

# Arranging love

AS SOMEONE who has had an arranged marriage, I am tired of explaining to mainstream Australians that I am actually quite happy.

No, I wasn't forced to marry a stranger. No, I wasn't "promised" to his family as an infant. No, my parents didn't "pick" him for me. Yes, I *had* met him before the wedding day.

Now, people have begun to understand. Somewhat.

They understand that there is no coercion, and that for some inexplicable reason, it does seem to work. Still, it all appears "freakish".

A new documentary film attempts to remove the "freak" value attached to the concept. Sheila Jayadev's *Arranging Love* is a

half-hour film that presents the realities in arranged marriages, seeking to demystify the concept for western audiences by providing an insight into how it all works.

The film looks at the stories of three couples who have got together in different ways. It brings out differences in definitions of Eastern and Western concepts of love, and in the attitudes towards sexuality. This helps

in understanding the arranged marriage system.

"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".

Jayadev's first film, the project no doubt stems from queries similar to the ones I have been answering for seventeen years now, and from stereotypes presented in films.

"*Bend It Like Beckham* for example gives the impression that the second-generation struggles against extra-conservative parents. That is not true at all. Most parents in our own community here in Australia are quite happy about dates etc and have even seen their children happily married to non-Indians".

Is Sheila herself struggling with bicultural stress, in regards to the issue of her own marriage?

She laughs, "At 25, I have not given serious thought to marriage, and no, my parents are not 'looking' – they have left it up to me. But I'm sure if I need help, I will call on them".

A lawyer by profession, Sheila's passion lies in film-making. Already on the short-film circuit with *Arranging Love*, her next project is a feature.

Rajni Anand Luthra



A scene from the movie *Arranging Love*



Film-maker Sheila Jayadev