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'Arrange marriages are not bad after all'

Shivangi Ambani-Gandhi

Sheila Jayadeva's Arranging Love has been screened at six international film festivals. It is eligible for the 2007 Inside Film Awards

SYDNEY: "There are too many films that depict arranged marriages negatively — as something that young Indians are forced into against their will, without having any say in the matter. It's understandable as it makes an exciting story!" says Indian-origin Australian filmmaker, Sheila Jayadev, whose documentary, *Arranging Love*, is due to screen in Sydney.

"Their idea of being Indian in Australia is influenced by movies like *Bend it Like Beckham* — they would assume I had extremely strict parents and very little freedom. I had a lot to say about these issues regarding parenting adolescents growing up in a Western society after emigrating from India," she adds.

"I wanted to make a documentary that showed what an arranged marriage was really about — that there are positive aspects to the arranged marriage and that a happy marriage is indeed possible!" she says. The 26-minute film features three second-generation Indians in Australia revealing how they came together. "I had my first boyfriend at university and he came home and it was all good," says Veena. "My father still thinks, to this day that he was my tennis partner."

Ami remembers once telling her parents, "You never really wanted me to go out with boys and now you suddenly want me to get married? It made them realise at that point that actually this was true!"

Aussie girl April says she was worried at first about the reaction of her Indian boyfriend's family to their wedding. "The negative comments I have had, were from Western people. I've never had such comments from Indian people," she says. However, some of the most interesting comments come from the white Hindu priest, Rami. He speaks about the recognition of sexuality in ancient India — the Kamasutra and temple carvings — now washed away with our Victorian sensibilities from an English education. Even more revealing is his exploration of the origins of the arranged marriage — and its reflection in today's online dating sites and singles clubs.

"I've tried to bring out the idea that just like friends set each other up in the western world, families do that in our culture — it's the same thing," says Jayadev. The documentary has now been screened at six international film festivals, most recently at the Brisbane International Film Festival. It's also screened in Florida, Los Angeles, Toronto and Washington, DC. "I have had very enthusiastic responses to the film — including younger people approaching me to tell me that the stories were exactly like their own experiences growing up in between Western culture and Indian culture," she says.

Since the filming for *Arranging Love* finished in February 2006, Jayadev has made a few short films. At university, she studied Film and Law, and now practices in the area of Entertainment Law. "It's great because it combines my love of film-making with the law," says Jayadev.

And she has also been engaged since the making of *Arranging Love*. "It's not an arranged marriage, although colleagues were thinking of setting us up as they thought we made a good match. Had I not found my fiancé, I would be very open to suggestions and advice from my parents and close friends as to who they thought would be right for me, and that is the essence of the arranged marriage," says Jayadev.

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