



## Intersectionality and Indian Weddings: Gender, Caste, Class and Sexuality in Made in Heaven

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### Abstract:

This paper reads the Indian OTT series *Made in Heaven* (Amazon Prime Video, 2019, 2023) through the framework of intersectionality. It argues that the series presents the wedding not only as a site where gender, class, caste and sexuality overlap, but as an industry that profits from managing and concealing those hierarchies, with its own protagonists implicated in the process. Drawing on the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins, and on Indian scholarship on caste, gender and sexuality, the paper offers a qualitative close reading of selected storylines across both seasons. It shows that class operates as a mechanism through which patriarchal control is enforced and silence is purchased; that caste resists correction by wealth and education and attaches itself with particular force to the body of the Dalit woman; and that the cost of queerness is distributed unevenly by class and legal vulnerability. The paper then turns to Tara and Karan, the wedding planners, whose dependence on elite clients repeatedly makes them facilitators of the structures the series critiques. It concludes that *Made in Heaven* draws its critical force from this self-implicating perspective, while remaining bounded by the elite, urban world it depicts.

**Keywords:** intersectionality; *Made in Heaven*; Indian weddings; caste; queerness; Brahmanical patriarchy; OTT

### 1. Introduction

*Made in Heaven* (2019, 2023), created by Zoya Akhtar and Reema Kagti for Amazon Prime Video, follows Tara Khanna and Karan Mehra, who run a wedding-planning agency in Delhi. Across two seasons and sixteen episodes, each built around a different wedding, the series portrays a society in which tradition and aspiration coexist uneasily. In contemporary Indian culture the wedding is among the few occasions on which a family publicly displays its wealth, its caste standing and its respectability. The series exploits this fact: each wedding becomes a lens through which social hierarchies can be seen being maintained, negotiated and reproduced.

This paper analyses the series through Intersectionality framework introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. The framework argues that systems of oppression such as race, gender and class do not operate separately but overlap and compound one another, producing forms of disadvantage that no single axis can explain. In the Indian context, caste is a central axis of inequality, and it is inseparable from the regulation of women's sexuality. This makes marriage a particularly revealing site for such an analysis.

The paper makes two related claims. The first is that *Made in Heaven* shows gender, class, caste and sexuality working through the wedding as interlocking mechanisms: class purchases silence and enforces patriarchal control, caste resists correction by wealth or education, and the cost of being queer is distributed unevenly by class and legal vulnerability. The second, which is the paper's central argument, is that the series presents the wedding not only as a site where these hierarchies intersect but as an industry that profits from managing and concealing them. Tara and Karan are not detached observers of this system. Their dependence on wealthy clients repeatedly makes them its facilitators, even as they are themselves shaped by the vulnerabilities of gender, debt and sexuality. It is this self-implicating perspective, I argue, that gives the series its critical force.

The argument proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the theoretical and critical literature and outlines the method. Section 3 offers a close reading of selected storylines, organised by argument and not by episode: the first part examines gender, patriarchy and class; the second, caste and the Dalit woman's body; the third, sexuality, class and the law; and the fourth, the planners' own complicity. Section 4 reads across the axes and considers the limits of the series' critique, and a brief conclusion follows.

## **2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Intersectionality**

Crenshaw introduced the term in her paper "Demarginalizing The Intersection Of Race And Sex: A Black Feminist Critique Of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory And Antiracist Politics" in the United States, where courts treated race and sex as mutually exclusive grounds of discrimination and so failed to recognise the distinct position of Black women, who could be disadvantaged in ways that neither category captured alone (Crenshaw). Patricia Hill Collins extended the insight through the concept of the "matrix of domination," which describes how race, class, gender and sexuality are organised together, and how that organisation operates not only through laws and institutions but through ideology and everyday interaction (Collins). Two implications matter here. First, an intersectional reading looks for the interaction of systems and not for a list of separate injustices. Second, because the same person can be advantaged on one axis and disadvantaged on another, intersectionality is attentive to contradictory positions, including those of people who both suffer under and sustain hierarchies.

### **2.2 Caste, Marriage and Gender**

The Indian scholarship on which this paper draws begins from the recognition that caste and gender cannot be separated. B. R. Ambedkar argued that endogamy, the restriction of marriage to one's own caste, is the mechanism that sustains caste, and that inter-caste marriage therefore threatens it directly (Ambedkar). Uma Chakravarti developed this insight into the concept of Brahmanical patriarchy, in which the control of women's sexuality, labour and reproduction is the means by which caste boundaries and purity are maintained (Chakravarti, "Conceptualising"; Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste*). Nivedita Menon likewise argues that the regulation of women's sexuality has been central to the preservation of caste (Menon). Sharmila Rege adds that Dalit women occupy a distinctive position that neither upper-caste feminism nor male-led Dalit politics adequately represents, and she calls for a Dalit feminist standpoint grounded in their own experience (Rege). Marriage is therefore not a neutral backdrop to caste and gender oppression but one of the institutions through which both are enforced.

### **2.3 Sexuality, Heteronormativity and the Closet**

Feminist and queer theory supply a vocabulary for the way marriage organises sexuality as well as property. Gayle Rubin's account of the "traffic in women" describes how kinship systems treat women as objects of exchange between men (Rubin). Adrienne Rich argues that heterosexuality is not simply a preference but an institution enforced on women through social and economic pressure (Rich), and Judith Butler extends this into an analysis of the heterosexual matrix that makes some genders and desires intelligible and others not (Butler). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick shows how a regime of silence and disclosure organises modern life, so that being known or unknown as gay becomes a site of power and risk and not a private matter alone (Sedgwick). In the South Asian context, Gayatri Gopinath examines how queer desire is rendered "impossible" by dominant nationalist and heteronormative narratives (Gopinath), and Ruth Vanita's study of same-sex unions in India and the West situates such unions in relation to religious and legal marriage (Vanita).

### **2.4 Existing Scholarship on the Series**

Scholarly attention to *Made in Heaven* is growing. Dey studies the series' representation of queerness through an analysis of audience responses, treating it as an instance of the new gender representation made possible by Indian OTT platforms. Ghosh and Brahma read the series as meta-storytelling, arguing through qualitative content analysis that its weddings stage wider discourses on gender, patriarchy, caste and sexuality. These studies establish the series as a site of social commentary. This paper builds on them in two ways: it applies an explicitly intersectional framework to the series' treatment of caste, class, gender and sexuality together, and it asks how the position of the wedding planners themselves shapes the critique.

## **2.5 Method**

The analysis is a qualitative close reading of selected storylines, chosen because each represents one axis of oppression while involving others. They are S1E1 (“All That Glitters Is Gold”), S1E3 (“It’s Never Too Late”), S1E5 (“A Marriage of Convenience”), Karan’s storyline across S1E4 to S1E6 and its continuation in S1E9, and S2E2 (“Beauty and the Beast”), S2E5 (“The Heart Skipped a Beat”) and S2E6 (“Warrior Princesses”). Episodes are cited by season and number (for example, S1E1). The reading attends to narrative events, character positioning, and the way each storyline relates the wedding to the family, the law and the market.

## **3. Analysis**

### **3.1 Money Buys Silence: Gender, Patriarchy and Class**

The series’ women are subjected to patriarchal pressure, but its form changes with class, age and circumstance. Four storylines show how.

In S1E1, Tara and Karan win the contract for the wedding of Angad Roshan, heir to the Roshan Cycles empire, and Aliya Saxena, a journalist, on one condition: that they investigate Aliya. The background check is at once classist and patriarchal. It is classist because Aliya does not belong to the Roshans’ world and is treated as a risk to be assessed, by a family with the wealth to commission an investigation and the confidence to discard her if she fails it. It is patriarchal because the grounds on which she is judged are her virginity and a past abortion, while Angad faces no comparable scrutiny. When Angad walks out on his parents because of their treatment of Aliya, Tara persuades Aliya to urge him to reconcile with them, since the alternative is the loss of a vast family fortune. The reconciliation does not remedy the injustice done to Aliya; it is a financial settlement she cannot afford to refuse. Patriarchy here needs no force, because class performs its work.

S1E5 shows a different mechanism. Sukhmani Sadana is one of several young women who compete in a contest to become the wife of Jeet Gill, a wealthy NRI. The contest frames marriage as something a woman wins and a man bestows, and it leaves the groom as the sole bearer of choice. Sukhmani speaks of her future as going to America as Jeet’s wife, so that her identity is already absorbed into his and the marriage is valued chiefly as a route to mobility. When she learns after the wedding that Jeet has concealed his impotence, she has every reason to leave. She goes to America anyway, out of fear of the stigma attached to a broken marriage and not out of willingness. Her silence protects his masculinity while she bears the consequences. Gender and class aspiration combine here: the promise of an affluent life abroad makes the bargain seem worth its price, and stigma makes exit costlier than endurance.

S1E3 adds age and widowhood. Gayatri Mathur, an elderly widow, wishes to marry Bijoy Chatterjee, and her children treat her choice as a violation of social norms. Her body and desires are treated as though they still belonged to her dead husband’s family, whereas Bijoy, a widower, meets no comparable opposition. That the resistance comes from within her own family, and persists regardless of class position or education, shows how deeply the control of women’s sexuality is embedded in cultural expectation. In Collins’s terms it operates through everyday social practice more than through law.

S2E2 addresses gender-based violence more directly. Anik, a life coach, holds public authority as someone who helps others while privately abusing Adhira, whom he is about to marry. His respectability shields him, since his public standing makes Adhira’s account harder to credit. When Adhira goes ahead with the marriage after he begs forgiveness, the episode invites recognition of a pattern often described as the cycle of abuse, but it does not blame her; her decision is set within a world in which leaving is stigmatised and often unsafe. The revelation that Bulbul, who alerts Tara and Karan to Anik’s behaviour, is herself a survivor suggests that such violence crosses backgrounds and is systemic and not isolated.

In each case the pressure takes a distinct form. Aliya’s compliance is purchased through financial dependence, Sukhmani’s is enforced by the stigma of a broken marriage, Gayatri’s by cultural expectations of widows, and Adhira’s by a cycle of abuse that those around her have economic reasons not to interrupt. In none does gender alone explain the outcome; it always works alongside something else.

### **3.2 Money Cannot Buy Caste: Class, Caste and the Dalit Woman’s Body**

S2E5 turns to caste. Pallavi Menke is a Dalit woman, a Columbia University professor and an activist, and she holds considerable educational and professional standing. Yet she meets caste prejudice from the family of her fiancé,

Vikram Sharma. The point is made precisely: class and education raise a person's social standing but do not dissolve caste, and the family's unease concerns not Pallavi's achievements or suitability but her birth. Caste and class are not interchangeable hierarchies. Disadvantage on one axis resists correction by advantage on another, which is the situation intersectional theory was developed to describe.

Gender sharpens the point. Ambedkar's account of endogamy explains why marriage is where caste is policed, and Chakravarti's concept of Brahmanical patriarchy explains why the anxiety attaches to the woman: a Dalit woman marrying into a dominant-caste household is perceived as a threat to the purity of its lineage. The discomfort directed at Pallavi is therefore not caste prejudice in general but a prejudice directed at her body and her descent, which makes it irreducibly gendered. Rege's argument that Dalit women's experience is distinct from both upper-caste feminism and male-led Dalit politics helps explain why Pallavi's situation cannot be reduced to either her caste or her gender.

Vikram's position shows how caste is sustained through the family. He is personally supportive of Pallavi, yet his family's conduct goes largely unchallenged until late in the episode. This suggests that caste prejudice is reproduced by family institutions while younger members may reject it in private and struggle to confront it in public. His support is real, but the episode is candid that it is also passive.

The decision to hold a Buddhist wedding is the episode's most significant moment. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism, with his followers, at Nagpur on 14 October 1956 was a deliberate political rejection of the Hindu caste order, and for many Dalits embracing Buddhism has carried that meaning since. The couple's Buddhist wedding therefore does more than avert conflict: it declines to let the wedding be conducted on terms set by a tradition that has excluded Dalits. The resolution is, however, a personal one, available to a couple with considerable resources. It changes the terms of one wedding and does not unsettle the structure that made the conflict possible.

### **3.3 The Closet as Structure: Sexuality, Class and the Law**

Karan's storyline, which runs through both seasons, is the series' most sustained treatment of sexuality. Its most revealing flashback, in S1E9, is set in school. When Nawab's love note is discovered and mocked by classmates, Karan does not stay silent; he leads the attack on Nawab to protect himself. This is an instance of what is often called internalised homophobia, in which a queer person turns on another in order to pass as straight, but the episode locates its cause in the environment: the school, the locker room and the peer group are spaces that enforce a heterosexual masculinity, and cruelty is the price of survival within them. The cost is distributed unevenly. Nawab is forced to leave the school, while Karan stays at the cost of his integrity. In Sedgwick's terms, the closet here is not a personal choice but a structure that society builds around the individual, and Butler's heterosexual matrix explains why exposure must be avoided at almost any price. In the present-day reunion Nawab is married, presumably to a woman, which suggests that he too has been pressed into performing heterosexuality as an adult. Their night together takes place in private, outside any public acknowledgement.

The unevenness of queer vulnerability is clearest in the thread that runs across S1E4 to S1E6. Karan's landlord, Ramesh Gupta, installs a hidden camera in his room and films him with another man. When the landlord's wife discovers the footage, it is Karan who is arrested under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, although it is he who has been violated. The law, in the series' account, works not to protect queer people but to criminalise them, and it does so in a way mediated by class. Karan is a tenant, indebted and financially insecure, facing a landlord with property and respectability on his side. A wealthier or better-connected person might have managed the situation through lawyers or influence; Karan has no such buffer. The series, released in 2019, depicts the arrest as taking place while Section 377 was in force. In *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018) the Supreme Court read the provision down so that it no longer applies to consensual sex between adults, and the series thus dramatises a legal order that had only recently been dismantled but whose social effects were far from gone.

The landlord's apology complicates the picture. When Ramesh reveals that he too is gay and has hidden it all his life, his earlier conduct appears as that of a man trapped by the same system he used against Karan. Heteronormativity damages those who live openly and those who pretend to be straight alike. But the consequences are unequal. The landlord's class position and respectability allowed him to conceal his sexuality while exercising power over his tenant, whereas Karan, with less class privilege and no social cover, bears the more visible and immediate costs.

S2E6 shifts from hiding to the management of visibility. Aditi and Radhika plan a commitment ceremony and not a marriage, since same-sex marriage has no legal recognition in India; in *Supriyo v. Union of India* (2023), decided about two months after the season's release, the Supreme Court declined to recognise a right of same-sex couples to

marry. The central question is whether to invite Radhika's homophobic parents. Her reluctance stems not from shame about her sexuality but from a wish to protect the ceremony from people who might disrupt it. She does not want her happiness to become an act of resistance. Her caution reflects the reality that being out does not guarantee being safe or accepted, even within the family. When her mother eventually attends, without explanation or a dramatic change of heart, the gesture is realistic because it is understated: not full acceptance, but a first step.

The ceremony is also quietly political. As Vanita's work on same-sex unions suggests, couples who create their own framework of commitment outside the law assert the validity of their relationship where the law refuses it. Yet the ability to plan, decorate and host such an event depends on social and financial freedom. It is a reminder that queer visibility is far easier for the privileged, and that class shapes how freely a person can be queer. Karan's arrest and Aditi and Radhika's ceremony show the same pattern from opposite ends.

### **3.4 The Planners' Complicity: The Wedding as Industry**

The preceding sections treated the wedding as a site where hierarchies become visible. This section argues that the series goes further and presents the wedding as a business. Tara and Karan are professionals who earn their living from the displays of status, caste and respectability that their clients commission, and the series repeatedly shows what that dependence demands of them.

The first demand is cooperation with the client's hierarchy. The price of the biggest wedding in Delhi is the investigation of Aliya (S1E1), and they accept it. When the Swarup family, whose wedding they are planning, threatens to cancel because of Karan's arrest, Tara agrees that Karan will stay away from the wedding, stipulating only that he be paid in full (S1E6). The agreement reconciles the planners' business interests with a client's prejudice at Karan's expense.

The second demand is silence. In S2E2, when Bulbul tells Tara and Karan about Anik's behaviour, they choose not to act because they cannot afford to lose the contract. The episode makes clear that this is not merely a personal failing. An industry built on projecting love and celebration has a financial reason to look away. The silence is structural, which makes it more troubling.

What makes the series' perspective distinctive is that the planners are not exempt from the pressures they enable. Tara's professional independence rests on a marriage to Adil Khanna, whose money funds the agency, and Karan's livelihood is burdened by debt while his sexuality leaves him exposed to the law and to clients' prejudice. Their compromises are therefore themselves intersectional, shaped by gender, class and sexuality, and not simple failures of will. The series also allows them moments of resistance. After his release Karan speaks publicly about his sexuality and challenges Section 377 at a cost to his business, and the first season closes with their office vandalised in retaliation. The point is not that Tara and Karan are hypocrites. It is that complicity is the condition of working in an industry that sells the performance of tradition and status.

## **4. Reading Across the Axes, and the Limits of the Critique**

Placed side by side, the storylines show that oppression in the series is never a single, clean system. Aliya's case joins gender and class. Pallavi's joins caste, gender and class, and shows that advantage on one axis does not cancel disadvantage on another. Karan's joins sexuality, class and the law, and Aditi and Radhika's shows that queer visibility is itself stratified by class. Characters are often advantaged and disadvantaged at once: the landlord is both a victim and an agent of heteronormativity, Tara is both a successful professional and a financially dependent wife, and Pallavi is class-privileged and caste-stigmatised. This is what intersectional theory describes. The systems do not merely add up but interact to produce specific and sometimes contradictory positions that cannot be understood by examining either axis alone.

The series' critique has limits. Its world is overwhelmingly elite, urban and affluent. Those most exposed to the systems it examines, such as people without the resources to hold a ceremony, hire a lawyer or walk away from a contract, appear rarely and mostly at the edges. Several resolutions rest on individual choice: Pallavi's Buddhist wedding, Karan's public stand, Aditi and Radhika's ceremony. They are real acts of resistance, but they leave the underlying structures largely intact. As a polished production on a global streaming platform, the series also participates in the aestheticisation of the wedding that it questions. Whether its critique unsettles that spectacle or merely decorates it is a question that audience research could usefully pursue. At the same time the series is careful to register partial progress, such as Radhika's mother's attendance, without presenting it as a resolution.

## 5. Conclusion

*Made in Heaven* uses the wedding as a recurring and deliberate site of social analysis. By building each episode around a different wedding, it shows how gender, patriarchy, caste, class and sexuality are reproduced through marriage in contemporary India. It does not present them as relics of a traditional past that modernisation will dissolve, but as active and adaptive forces present in the most affluent and apparently progressive spaces. An intersectional reading shows that its characters experience oppression through the interaction of several systems, in compound and sometimes contradictory ways: money purchases silence, wealth and education cannot erase caste, and the freedom to be queer depends on class and the law.

This paper has argued further that the series treats the wedding as an industry as well as a site. Tara and Karan, who plan the ceremonies that display and reinforce these hierarchies, are shaped by the same systems and implicated in their reproduction. This is where the series targets the families it depicts and also the business of managing their status, and by extension the viewer's pleasure in the spectacle. For feminist analysis, the series confirms that single-axis frameworks cannot account for the lives it depicts, and that intersectionality remains an essential tool for reading the social world as it works through its most ordinary and celebrated institutions. Future research might extend this reading to the series' treatment of religion and age, which this paper has not addressed, or examine how audiences receive its critique.

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