit, by contrast, while acknowledging the difficulties of their love marriage, presented a narrative that spoke of his trajectories and achievements as a tailor and contractor in Tiruppur. Having learned singer tailoring from his father in Idukki, Kerala, he came to Tiruppur in 2000, at the age of 21, and proudly describes how through skill and competence he became an ironing contractor in 2004. As he was also an experienced tailor, he then began to act as a tailor contractor too, and by 2008 he was looking after a sizeable team of workers. He explains that he is now capable of managing nearly forty workers at a time, including tailors, ironing masters and packers, and tells at length about how he negotiates rates with the company owners, pays his own workers, and employs supervisors to keep track of quality. Ajit clearly feels he has done well in Tiruppur, and his salary of close to Rs 4000 per week is testimony of this. He says he can save at least Rs 2000 per month. His dream, however, is to start a company of his own, but he realises that substantial amounts of money are needed for this and that, given his isolated position in Tiruppur, he may not be able to take that step for quite a while.

Love marriage, kin support and enterprise in post-liberalisation India

'At some point between the age of 30 to 40 I should be standing on my own feet, and by the time I reach 40, I should not be working for other people anymore. I should have my own business!', Mohan firmly expressed. When I caught up with Mohan two years later, he had bought three stitching machines and was looking for ways to set up his own small garment unit. Embodying the Tamil ideal of the householder whose responsibility it is to provide for his family, Mohan also represents the hardworking and entrepreneurial subject of post-liberalisation India, who aspires to

make the most of the new opportunities available in Tiruppur. This paper has explored how such aspirations of entrepreneurship and upward mobility intersect with people's narratives and experiences of marriage, and how marriage narratives themselves constitute a commentary on the contemporary challenges of work and life in India's post-reform economy.

As Thomas and Cole remind us, discourses about love should be approached as 'cultural commentaries to be explored rather than simple reflections of social reality'.⁴³ Seeking to challenge linear and homogenous ideas about love and modernisation, Thomas and Cole see people's discourses of love as forming a 'part of broader efforts to claim "civilized" or "modern" identities'.⁴⁴ Similarly, narratives and experiences of marriage in Tiruppur offer insights into individuals' engagement with contemporary aspirations and subjectivities. Their accounts of post-marital lives shed light on the continued significance of family networks and kin support to economic success, even at a time when media, state and corporate sectors alike celebrate individual enterprise and achievement.⁴⁵ Just as Grover emphasised the significance of post-marital kin support and moral entitlement to refuge for low-caste women in Delhi,⁴⁶ post-marital family assistance and marital stability is equally important to vulnerable (migrant) men and women who aspire to upward mobility in Tiruppur.

A few concluding comments can now be made. First, in all the love marriages described above, the rule of caste endogamy was disregarded and religious transgressions - in which Hindu men married Muslim or Christian women - created serious challenges to the families involved, effectively foreclosing parental approval. Crucial in all of this was the flouting of parental authority, manifested in the fact that the couples got themselves married either against their parents' wishes (Soundaraj) or without their parents' knowledge altogether (Senthil and Ajit). Kumarasamy was explicit about how he felt let down by Senthil's lack of respect for him, and all the young men acknowledged that their autonomous decisions amounted to a grave rejection of parental authority, which in turn was key to the shaping of their parents' responses and subsequent refusal to assist the newly-wed couple. These were love marriages that could not be turned into 'love-cum-arranged marriages' and made acceptable to the wider family and community. Moreover, such filial tensions have to be understood within the broader context of a strong public discourse that depicts the garment factory and Tiruppur as a zone of immorality and sexual impropriety that rapidly dilutes Tamil values of family and sexuality. This discourse includes a preoccupation with a loss of control over one's children's sexual lives - expressed in fears over pre-marital sex and sexual promiscuity - as well as a concern about the cross-caste unions that such sexual liaisons often result in.

Secondly, love marriages are also evaluated through a set of economic idioms about entrepreneurship, mobility, financial exchange and material support. Just as arranged marriages are increasingly entangled with discourses about monetary exchange and post-marital support (as reflected in the widespread practice of dowry giving and post-marital gift exchanges), love marriages are similarly evaluated and experienced in

⁴³ Thomas and Cole, 'Introduction', p.16.

⁴⁴ Thomas and Cole, 'Introduction', p.16.

⁴⁵ Gooptu, 'Introduction', p.9-14.

⁴⁶ Grover, *Marriage, Love, Caste and Kinship Support*, p. 204.

terms of the contribution they make – or fail to make - to marital stability, economic well-being and aspirations for status and social mobility. Given the way in which self-made unions foreclose dowry and gift exchanges at the time of marriage as well as in later life, one can begin to see why those involved often end up being the strongest critics of their own marriage. Noteworthy too is the close ‘fit’ between rhetoric and experience. Even though kin support is not always withdrawn for ever and family relations can be restored over time, people’s narratives of love marriages reflect to a significant extent their actual experiences of support lost.

Thirdly, love marriage narratives and experiences transpire as a kind of ideological rejection of the much celebrated ‘individual’ and as a critique through which garment workers in Tiruppur expose the limits of what can be achieved by individuals *as individuals* in a liberalised market. They reveal an awareness that behind every successful man is a nurturing family who supports him in his pursuit of upward mobility and entrepreneurial success. Moreover, this critique of the contemporary neoliberal orientation towards the ‘individual’ has ended up reinforcing rather than subverting the value of the arranged marriage and, with it, of parental approval, caste endogamy and marital stability. In their pursuit of success in the market, the Tiruppur working classes produce a conservative attitude to marriage that critiques values of individuality and autonomous choice. A consistent narrative among my informants – including the ones who had a love marriage – is that the arranged marriage is to be preferred given that it offers the best chances of coping with the challenges of the post-liberalisation world. It also has a better chance of providing the marital stability and economic support so much needed to do well in a competitive market. Ironically, and here attitudes become more ambivalent, it is only because the value of entrepreneurial success is already so deeply internalised (as reflected in the aspirations of Mohan, Jeganathan and others) that people now must be hammered over the head with the message that the only way to achieve such success is by having a ‘proper’ (read arranged) marriage. Only such a marriage is seen as capable of delivering stability, security and success.⁴⁷ A love marriage by contrast is perceived as a rather irresponsible act that risks jeopardising those forms of social capital that are most needed to fulfil one’s aspirations in life. In this sense, Tiruppur’s contemporary working class resembles Bhilai’s labour aristocracy, among whom, Parry argues, a ‘new ideological stress on the couple is accompanied, not by a new acknowledgement of the possibility of de-coupling, but by a new stress on the indissolubility of their relationship’.⁴⁸ While love, personal choice and conjugality are increasingly valued among Tiruppur’s young labour force, their discursive practices also reflect an awareness of the significance of marital stability and kin support to contemporary life.

Bloch and Parry drew attention to the cross-cultural existence of ‘a cycle of short-term exchange which is the legitimate domain of individual – often acquisitive – activity, and a cycle of long-term exchanges concerned with the reproduction of the social and cosmic order’.⁴⁹ Short-term market engagement is opposed to longer-term kin and family involvement. The argument made was that people enter the market

⁴⁷ Gooptu, ‘Introduction’, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Parry, J. (2001). Ankalu's errant wife: sex, marriage and industry in contemporary Chhattisgarh. *Modern Asian Studies*, 35:4, p. 817.

⁴⁹ Bloch, M. and Parry, J. (1989). ‘Introduction’ in Bloch, M and Parry, J. *Money and the Morality of Exchange*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.2.

and engage in individual, competitive activity in order to sustain and reproduce the other sphere of the family and the social. The material presented here, however, indicates a different link between these two spheres: it is networks of kinship and kin support that sustain one's engagement with the market and with market activities. Or, marriage experiences reveal that it is the availability of parental and kin support that enables Tiruppur's garment workers to engage successfully with the opportunities of the market. Put differently, discourses and practices of marriage suggest that rootedness in family and kin networks acts as a precondition for successful engagement in the sphere of market exchange. In the process, they produce a discourse that reinforces the importance of social embeddedness to market enterprise.

Finally, in line with what Grover and Parry have suggested,⁵⁰ love marriages also appear as a practice whose localised experiences and interpretations betray modernist narratives of gradual and linear changes in marital practices from arranged marriages to self-chosen unions. While love marriages have no doubt become increasingly popular across class and caste,⁵¹ and while in places like Tiruppur there are ample opportunities for 'falling in love', love marriages are nonetheless locally perceived as a risk to one's aspirations for progress and mobility. They are experienced and talked about as regressive rather than progressive practices - irrespective of how actual post-marital life turns out to be. This may ultimately help to explain why love marriages remain heavily commented upon, and why an ideology that foregrounds individualism, coupledness and intimacy over kin networks, filial duties and economy may well ring hollow for youngsters who have come to realise the importance of marriage to success in the market.⁵² Love, indeed, has its own economies.⁵³ Those who opt to prioritise coupledness, romantic love and personal choice over family involvement risk not only the moral resentment of society at large but also the loss of key sources needed for their own entrepreneurial aspirations.

⁵⁰ Grover, *Marriage, Love, Caste and Kinship Support*; Parry, J. (2004). 'The marital history of a "thumb impression man"' in Arnold, D. and Blackburn, S. *Telling lives: South Asian life histories*, Permanent Black/Indiana University Press, New Delhi/Bloomington; Parry, 'Ankalu's errant wife'.

⁵¹ Baas, M. (2009). The IT Caste: Love and Arranged Marriages in the IT Industry of Bangalore. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 32:2, 285-307; Donner, 'One's own marriage'; Fuller and Harasimhan, Companionate Marriage in India; Grover, *Marriage, Love, Caste and Kinship Support*; Lessinger, J. (2013). "Love" in the Shadow of the Sewing Machine: A Study of Marriage in the Garment Industry of Chennai, South India' in Kaur, R. and Palriwala, R. *Marrying in South Asia: Shifting Concepts, Changing Practices in a Globalising World*, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi.

⁵² Giddens, A. (1992). *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Polity Press, Cambridge.

⁵³ Cole, J. (2009). 'Love, Money, and Economies of Intimacy in Tamatave, Madagascar' in Cole, J and Thomas, L.M. *Love in Africa*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago; Srinivasan, Daughters or Dowries?