In India, 'love' and 'arranged' marriages appear to be at opposite ends of the spectrum, but Michiel Baas argues that this 'opposition' is being challenged by IT professionals in the South India city of Bangalore.

'Arranged Love':
Marriage in a transnational work environment

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Marriage, at least the way the West understands it today, is largely a product of developments that occurred during the 18th century and thereafter. As Stephanie Coontz writes, around this time the spread of the market economy and the advent of the Enlightenment wrought profound changes in record time.[1] Before the 1700s things such as personal choice or love hardly figured in the event of a European marriage.[2] Today it is 'love' that defines marriage, at least in the Western world. This is most definitely not the case in India, a country associated with the system of 'arranged' or 'caste' marriages. In these unions, factors such as personal choice or love are seen much less as a solid basis for marriage. Yet, as this article will show, this traditional view is being turned on its head by IT professionals in the South Indian city of Bangalore, a place where love marriages are becoming increasingly common.[3]

My research shows that although many Indian IT professionals may prefer the idea of a love marriage, the fact that many of these marriages are 'accepted' by the rest of the family often hints at particular 'arrangements' that are convenient to the situation and the interests of the family. In this sense one can argue that such love marriages actually take the form of (semi-) arranged marriages. The results of my study also show that the increasing number of love marriages is a direct result of the specific working conditions of the Indian IT industry. Transnationalism plays a central role in this as IT companies typically operate in 24-hour work environments. This demands a rather particular flexibility from employees. As a result of this, and the fact that many love marriages in India are also inter-caste marriages, it will be argued that we can speak of the establishment of a new caste which is highly upper-caste in nature and which consists of higher-educated people who work in the local IT industry.

Those IT professionals who are originally from Bangalore generally live with their families. However, the majority of workers do not originate from Bangalore and tend to live with friends met before moving into the area. The accommodation they share is sparsely decorated (giving away the transient nature of the situation), and in most cases they are far away from family. Consequently, the social lives of these young professionals are not what they would be, had they remained in the place where they were born and brought up. Family is not there to keep an eye on them and, perhaps more importantly, their social life is determined by the colleagues with whom they interact on a daily basis and with whom they often work long hours meeting deadlines.

As the IT offices are open 24 hours a day and the working hours are flexible, most young IT professionals spend many hours in the confines of their workplace. Their lives revolve around their work, and this is how they usually live as singles in the city. But then the time comes to get married. On the whole Indian marriages are arranged, meaning that the parents and other family members will find their daughter or son a spouse. Almost without exception this means that the person they will marry will be somebody of their own caste.

It is important to realise that, traditionally, an arranged marriage is not about whether the couple are actually in love, "in fact, in the case of Hindus, it is geared around the assumption that ideally the girl and the boy are strangers to each other and that it is their obligation to their parents that makes them sometimes reluctant, though consenting parties to the marriage." [4]

A Transnational Work Environment
IT professionals come to Bangalore from all over India. They are mostly male graduates who were recruited by an IT company while still at university, or they come to stay with friends already in the industry in the hope of using contacts to find an IT job themselves. They usually arrive in Bangalore as bachelors which makes them an attractive proposition for IT companies since they are able to make long hours without having the responsibility of family at home. Working days averaging ten to twelve hours are not uncommon in the IT industry, and quite often weekends are worked too. Because of this the office becomes an important place for social interaction.

Bangalore, with its large number of pubs and restaurants, offers the perfect environment for the young, highly educated, well-paid professional. A 'fresher' within an IT company knows that they should make the most of these attractions, as within a few years he will almost certainly receive marriage proposals from his community and he will no longer be free to have the lifestyle he once did.

What lies behind the increasing number of IT professionals choosing to marry for love? Bhavya, for instance, is a software programmer in his mid-twenties and belongs to a *Kshatriya* (warrior) caste. He has a girlfriend who is from a *Brahmin* (priestly) caste. Bhavya wants to postpone ideas of marriage for as long as possible: "My parents are very particular about community." According to Bhavya, ideas about marriages are changing "dramatically" as more and more people marry outside their communities. He himself has little interest in the caste system or anything associated with

it. He knows he will marry his girlfriend one day. That said, he remains fearful of his parents' reaction. When I asked him why he wanted to marry this girl he explained that he likes the fact that she is also working in the IT industry and that they have similar jobs.

By describing such unions as love marriages, it gives the impression that these arrangements are primarily of a romantic nature. However, they are often also about these young men being able to maintain their bachelor lifestyles. Although one might think that this is mostly about being able to continue visiting Bangalore's many pubs, it is in fact much more about the liberty of being able to make as many hours at work as necessary. It is the type of flexibility a job within the Indian IT industry demands and a love marriage with another IT professional is much more able to facilitate this. Asked how Bhavya thinks he will be able to

Bangalore. Photograph by Revati Upadhya

convince his parents, he explained that he will try to make clear how compatible their lifestyles are. Moreover, he added that his girlfriend also makes quite a bit of money, something which the whole family will benefit from. There is no question that caste will remain an issue in their relationship, though there are also things both have in common. For example, both belong to upper-caste communities, only eat vegetarian food (at home), and generally pray to the same Gods. Both describe negative experiences as a result of their upper caste backgrounds. Bhavya, for instance, claims that he failed to get into medical school because of the 'reservation system' (positive discrimination of lower castes). His girlfriend had experienced something similar. It is experiences such as these that have caused the dichotomy between upper and lower castes to become sharper and conse-

quently to create a stronger 'them and us' feeling among upper-caste Hindus.

Caste Away
Anish Vikrant is a manager at a medium-sized IT company of American origin located in Koramangala. He explained that: "We are a merit organisation and in such an organisation, caste has no place." This appears to be the way most IT companies in Bangalore run their business. A director at a much larger IT company confirmed this. "The IT industry is a meritocracy. Those who have shown merit will get the promotion." In a meritocracy there is no place for alternative motives to hire somebody or to give somebody a promotion. The caste system and religion are deeply embedded in Indian society, yet IT companies have made a point of giving these factors as little room to manoeuvre as possible.

On the whole, IT companies in India are dominated by upper-caste Hindus as my own and other studies show. It is clear that their employees limit their interaction to other upper caste Hindus with similar jobs. The result is a very specific world in which, on the one hand, it is claimed that caste does not and should not play a role; that merit is the key to getting on; on the other hand, it is a world dominated by upper caste people with similar backgrounds and opinions, and everything happens in a specific upper caste context.

The IT Caste?
In the past an educated, upper caste, middle class person of marriageable age would have no involvement in the process of finding and choosing a partner. Over time this has been changing. The marriage stories of IT professionals in Bangalore show that this group has gone one step further: In other parts of the country it may be that the person in question is asked for his opinion or may even be allowed to take his future wife to the movies for instance. The community, or at least direct family members, would still be very much involved in this. In Bangalore, the community is simply not present. Whereas in other situations a bachelor's life would largely revolve around family and community, in the IT industry of Bangalore this is simply not the case. Young men live with bachelor friends, spend most of their time inside IT offices, working in an environment defined by transnational business processes.

While love marriages among the IT professionals of Bangalore are quite common, the assumed difference between arranged and love marriages turns out not to be so great in this industry. Like an arranged marriage, a love marriage is a marriage within the own community – that of the IT professionals. Within that community people

become friends with each other, start living together and eventually get married. It appears that love is not the only reason why people choose to make this commitment. The fact that both partners work in the IT industry and their lives, interests, working hours, and so on, fit perfectly together should not be underestimated. Often when I asked the young people in my study if they found it problematic that their wives were not from the same caste (and often not even from the same region or state), they would answer with a rather surprised "no, of course not, she/he is also in IT."

Marrying somebody within the IT industry could be called an 'arranged love marriage'. Although the prospective partners find each other in college or on the workfloor, both families and/or communities still have to approve of the marriage. They have to be convinced that besides personal compatibility, there is also social compatibility in the sense that both belong to the same world. It is not a question of following your heart, but following your path: a path that leads to promotion within the IT industry and, of course, more money which both families and their respective communities will profit from as well. And for that reason, a new caste is born, one with its own set of rules and rituals. In this caste, the caste of the past no longer matters as the industry itself communicates both to the employees and the outside world that it has no place there. What matters is that they are IT professionals and belong to the IT community. ∎

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Notes
1 Stephanie Coontz. 2005. *Marriage, a History, from Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage*. New York: Viking, p. 146.

2 Ibid.

3 In 2003 I conducted intensive anthropological fieldwork among Indian IT professionals in Bangalore for the duration of five months. I gathered data on a little over fifty IT professionals; some whom I interviewed only once, others with whom I would meet up more regularly. After this fieldwork I remained in close contact with some of my informants , following their lives by e-mail, and meeting up with them during later visits to Bangalore.

4 Mody, Perveez. 2002. 'Love and the Law: Love-Marriage in Delhi'. *Modern Asian Studies*. Vol. 36, No. 1. I should acknowledge Mody here for providing a theoretical analysis of the concepts of arranged and love marriages. Quote: p. 225.