
**Rewriting the Romance Plot: Hybridity, Power, and Intimacy in Monica Ali's
*Love Marriage***

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Abstract

This paper examines Monica Ali's 2022 novel *Love Marriage*, arguing that it utilizes the traditional marriage plot to explore how diasporic subjectivity in twenty-first-century Britain is shaped by intersecting forces of race, class, gender, and generational inheritance. Drawing upon postcolonial theories of hybridity, specifically Homi Bhabha's concept of the "third space," alongside intersectional feminist criticism, the study unpacks the mutually constitutive axes of identity and discrimination at play in the narrative. By deconstructing the presumed opposition between "arranged" and "love" marriages, the analysis demonstrates that Ali frames both romantic frameworks as being governed by unequal power dynamics, concealment, and compromise. Furthermore, the paper highlights how the novel critiques the racial biases and minor exclusions of white liberal feminism while simultaneously scrutinizing patriarchal expectations within diasporic immigrant families. Through its exploration of sexual silence, the text reveals that both culturally conservative and supposedly permissive households produce secrecy that carries a heavy narrative price. Ultimately, the paper posits that Ali's use of a comic vignette structure and free indirect discourse effectively resists conventional "trauma plot" and "liberal-humanist" narratives, presenting instead a skeptical yet compassionate account of intimacy that suggests hybrid identity and modern relationships require continuous negotiation rather than settling into tidy resolutions.

Keywords: Monica Ali, Love Marriage, Diasporic Subjectivity, Hybridity, Third Space, Intersectional Feminism, Generational Conflict, White Liberal Feminism, Sexual Silence

Introduction

Monica Ali's fifth novel, *Love Marriage* (2022), returns to territory that made her literary reputation nearly two decades earlier: the intimate lives of British South Asian families negotiating the competing claims of inherited tradition and metropolitan modernity. Where Ali's Booker Prize-shortlisted debut, *Brick Lane* (2003), centered on a Bangladeshi woman transplanted to Tower Hamlets for an arranged marriage, *Love Marriage* inverts the premise ("Monica Ali"). Its protagonist, Yasmin Ghorami, believes she is accomplishing something her immigrant parents never could: choosing her own husband, for love rather than family arrangement. The novel's title, however, functions less as description than as provocation, for as the narrative unfolds, Yasmin discovers that the "love marriage" of family legend, her parents Shaokat and Anisah's own courtship, is as entangled with class calculation and concealment as her own engagement to the English doctor Joe Sangster (Cummins).

Set in London in the year following the 2016 Brexit referendum, *Love Marriage* follows the months leading up to Yasmin and Joe's wedding, tracking two families across the dinner table, the therapist's office, and the hospital wards where the young couple both work as junior doctors ("Love Marriage by Monica Ali [in Shelf Awareness]"). The Ghoramis are first-generation immigrants who emigrated from Calcutta; the Sangsters are headed by Harriet, a celebrated feminist writer known for having posed nude in her professional heyday and currently at work on a book about men's relationships with their own bodies ("Love Marriage by Monica Ali [in Shelf Awareness]"). Ali's novel has been read as social comedy, as a chronicle of Britain's unfinished reckoning with multiculturalism, and as an anatomy of the ways sexuality is silenced within immigrant households and merely performed, rather than resolved, within liberal ones (Cummins; "Love Marriage" Kirkus Reviews).

This paper argues that *Love Marriage* uses the marriage plot, a genre historically preoccupied with the negotiation of individual desire and social constraint, to interrogate the intersecting structures of race, class, gender, and generational inheritance that shape diasporic subjectivity in twenty-first-century Britain. Drawing on postcolonial theories of hybridity and diaspora, particularly Homi Bhabha's concept of the "third space," alongside intersectional feminist criticism, this paper examines how Ali destabilizes the presumed opposition between "arranged" and "love" marriage announced by her title and instead reveals both categories as structured by concealment, compromise, and unequal power. In doing so, the novel resists the two dominant narrative modes available to South Asian

diasporic women's fiction: the trauma narrative of enforced marriage and the liberal-humanist narrative of romantic self-actualization. It proposes instead a more skeptical, comic, and ultimately compassionate account of intimacy under conditions of cultural in-betweenness (Fatima and Dhera 192-93).

Narrative Overview: Plot, Characters, and Setting

Love Marriage opens on a note that announces its central preoccupation: "In the Ghorami household sex was never mentioned" (Ali 1), a line placed under the chapter heading "Chaste" and one that a reviewer for the blog I've Read This rightly identifies as a thematic key to everything that follows ("Book Review: Love Marriage"). Yasmin Ghorami is twenty-six, a trainee doctor working the geriatric and dementia wards of a London hospital, engaged to her colleague Joe Sangster, three years her senior and training in obstetrics ("Love Marriage by Monica Ali [in Shelf Awareness]"). Both still live with a parent: Yasmin with her father Shaokat, a general practitioner who rose from poverty in Calcutta, and her mother Anisah, a homemaker whose Tupperware containers of pakoras and chutneys become a recurring, affectionately comic motif; Joe with his mother Harriet, an "uppercrust feminist writer" whose fame and self-regard both loom over her son's adult life ("Love Marriage").

The engagement forces two mismatched families into proximity. The novel's opening set piece, a dinner at Harriet's Primrose Hill townhouse, stages the comic collision that critics have identified as the novel's initiating device: Yasmin's mortification at her mother's homemade food, Harriet's performative graciousness, and the wide gulf, financial, cultural, and sexual, between the two households ("Love Marriage" Simon & Schuster). As wedding preparations proceed, that gulf widens rather than closes. Harriet effectively annexes the planning, proposing an imam-led ceremony that appalls the secular-minded Yasmin even as her mother Anisah embraces it; Yasmin's brother Arif, unemployed and increasingly alert to the racism, blatant and subtle, that structures his and his sister's daily lives, drifts toward a documentary project on Islamophobia and eventually fathers a child outside marriage, further straining his relationship with Shaokat ("LOVE MARRIAGE" Kirkus Reviews).

The marriage plot's central complication, however, is sexual. Joe, it emerges through sessions with his therapist Sandor, is being treated for a compulsive sexual behavior that predates the relationship and that he has concealed from Yasmin; a "hook-up" with a hospital colleague surfaces and threatens the engagement outright ("Love Marriage by Monica Ali [in Shelf Awareness]"). Yasmin's own sexual

inexperience, framed early in the novel as a source of quiet anxiety about her ability to satisfy Joe, becomes the occasion for a parallel awakening, one that draws her into an entanglement of her own at work. Meanwhile, the elder Ghoramis' marriage, which Yasmin has spent her life mythologizing as a "love marriage" achieved against the odds by an impoverished young man who won a wealthy family's daughter, is revealed by the novel's end to rest on a far more complicated history; Anisah's decision to leave Shaokat and move in with Harriet constitutes the novel's most consequential late turn, recasting everything the reader, and Yasmin, thought they understood about the elder generation (Ali; "Love Marriage, by Monica Ali").

Theoretical Framework: Hybridity, Diaspora, and Intersectionality

Reading *Love Marriage* productively requires a critical vocabulary adequate to its double preoccupation with cultural location and sexual politics. Homi Bhabha's account of hybridity offers a first coordinate. For Bhabha, the colonial and postcolonial subject inhabits a "third space" of enunciation in which cultural meaning is never simply transplanted from one location to another but is instead produced anew, ambivalently, at the point of encounter between cultures (Bhabha 36-39). Diasporic identity, on this account, is not a compromise between two fixed poles, "British" and "Bangladeshi," or "British" and "Indian", but a continuously negotiated position that unsettles the very idea of cultural purity on either side of the encounter. Recent scholarship on *Love Marriage* has applied this framework directly to Ali's novel. Ammara Fatima and Saleem Akhtar Dhera's 2026 study of the novel argues that the Ghorami family's negotiation of "inherited cultural traditions, family expectations, and the socio-cultural norms in the host society" exemplifies Bhabha's third space, and that even ostensibly liberal, welcoming social structures such as Harriet's household can "reproduce minor exclusion" of the diasporic subject they claim to embrace (Fatima and Dhera 192).

A second coordinate is supplied by intersectional feminist criticism. Kimberlé Crenshaw's foundational argument that race, gender, and class are not additive but mutually constitutive axes of identity and discrimination provides a useful lens for a novel in which Yasmin's experience cannot be explained by her gender alone, nor by her ethnicity alone, but only by their conjunction with her class position relative to Joe's family (qtd. in Uddin 268). Haydor Uddin's study of the novel, while occasionally imprecise about its publication history, usefully identifies the way Ali's narrative "critique[s]" the "gendered nature of marriage" within South Asian communities even as it refuses to romanticize the alternative offered by Yasmin's "progressive" relationship with Joe, in which "subtle forms of gendered

power dynamics" persist beneath a surface of liberal courtesy (Uddin 268-69). Taken together, these frameworks suggest that *Love Marriage* should be read not as a simple morality tale about the relative merits of arranged versus chosen marriage, but as an inquiry into how power, cultural, sexual, financial, circulates within both forms of union alike.

The Title as Ironic Signifier: Deconstructing "Love" versus "Arranged" Marriage

The novel's title stages a binary that its plot spends four hundred pages dismantling. Within the Ghorami family's oral history, "love marriage" names a specific kind of triumph: Shaokat, born into poverty, is said to have won the heart of Anisah, the daughter of a comparatively well-to-do Bengali family, through merit and devotion rather than family brokering, a rags-to-respectability romance that Yasmin has been raised on and that she takes as the template, and the guarantee, for her own choice of Joe (Country Life review, "Love Marriage"). Ali has been explicit that this ironic doubling is the deliberate engine of the novel. In an interview conducted for reader discussion, she noted that the contrast implied by the title, set against the shadow of arranged marriage, is "deliberate," and that her interest lay less in staging a "clash of cultures" than in examining what happens when families of any background are forced into proximity by a wedding ("Love Marriage by Monica Ali" Goodreads).

That ironic doubling is confirmed structurally by the novel's late revelation concerning Anisah and Shaokat's marriage. A reviewer for *The Oldie* describes this disclosure, which "finally unspools" only at the book's close, as an example of a revelation that retrospectively "makes sense of what has gone before rather than invalidating the reader's experience," in contrast to the kind of overloaded "trauma plot" that can leave characters unable to move forward ("Love Marriage, by Monica Ali"). The effect is to reveal that the founding myth of the Ghorami family, a love match freely chosen against social odds, was never as simple as family lore suggested; Anisah's eventual decision to leave the marriage and move into Harriet's household constitutes both a literal and a symbolic repudiation of the story Yasmin has built her own life around. Ali thereby refuses her title's implicit promise that love marriages escape the compromises, calculations, and silences that structure arranged ones. Instead, as the *Spectrum Culture* review of the novel notes, all four principal relationships in the book, Yasmin and Joe's, Anisah and Shaokat's, and even Harriet's relationship to her own son and to her public persona as a feminist icon, are governed by "secrets," discovered gradually and at cost (*Spectrum Culture*).

This structural irony aligns the novel with a broader feminist critique of the romance plot itself. Rather than treating "choice" as a self-evidently liberating alternative to family arrangement, *Love Marriage* asks what conditions make a choice free, and suggests that Yasmin's supposedly autonomous decision to marry Joe is itself shaped by class aspiration, racial anxiety, and a longing for the social legitimacy that Joe's white, upper-middle-class Englishness confers. In this respect Ali's novel participates in what postcolonial feminist critics have long argued: that the modern, companionate, love-based marriage promoted by liberal Western discourse is not a neutral or universal endpoint of romantic development but a historically and culturally specific arrangement with its own hidden hierarchies (Uddin 267-68).

Generational Conflict and the Diasporic Family

If the title's irony operates at the level of plot, the novel's treatment of generational conflict operates at the level of character, and it is here that Ali's fiction most closely engages Bhabha's account of hybridity as continuous negotiation rather than fixed inheritance. Shaokat represents the immigrant narrative of upward mobility purchased at significant psychological cost: having become a doctor "against all odds," he channels intense, occasionally suffocating expectations onto both of his children, and his disappointment in Arif's unemployment and eventual fatherhood outside marriage becomes one of the novel's most sustained sources of familial friction (Book Club Mom review, "Book Review: Love Marriage"). Anisah, by contrast, is initially rendered as the more legible, contained figure of immigrant domesticity: a devout, competent homemaker who appears, on the novel's surface, to have accepted her role without complaint. Yet it is precisely this apparently settled figure whom the novel destabilizes most dramatically, first through her unlikely rapport with Harriet, and then through her decision to leave her marriage, a choice that retroactively reframes her earlier characterization as a matter of narrative withholding rather than genuine flatness (Book Club Mom, "Book Review: Love Marriage").

Arif's storyline offers the novel's most direct engagement with the politics of race in contemporary Britain. His drift toward documentary filmmaking about Islamophobia, and the novel's extended attention, noted by multiple reviewers, to the everyday accumulation of microaggression in Yasmin and Arif's professional and social lives, position the younger Ghorami generation as newly, and often exhaustingly, fluent in a vocabulary of racial critique that their parents' generation did not have available to it ("LOVE MARRIAGE" Kirkus Reviews). An excerpt from the novel published in *Wasafiri* dramatizes this dynamic precisely: at a dinner party,

Yasmin is asked by Harriet's guests to speak not as a doctor but, in her own interior formulation, as "the representative of brown-skinned people, of immigrants, of outsiders," an authority conscripted by well-meaning liberal curiosity into performing racial expertise she never volunteered (Ali, qtd. in "Harriet's Party"). The scene crystallizes what Fatima and Dhera describe as the way seemingly progressive social spaces can nonetheless "reproduce minor exclusion" even as they congratulate themselves on their inclusiveness (Fatima and Dhera 192).

Uddin's study, despite its factual imprecision about the novel's publication date, correctly identifies the structural pattern at work: Shaokat embodies "nostalgic attachment" to inherited norms, Anisah attempts to "balance respect for tradition with the challenges of raising a family in a foreign country," and the children's generation seeks "to create a new identity that blends both cultures" rather than choosing decisively between them (Uddin 267-68). Crucially, Ali does not resolve this tension by having the younger generation simply triumph over the older one's supposed rigidity. Anisah's late-novel assertion of her own desires is not framed as a capitulation to Western individualism but as an assertion of interiority that had been present, unacknowledged, all along; the novel insists that the first generation, too, possesses an inner life of longing and calculation that the children's generation has been too quick to read as merely traditional, merely settled, merely known.

Class, Race, and the Performance of White Liberal Feminism

Harriet Sangster is the novel's most pointed satirical creation and the vehicle for its sharpest critique of a specifically British, upper-middle-class variety of feminism. Introduced as a "Gloria Steinem-esque figure" and one of England's most prominent feminist writers and thinkers, Harriet is characterized by what Kirkus Reviews calls an "urbane, liberal fetishizing" of the Ghorami family, and of Anisah in particular, that proves "destabilizing" precisely because it is so warmly, so plausibly well-intentioned ("LOVE MARRIAGE"). Rather than treating Anisah with the condescension a cruder satire might supply, Harriet enthusiastically incorporates her into her Primrose Hill salons, celebrating her as a kind of authentic counterpoint to Harriet's own theorized, textual feminism. The effect, as multiple reviewers note, is a portrait of "inclusion by steamroller": Anisah's individuality is less recognized than instrumentalized, absorbed into Harriet's own narrative of open-mindedness ("Love Marriage, by Monica Ali").

This critique extends to Harriet's possessive relationship with her own son. Kirkus Reviews identifies Harriet's grip on Joe as a further "destabilizing influence" on the young couple, one inflected by an almost Oedipal intimacy, Harriet at one

point wanders unselfconsciously into Joe's bathroom while he showers, that several reviewers read as symptomatic of a broader failure of boundary-setting masked by Harriet's rhetoric of liberation ("LOVE MARRIAGE"; "Love Marriage by Monica Ali" Goodreads). Ali's satire here is double-edged: Harriet is neither a simple hypocrite nor a straightforward villain, but a case study in how personal and political forms of feminist self-understanding can coexist with unexamined class privilege and racial presumption. Uddin's reading captures this precisely, arguing that Harriet "epitomizes the contradictions of white liberalism," outwardly embracing progressive ideals while her interactions with Yasmin "expose underlying racial biases" that persist "even in supposedly enlightened circles" (Uddin 269).

Crucially, this critique of white liberal feminism does not function to exonerate the Ghorami family's own patriarchal structures by comparison. Shaokat's authority over his children, and the pressure both Yasmin and Arif experience to justify their choices in terms of family honor and sacrifice, receive their own sustained scrutiny. What the novel resists is any suggestion that one household offers a cleanly liberated alternative to the other's supposed traditionalism. Instead, Ali distributes her satire evenly enough that, as one review observes, she "successfully skewers everyone, white feminists, children of immigrants, overconfident male doctors" alike (qtd. in "Love Marriage" Simon & Schuster Canada). This even-handedness is itself a formal argument: by refusing to grant either family, or either generation, the moral high ground, *Love Marriage* insists that patriarchal and racialized power operate across, rather than only between, cultural communities.

Sexuality, Silence, and the Body

No theme is more insistently developed across *Love Marriage* than the relationship between silence and sexuality, a relationship the novel announces in its very first sentence. The declaration that "In the Ghorami household sex was never mentioned" (Ali 1) establishes silence not as absence but as a structuring condition, one whose pressure becomes visible precisely in the plot's recurring sexual disclosures: Joe's concealed compulsive behavior and therapy sessions, his infidelity with a hospital colleague, Yasmin's own anxious sense that her comparative inexperience constitutes a deficiency, and, ultimately, Anisah's own long-buried desires ("Love Marriage by Monica Ali [in Shelf Awareness]"; "Book Review: Love Marriage"). The novel repeatedly stages sex as something that happens offstage, reported rather than dramatized, and then erupts into the visible plot with disproportionate, destabilizing force once it can no longer be contained by silence.

This structure allows Ali to draw a suggestive parallel between two households that might otherwise seem opposites. The Ghoramis' silence around sex is coded as a marker of cultural and religious reticence; the Sangsters, by contrast, appear at first to represent a permissive, even exhibitionist, sexual modernity, embodied by Harriet's own history of posing nude and her current authorial project on masculinity and the body ("Love Marriage by Monica Ali [in Shelf Awareness]"). Yet Joe's concealed sex addiction reveals that the Sangster household's apparent openness masks its own regime of secrecy and shame, one arguably more psychologically costly for being unacknowledged within a family that prides itself on frank talk. Ali's juxtaposition thus resists a simple opposition between repressive tradition and liberated modernity; both households, in their different idioms, produce sexual silence, and both pay a narrative price for it.

Yasmin's own sexual trajectory across the novel functions as a coming-of-age narrative nested within the marriage plot. Her early anxiety about satisfying Joe, compounded by Harriet's casual assumptions about her family's supposed conservatism, gradually gives way to a more assertive, if morally compromised, exploration of her own desire at work, an arc that several reviewers read as central to the novel's larger interest in female agency (Paterson Loarn). Notably, Ali refuses to resolve this arc through simple punishment or simple liberation. Yasmin is at various points in the novel described by others as "out of control" or as possessing "a mean streak" for asserting needs and grievances that a more conventionally sympathetic heroine might suppress, and the narrative neither fully endorses nor fully condemns this judgment, leaving the reader to weigh the double standard by which female anger and female desire are read as character flaws (Paterson Loarn). The result is a portrait of sexual awakening that is neither triumphant nor cautionary but genuinely ambivalent, consistent with the novel's larger refusal of tidy moral binaries.

Narrative Form: Vignette Structure, Comedy, and Free Indirect Discourse

Love Marriage's thematic ambivalence is reinforced by its formal choices. The novel is constructed from short, often single-scene chapters, a vignette structure that one review describes as allowing the narrative to "accrete" its subplots gradually, small "flares of violence, co-dependency and abuse" accumulating alongside the comic set pieces of wedding planning, rather than announcing themselves through conventional dramatic escalation ("Love Marriage, by Monica Ali"). This structure suits a novel whose central argument is that secrecy operates cumulatively, through the steady deferral of disclosure across many small scenes, rather than through a single climactic revelation. The occasional interpolation of therapy-session dialogue

between Joe and Sandor further fragments the narrative's surface, introducing a clinical, confessional register that contrasts with the comic social observation dominating the rest of the book (Ali).

Comedy itself functions as more than tonal seasoning in Ali's hands; it is the novel's primary mode of social analysis. Reviewers consistently single out the humor generated by cross-cultural misunderstanding, Anisah's carrier bags of homemade food arriving at Harriet's elegant townhouse, Shaokat's precise and faintly absurd domestic rituals, Harriet's earnest speeches about liberal guilt, as the engine of the book's social critique rather than a distraction from it ("Love Marriage, by Monica Ali"). One review credits Ali's "lightly satirical approach" with making "good use of comic stereotypes" precisely in order to undercut them, introducing familiar immigrant-narrative and feminist-icon archetypes only to complicate them through accumulated, specific detail ("Love Marriage, by Monica Ali"). This comic register also allows Ali to address serious material, sexual coercion, racial microaggression, generational estrangement, without tipping into the register of what the same review calls the contemporary "trauma plot," in which characters become so burdened by elaborated backstory that they lose narrative mobility ("Love Marriage, by Monica Ali").

Free indirect discourse, meanwhile, tethers the reader closely to Yasmin's consciousness even as the narrative's dramatic irony repeatedly exceeds her understanding. The recurring refrain that "life is not simple," attributed to Yasmin's perspective across the novel, operates almost as a choric commentary on the plot's accumulating revelations, an observation Yasmin arrives at repeatedly without ever fully absorbing its implications for her own choices ("Love Marriage by Monica Ali" Goodreads). This narrative irony, in which the reader is invited to see more than the protagonist herself sees, is central to the novel's critique of the very "love marriage" ideal Yasmin has inherited: the reader recognizes, well before Yasmin does, that the story she has been told about her parents' courtship cannot fully account for the adults she observes in front of her.

Love Marriage and Brick Lane: Continuities and Departures

Read alongside *Brick Lane*, *Love Marriage* reveals both a consistent authorial preoccupation and a significant evolution in Ali's treatment of it. Both novels center a young Bengali-heritage woman negotiating marriage within a British setting, and both trace what one critic, discussing *Brick Lane*, calls a stuttering feminist progress "from quiet shame to a degree of self-possession" ("Monica Ali Love Marriage"). Both novels are also structured around a mother-daughter or sister

relationship conducted partly through storytelling, food, and inherited domestic ritual: a reviewer for the *American Kahani* draws an explicit parallel between the way both Nazneen, *Brick Lane*'s protagonist, and Yasmin absorb their mothers' stories alongside "the rice, dal, cumin, coriander, cloves and bay leaves of their motherland," suggesting a continuity of sensory, maternal inheritance across Ali's fiction even as her plots diverge (Soni).

Yet the two novels differ sharply in their treatment of marital agency. *Brick Lane*'s Nazneen begins the novel in an arranged marriage to an older man and must gradually claim interiority and choice within and eventually beyond that structure. Yasmin, by contrast, begins *Love Marriage* already exercising the choice Nazneen was denied, and Ali's interest lies precisely in demonstrating that this choice does not exempt her from the pressures, familial, sexual, and social, that shaped her mother's generation. As one reviewer for *The Saturday Paper* observes, both novels are "resolutely old fashioned" in setting and theme even as *Love Marriage* is "obliged to absorb a moment in which identity, whether racial, religious or sexual, has become a more fraught and consuming locus of dispute" than it was in the early 2000s ("Monica Ali *Love Marriage*"). This later, post-Brexit, post-#MeToo cultural context arguably sharpens the intersectional stakes of Ali's marriage plot, layering contemporary anxieties about racial microaggression, therapeutic disclosure, and consent onto a narrative structure Ali had already tested in her debut.

It is also worth noting a shift in the ethnic and religious specificity of Ali's diasporic families. Where *Brick Lane* centers a Bangladeshi Muslim family from Tower Hamlets, the Ghoramis of *Love Marriage* are identified as having emigrated from Calcutta, situating them within the Indian, rather than Bangladeshi, Bengali diaspora ("*Love Marriage* by Monica Ali [in Shelf Awareness]"). This distinction matters for readings of the novel's diasporic politics: it resists any assumption that Ali's fiction speaks for a single, undifferentiated "South Asian" or "Muslim" immigrant experience, and instead insists, consistent with the hybridity framework outlined above, on the specificity of each family's route into and through Britishness.

Critical Reception

Love Marriage was received as a significant return for Ali after a decade-long publishing hiatus and became an immediate bestseller upon its February 2022 publication by Virago Press in the United Kingdom ("Monica Ali"). Named a best book of the year so far by *The New Yorker* and selected for major book-club programming in the United States, the novel drew praise for its comic control and emotional generosity; the novelist Tash Aw called it a "rich, sensitive and gloriously

entertaining novel," while the *Financial Times* found it "wildly entertaining" and the *Sunday Times* praised its "exploration of cultural diversity in Britain" as both "touching and satirical" (qtd. in "Monica Ali").

Critical assessment has not been uniformly celebratory. Some reviewers, including a mixed notice in *Spectrum Culture*, found the novel's pacing uneven, arguing that its accumulation of small domestic scenes sometimes came at the expense of narrative momentum, and that "an interesting family dynamic. . . is unfortunately not enough to drive a book's narrative" on its own (*Spectrum Culture*). Others, writing for *The Guardian*, situated the novel within the broader arc of Ali's career, noting her history of oscillating between "market-pleaser" novels closely tied to her own background and more idiosyncratic "left turn" projects, and reading *Love Marriage*'s return to explicitly diasporic material as both a commercial and a critical recovery (Cummins). The small but growing body of academic scholarship on the novel, represented here by Fatima and Dhera's Bhabhaian analysis and Uddin's intersectional reading, suggests that *Love Marriage* is increasingly being taken up as a text through which to examine second-generation diasporic identity formation in contemporary British fiction, extending rather than superseding the critical attention long paid to *Brick Lane* (Fatima and Dhera 192; Uddin 266).

Conclusion

Monica Ali's *Love Marriage* takes as its title a term that promises resolution, the triumph of individual desire over inherited constraint, only to spend its length demonstrating how thoroughly that promise is compromised by class, race, and the unequal distribution of sexual and narrative power. Reading the novel through Bhabha's account of hybridity and through an intersectional feminist lens reveals a text less interested in adjudicating between "traditional" and "modern" models of marriage than in exposing the concealments common to both. The Ghorami family's story of a self-made man who won his bride through merit alone, and the Sangster family's story of an unbounded feminist household free of the anxieties that structure "traditional" marriage, are each, in their own way, revealed as partial fictions, sustained by silence and disrupted, eventually, by disclosure.

What emerges instead is a vision of intimacy as perpetually negotiated rather than achieved once and for all, a vision consistent with Bhabha's insistence that hybrid identity is produced continuously at the point of cultural encounter rather than settled in advance. Ali's achievement, sustained through a comic, vignette-driven narrative form and a free indirect style that keeps the reader one step ahead of her protagonist, is to make this perpetual negotiation legible without collapsing it into either tragedy

or easy triumph. In refusing to let either "love" or "arranged" marriage claim the moral high ground, and in distributing her satire evenly across generations, cultures, and class positions, Ali offers a marriage plot adequate to the genuinely mixed conditions of diasporic life in contemporary Britain, one in which, as the novel's own refrain insists, life is never simple, and neither, finally, is love.

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