

Analysis of an Indian Commercial Television Drama Series - "Balika Vadhu: Kacchi
Umra Ke Pakke Rishte" (Child Bride: Firm Relations at a Tender Age)

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This dissertation titled
Analysis of an Indian Commercial Television Drama Series - "Balika Vadhu: Kacchi
Umra Ke Pakke Rishte" (Child Bride: Firm Relations at a Tender Age)

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Abstract

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Analysis of an Indian Commercial Television Drama Series - "Balika Vadhu: Kacchi Umra Ke Pakke Rishte" (Child Bride: Firm Relations at a Tender Age)

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It is often said that media studies are usually focused on analyzing the effects of mass media programs on their audiences. However, it is equally important to analyze how popular television itself addresses, portrays, or represents social issues, especially the ones that pose a break with tradition in a society. In India child marriage is one such issue. The series "*Balika Vadhu: Kacchi Umr ke Pakke Rishte*" (henceforth *BV*), translated as, "Child Bride: Firm Relationships at a Tender Age," an Indian commercial television drama series, was heavily criticized in the Indian Parliament on July 14, 2009 for its treatment of child marriage, because child marriage is illegal in India, although the fact that it survives with community support is well-accepted in villages and family groups. *BV* was accused of being unconstitutional and glorifying child marriage. This study examined how *BV* portrayed/represented the issue of child marriage in India. It also examined whether it reinforced gender inequality or supported the rights and voices of women. These inquiries were best suited to be answered through the usage of qualitative methodological approach. Thus, Critical Discourse Analysis methods and approaches were chosen to examine how through discourse, Indian media such as television portrayed child marriage, and whether it reinforced gender inequality or supported the rights and voices of women in traditional Indian Hindu societies. The Parliament controversy around the theme of the drama series became the basis for choosing the unit

of the Critical Discourse Analysis. The complete unit or *text* chosen for the study was the total of 24 sampled *BV* episodes. 12 of these episodes were aired immediately before and 12 episodes immediately after the Parliamentary controversy that took place in the summer of 2009. I conclude that if mass media programs that involve opinion leaders in their narratives and portray issues that pose a break with tradition without demonizing either the tradition or the modern ideas; it would help create a middle space, a fluid space, a grey instead of having a dichotomy of black and white, good or evil etc. This could be a space where nothing is fixed or eternal and new spaces for negotiations can be created for debates to facilitate social change.

Dedication

*This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, and my family, whose unconditional love
and support gave me the strength to achieve my dreams
and confidently move forward in life.*

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I would like to express my sincere respect and gratitude to my father, the renowned artist, musician and theater performer, Pundit Ram Dayal Sharma. His dedication to using folk performing art forms for communicating with rural audiences to bring about behavioral and social change has inspired me to do research on communication for social change. I would like to thank my mother for inspiring and encouraging me to keep pursuing my education, and to always have patience, perseverance, and dedication.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

This chapter, which is the introduction to the study, is divided into five major sections: first, the journey; second, the controversy; third, the study; fourth, overview of the chapters; and fifth, summary of the chapter. The first section describes my journey from New Delhi India to Ohio University (OU) as an international student pursuing graduate studies, and how the topic of this study caught my imagination. The second section provides information about the Indian Parliamentary controversy triggered by the content of *Balika Vadhu*, (BV) the Indian television drama series under consideration. The third section provides insights into the background of the study, significance of the study, the problem statements, the purpose of this study, and the Research Questions. The third section comprises the following sub-sections: Law vs. Traditional Norms; Mediated Communication and Social Change; Mass Media, Representation, and social change; and the Research Questions. The fourth section provides a brief overview of the literature review, methodological approach, analysis, and discussion and conclusion chapters of this study. The last section provides a brief summary of this chapter.

The Journey

My journey from living in New Delhi to pursuing graduate studies at Ohio University really started long before I became aware of it. I certainly never imagined that I would be pursuing a PhD. and researching the topic of child marriage.

I come from a performer's family. My father is a professor of theater music, a singer, songwriter, music composer, and a folk opera singer. He dreamt of going beyond mere performance, and wanted to use performance, especially folk performance, as a force for social change and social development. This dream led him to start a non-profit

organization called *Brij Lok Madhuri*, (*BLM*) dedicated to using traditional folk performing art forms in India as a communicative tool to bring about social change. As an Indian traditional and classical dancer myself, I wanted to become a part of the project. I was fortunate to join and serve *BLM* as a campaign project coordinator. There I was invited to work for many organizations, including USAIDS, UNAIDS, JHU (CCP), and WHO, among others, on various social developmental campaigns before coming to OU. Meanwhile, my elder brother was already pursuing his doctoral degree at OU in 2003. He found the “Communication and Development” Master’s program at OU and suggested I explore it, which I did. I found that the program was quite similar to what I was doing as *BLM*’s program coordinator. While working with my father’s organization, I had acquired a great deal of field experience; however, I was lacking the necessary theoretical background, which was the main reason I became interested in the Communication and Development program at OU. I applied and then finished my Master’s program, but wanted to pursue further studies and started the PhD program at the school of Media Arts & Studies.

I came to pursue my present research topic out of a sense of dislocation. Living in the United States as an international student, it was quite natural for me to feel homesick. Consequently, I developed a habit of talking with my parents through Skype every day. Both my family and I used to impatiently wait for the Skype call and we never missed a day. We were always on time despite the considerable time difference. However, this arrangement slowly changed into something a little less regular. Some days when I called my family on Skype, I received a message that I should call back later because my

parents were watching *Balika Vadhu (BV)*. I had no idea what *Balika Vadhu* was at the time. However, when the requests to call back later started happening quite often, I started getting annoyed and frustrated. This led me to want to find out what this *BV* phenomenon was that has almost hijacked my parents' attention so intensely that they were willing to delay our daily, meaningful family calls.

As I was exploring the internet regarding *BV*, I realized that it was one of the top rated shows on Indian prime-time television. Some of the main characters have become household names: *Dadisa*, *Sugna*, *Anandi* and *Jagiya*. The show is also popular in South India, where it is broadcast on *Raj Network* in the Tamil language as *Man Vasanai*, and in Telugu on *Maa TV* as *Chinnari Pellikuthuru*. Currently, the show airs around the world in ten different countries and 12 different languages. The leading character *Anandi* was invited by a Serbian audience to come for a fundraising event in Serbia. *BV* has been winning major Indian television awards every year since its launch.

The focus of the drama series is child marriage. While I was learning about the drama series, the *BV* phenomenon caught my imagination. It revealed a fact about my own life that was hidden in plain sight. The series made me realize that all the women in my life, including my mother, grandmother, aunts, cousins, and friends, were child brides. All of them were married before the age of eighteen. I started watching *BV* episodes online. Although I was not a child bride, the series and its core issue of child marriage hit home for me. The more I watched, the more I was moved by the struggles portrayed in the show that made me reexamine my own life struggles as an Indian Hindu woman, and the struggles of my mother and other women in my extended family and

community who were child brides at the time of their marriage. The issue was more personal than just a storyline on a television drama series. I started researching more about the topic and the show. In the process I realized that the show had not only caught my imagination but also prompted Parliamentary debate. I stumbled upon several news stories and articles that featured the story of Parliamentary controversy triggered by the content of *BV*. I was curious because given the popularity of the show; I was unable to imagine what the apparent problem was.

The Controversy

As I researched, I found out more about the Parliamentary controversy. *BV* has become one of India's most popular and successful shows. However, success comes with a price. On July 14, 2009, during the proceedings of Indian Parliament, "the minister for Information and Broadcasting Ambika Soni was responding to an original question by Bhartruhari Mahtab of the BJD (an Indian political party) pertaining to a content code for electronic media" (*Indian Express*, July 15, 2009, A1). Ambika Soni informed the Parliament that "India was the only country, which did not have a regulator for controlling content" (*Indian Express*, July 15, 2009, A1). During the discussion in respect to controlling content in electronic media, Sharad Yadav, the president of the *Janata Dal United* (JDU, one of the Indian political party), questioned the content of *BV*. Since *BV*'s theme is child marriage; he demanded in Parliament, that the show be banned because it violates the Constitution of India, which prohibits child marriage. Another member of Parliament, Priya Dutt, followed and said, "It's wrong if a serial (drama series) glorifies child marriage," (*India Today*, July 14, 2009). Ambika Soni responded that she would

look into the matter and report back to the Parliament. (*Indian Express*, July 14, 2009, A1).

In response to the allegations raised by politicians, the producer, director, and writers of the show claimed that they never intended to glorify child marriage and insisted they believe child marriage is a social evil. They argued that the show is an attempt to make the issue of child marriage more visible, spur dialogue among community members, and spread awareness of the consequences of child marriage to those who practice it, though that was not the original goal of the television drama series. As a mass communication researcher, I became interested in the issue and in the possible dual role of mass media for social change and mass media as a change agent in addressing social issues such as child marriage.

The Study

Calling attention to social problems is of great importance to the promotion of social justice. Struggles between legal laws and traditional norms in India are still sensitive issues in both politics and mass media. It is a tight walk for mass media professionals to maintain a balance between what is legally and politically advisable vs. what is traditionally acceptable in the community. Conceivably, many sensitive social issues may have been neglected by mass media in order to avoid possible controversies. Perhaps, this is why it may be an ongoing struggle, and a question for mass media professionals to ask, how to portray culturally sensitive but critical social issues without invoking controversy from either political leaders (as the representatives of the constitution and law) or community members (as the representatives of the traditions). Child marriage is one such issue in contemporary India.

Burns (2014) states, “despite being one of the 158 countries with domestic legislation specifically banning the practice of child marriage, India has the highest number of child brides in the world (p. 153). Apparently, progress “in reducing rates of child marriage is being made in a number of countries, particularly among younger adolescents” (UNFPA, 2012). However, it is believed that “global rates of child marriage remain alarmingly high and require strengthened policy and programmatic efforts informed by strong evidence of what works” (Svanemyr, Venkatraman, Raj, Travers, & Sundaram, 2015, p. 1). One of the reasons for such a status despite having laws banning the practice is perhaps because of the fact that “for many of these countries with a high prevalence of child marriage, social and cultural values hold more weight in the community than state-enacted law; thus, domestic legislation banning child marriage is weakly enforced,” (Burns, 2014, p. 153, also see Raj, McDougal, Silverman & Rusch, 2014; Ghosh, 2011; Nasrullah, Zakar, Zakar, Abbas, Safdar, Shaukat, & Krämer, 2014; Stith, 2015).

Law vs. traditional norms.

It is contested that there is a clear gap between the law and traditional norms in India. For instance, several laws – the Sarda Act (1929) and the Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act (1978) – ban child marriage, but the tradition is still reportedly practiced, especially in rural parts of India. Statistics show that 40% of the world's child marriages take place in India (BBC 2011). One of the reasons for such a status despite having laws banning the practice is perhaps because of the fact that traditional norms and local governance carry more weight than the state laws, and this could be the root cause

of the prevalence of child marriage, despite having laws in place to prevent it (Burns, 2014, p. 153, also see Raj, McDougal, Silverman & Rusch, 2014; Ghosh, 2011; Nasrullah, Zakar, Zakar, Abbas, Safdar, Shaukat, & Krämer, 2014; Stith, 2015). For members of Indian societies who accept child marriage, the practice is seen as a part of family honor, and is tied to religion, culture, and traditions. UNICEF in its reports has mentioned that “Poverty and social norms intended to ensure family honor and protect girls are significant factors that increase the risks for a girl to be married while still a child” (p. 2). These factors seem to be quite visible in the Indian traditional belief system that values physical and spiritual purity, chastity, and most importantly virginity. Apparently, the “practice [of child marriage] is seen as a way to ensure chastity and virginity of the bride, thus avoiding potentially dishonoring of the family” (UNICEF 2011). Therefore, keeping the family honor is probably the highest priority in traditional Indian societies, as it is in some others.

Then the question arises: how one can approach a social issue such as child marriage that poses a break with tradition? Scholars assert that our understanding of the issue of child marriage is limited and requires further research; an in-depth inquiry that involves more segmented analysis which covers but is not limited to religion, ethnicity, education, and social class among other factors (Svanemyr, Venkatraman, Raj, Travers, & Sundaram, 2015, p. 1; Greene, 2014). Moreover, it is believed that “historically transmitted powerful influence of patriarchal ideology continues to reinforce customs and traditions such as child marriages which put women in subservient position to men” (Nasrullah, Zakar, Zakar, Abbas, Safdar, Shaukat, & Krämer, 2014, p. 9). Understanding

the issue of child marriage in light of patriarchal traditions, gender roles, and their portrayals may provide better understanding of the issue. This may help mass media professionals to develop new strategies to portray such sensitive social issues without provoking controversies from either lawmakers or the members of a traditional society.

Mediated communication and social change.

Mediated communication could be a way to approach and address this problem of dealing with a social issue, such as child marriage, that poses a break with tradition. Scholars state that in the contemporary world, our lives are mediated in one way or another by various media surrounding us. Fang (2008) argues that “we live in a world of mediated communication. That will not change except to increase the world’s sum of mediated communication” (p. 350). Mass media mediates communication in almost every aspect of human life – social, political, and economic. As Johnson (2001) points out, “television, once thought of as a luxury, has in the past years become a perceived necessity . . . the communities that used to be defined by their own oral traditions and stories are now being structured and reorganized by the medium of television” (p. 147).

Television in India is no longer a privilege only for the elite classes. Now, nearly a majority of the people have access to it. Television has now made its way into the humblest homes, including the rural parts of India, where child marriage is mainly practiced. The presence of television in the rural as well as poorest parts of India presents an opportunity to mass media to reach out to their target community and address social problems such as child marriage, perhaps in a very effective way.

People watch television, learn new things, and socialize by watching and imitating these virtual and fictional portrayals of their environments or societies. As Baudrillard suggests, “one must think instead of the media as if they were, in outer orbit, a kind of genetic code that directs the mutation of the real as hyper-real. . . .” (See also Durham, 2006, p. 473). People consume, inform themselves, make meaning, and socialize through mediated communication. Hence, in the context of India it may be crucial to understand the power, presence, and opportunity of mass media – especially television – to address social problems such as child marriage. Therefore, media through their mediation role in representing our society possibly play a central role in determining what is accepted as normal, and in the identification and construction of social problems or social deviance. Media play a crucial role in defining what a social problem is and is not. Understanding the dynamics of social relations – age, social status, gender roles, religion, and other elements – that organize social structure and the beliefs that support an understanding of the world as “truth” in a particular society, and define what a social problem is. In this context, it is critical to study how mass media portray the dynamics of these social relations that organize social structure, and the beliefs that support an understanding of the world as “truth” in a particular society. The power of media cannot be overlooked, but should be realized and recognized constantly.

Mass media and representation.

Mass media play an important role in representing various aspects of our lives. In the process they become critical in determining what is represented, what is not, and to what extent. As McQuail (1984) points out, “The mass media can serve to repress as well

as to liberate, to unite as well as fragment society, both to promote and to hold back change” (p. 64).

According to Roy (2012):

With the technological boom and the rapid advancement in electronic media over the past few decades, media has acquired such omnipotence that it not only propagates notions but has the power to create, construct or demolish certain ideologies. As is evident, representation in media is definitely a vast subject of discussion where the concepts of “representation” and “media” are intricately intertwined.

Hence, it becomes important to see if television programs reinforce patriarchal norms, women’s submission, and gender inequality through their portrayals of child marriage. Indian society is still highly patriarchal and women are still struggling to gain equality in all spaces, levels, and social spheres of society. Mass media is no different from any other space, and women are said to be still commonly portrayed in a subservient way.

Roy (2012) asserts that India:

The nation which claims to be in the process of “globalisation” or “modernisaion” [sic] still portrays its women in meaningless piles of costume jewellery and *jardousi* sarees. When women of India are progressing to be IPS and IAS Officers, all these contemporary “slice-of-life” soaps are still entangled in familial plots and schemes. (p. 1)

In light of the above quote, it was curious to see how a specific show portrays its women characters. Does it maintain the traditional image of women or advocate for women’s

rights? As Thoman (1986) states, "According to the defenders of television, television is a business and its task is not to create a social conscience in the viewing public, but to deliver an audience to its advertisers" (p. 2). It is generally difficult to convince advertisers to sponsor a program that involves sensitive social issues or taboo issues. In response to the needs of the sponsors, producers generally end up reinforcing social values, cultural norms, traditional practices, and styling. According to Dasgupta et al. (2012), "The glorification, mystification, and romanticizing of value systems of the past from child brides to self-effacement of women amply prove that the media can be biased or can be used as a consolidating tool for empowering patriarchal norms" (p. 14). It is curious to examine a specific set of portrayals and their discourse to see if this is the case.

Mass media seemingly have tried various strategies to address a variety of Indian social issues, such as family planning, education, gender equality, and HIV/AIDS, among others (Singhal & Rogers, 2003; Singhal & Rogers, 1999; Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal 2004). However, the issue of child marriage had not received attention from mass media until the summer of 2008. The Indian television channel *Colors* brought this issue to the forefront in the form of a television drama series known as *Balika Vadhu (BV)*. This series is a television drama set in rural Rajasthan, a state in northwest India. It revolves around the story of a child bride named *Anandi*, married at the age of 8 to a boy, *Jagiya*, of similar age. The show premiered on July 21, 2008, in Hindi, the national language of India.

The show is still running in 2016, but many questions remain unanswered in light of the Parliamentary controversy. For instance, does the portrayal of child marriage in *BV*

glorify this practice? Is there evidence that the portrayal of child marriage in *BV* is critical of the practice? Here we shall attempt to answer the following specific research questions through a critical discourse analysis of the portrayal of child marriage in *BV*. This study is guided by the following research questions.

Research questions.

RQ1: How does *BV* represent/ portray child marriage?

RQ2: How does *BV* portray/address (ideological) gender roles and women's rights?

Overview of the Chapters

To answer the research questions of this study I applied critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine 24 selected *BV* episodes. This dissertation has five chapters. The first chapter is introduction; the second is literature review; the third chapter is the methodology; the fourth chapter is the analysis, interpretations and synthesis of the findings; and the fifth chapter is the discussion and conclusion chapter. In the remainder of this chapter I outlined the major sections of this dissertation.

Chapter 2: Review of literature.

The second chapter of this dissertation is divided into five major sections to provide a broader view that presents a background related to the practice of child marriage. The chapter involves the relevant literature in several sections. Each section comprises several subsections. The first section, "South Asia: The region" is focused on literature concerning South Asia, its societies, and its social practices as a backdrop to the topic of child marriage.

The second section of the chapter, “Hindu marriages in India,” is focused on the literature concerning how religious scriptures, including the *Vedas*, *Smritis*, and epics such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, influence the way the institution of marriage, family, and *dharma* (righteous duty) is viewed, understood and practiced by Hindus in India.

The third section is focused on an overview of child marriage practices and on the literature concerning what it is, how it is defined by local and international organizations and their concerns regarding it, and its popularity in South Asia, moreso especially in India. The section concerns the factors and conditions that seem to lead toward and contribute to the practice of child marriage. It includes literature on some of the consequences of child marriage, its legal and political response from the public, and its success and failure over the time.

The fourth section examines the literature relevant to mass media content, regulation, and involvement of political leaders. It includes a discussion of literature regarding regulatory practices to control media content, especially in terms of television in India. This also references literature on the role of political leaders in regulating, controlling and influencing media, media content for instance constitutional and cultural interventions or personal political agendas among others.

The fifth section includes the research questions and the summary of the chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology.

Chapter 3 is a description of the methodological approach that guides this study. The chapter is organized in several sections. The first, “Discourse and Discourse

Analysis,” with its two subsections, “Textually-based discourse analysis method,” and “Text,” puts forward the basis of employing this research approach for the current study, including the sampled episode selection rationale and process. The second section, “Text Analysis,” elaborates on the text analysis guidelines of the research method in general and the conceptual guidelines employed. The third section, “Reflexivity” reveals upon my role and position as a researcher in the realm of the present study. The last section, “practice analysis of a single *BV* episode,” presents the accounts of employing the discourse analysis as a method and approach to one of the episodes that helped to re-evaluate the tool and to take further steps to make it better.

Chapter 4: Analysis, interpretation and synthesis of findings.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the critical discourse analysis and is divided into four major sections. First section introduces *BV*’s central character Kalyani Devi, her family, and other characters of the drama series. It provides a brief introduction into each character’s personality, demographic information, and their social standing in the family. The second section offers the synopsis which informs us about the general storyline and the plot of the selected episodes to provide context for the analysis. The third section focuses on the critical discourse analysis of the selected *BV* episodes which attempts to provide possible interpretations of the text by analyzing the emerging themes in the text of selected *BV* episodes. This section elaborates on how *BV* reinforces as well as problematizes traditional practices that are related to the practice of child marriage through its portrayal. The third section examine the selected *BV* episodes by analyzing the emerging themes in the text of selected *BV* episodes and how *BV* problematizes

traditional practices that are related to the practice of child marriage, gender and women's rights through its portrayal. This section is further subdivided into two parts and six major themes that emerged in the drama series. The two parts are: First, Representation of child marriage; second, Portrayal of gender roles and women's rights. The six major themes (further subdivided into subthemes) are: Plight of a widow; Generational difference on social issue; Negotiating through disclaimers, captions, and comments; Patriarchy; Honor; and Women's rights: The struggles, negotiations, and advocacy. The last section provides a brief summary of the chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion and conclusion.

The fifth and concluding chapter of this study presents the discussion of the findings and how these findings can add to the current understanding of mass media portrayals of social issues, such as child marriage, that pose a break with tradition. This chapter elaborates on some strategies that have emerged as a result of this study, that may be implemented in the future mass media projects that plan to deal with socially and constitutionally sensitive issues similar to child marriage – perhaps issues related to female infanticide, sexual orientation, and same sex marriage, to name a few. Based on the four findings of the critical discourse analysis and discussion, this study concluded that *BV* used a multi-strategy technique in its portrayals of child marriage, gender roles and women's rights. *BV* in its portrayals mostly maintained its traditional canvas by reinforcing traditional gender roles and traditions that promote child marriage but at the same time challenges them too. *BV*'s used religious and traditional beliefs as a launching pad to possibly create a new dialogue. However, one has to be aware that although this

strategy may be helpful in the beginning, it is ultimately limiting in itself and would need more refined strategies to address the issue at hand. *BV* did use the strategy of captions, comments, questions, and disclaimers to channel and mediate the thought processes of its audience in a more direct sense. *BV* also features the strategy of bridging the gap between local and state governance. These conclusions are discussed in detail in this chapter.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter, divided into five major sections, provides an introduction to the study. The first three sections provided brief information regarding the background of the study, its significance, the problem statement, purpose of this study, and the research questions that were studied in this research project. The fourth section in this chapter provided a brief overview of the four remaining chapters of this study. The next chapter will review relevant literature related to the topic of child marriage and mass media's mediating role as a social change agent and as a communicative tool for facilitating social change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This research investigated the portrayal of child marriage on India's prime-time television. The research focused on one of India's immensely popular prime-time drama series called, "*Balika Vadhu: Kacchi Umr ke Pakke Rishte*" henceforth *BV*, translated as, "*Child bride: Firm Relationships at a Tender Age*" broadcast on the *Colors* television channel. The research explored how the drama series; its media portrayal of the social issue; its narratives, discourses and discursive structures addressed the issue of child marriage. This research further attempted to understand how the drama series represented gender roles, women's rights.

The chapter is divided into five major sections. The first, South Asia: The region; second, Hindu marriages in India; third, Child marriage; fourth, Indian mass media: a brief background; and the fifth, research questions. Each section comprises several subsections.

Section 1 focuses on literature concerning South Asia, South Asian societies, and social practices as a backdrop to the topic of child marriage. This section sets the wider context for the study and the countries of this region; how diverse but at the same time how similar these countries are especially in terms of family patterns, cultural values, beliefs, honor, taboos, marriage patterns, son preferences, benefits, power, and relocation of brides, to name a few factors that contribute to the promotion and practice of child marriage.

Section 2 focuses on the literature concerning the Hindu marriages in India. This section examines how religious scriptures, including the Vedas, Smritis, and epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata influence the way the institution of marriage, family, and dharma (righteous duty) is viewed, understood, and practiced by Hindus in India. Furthermore, it sheds light on how the religious views, sanctions, prescriptions and perceptions influence the life of Hindu men and women that seems to contribute and promote child marriage. Furthermore, it includes literature concerning Hindu marriage negotiations and the new ways of matchmaking. The section reviews the historical Hindu religious views that seem to be in contrast with the contemporary religious views in India.

Section 3 examines the scholarship on child marriage. It provides an overview of the child marriage practice, literature concerning what it is, how it is defined by local and international organizations and their concerns toward it, its popularity in South Asia, and moreso, especially in India. The section looks at the factors and conditions that seem to lead toward and contribute to the practice of child marriage. It includes literature on some of the consequences of child marriage, legal and political response to it, and its success and failure over time.

Section 4 is a discussion of literature regarding regulatory practices to control media content, especially in terms of television in India. The section includes literature on the role of political leaders in regulating, controlling and influencing media, media content for constitutional, cultural interventions or personal political agendas, media for social change among others.

Section 5 introduces the research questions of the present study.

Section 1: South Asia; the Region

South Asia, “with over one-fifth of the world’s population, is the most densely populated region in the world” (Howarth, & Walker, 2011). South Asia includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, and, more recently, Afghanistan (Abraham, 2000; Das Dasgupta, 2000; Shankar, Das, & Atwal, 2013, p. 248). As reported by Howarth & Walker (2011), the region’s population is “largely dominated by India (over 1.2 billion) followed by Pakistan (over 170 million) and Bangladesh (over 160 million). The region is diverse with over 2000 ethnic entities with distinct regional cultures” (p. 31).

Despite being diverse, it seems South Asian countries “have some undeniable cultural commonalities such as the value that they attach to family interaction, the maintenance of social networks within their cultural groups, and the preservation of ethnic customs, traditions, and languages” (Das Dasgupta, 2000, p. 173). Cultural commonalties in terms of family, its members, and their roles, may help maintain social networks, preserve their customs and traditions, and are identified by some scholars. For instance,

According to Shankar et al. (2013):

- a) Sons are more important than daughters, b) Man is woman’s protector, c) The ideal wife must obey her husband, be loyal, devoted and chaste,
- d) Children must obey parents and be dutiful toward them at all times and e) woman’s primary role is toward the family and household. (p. 249)

As Shankar et al. explain that certain beliefs such as dedication to family and parents; preference for sons, men's responsibility to protect women, women's responsibility to be virtuous, and serve their husbands a devotion toward family, her husband, and household is not only expected but something that may be cherished as a sign of a woman's good character as he makes the point of mentioning the "ideal wife." Moreover, generally authors "report a higher ratio of preference for sons over daughters in most Asian countries" (Ahmed, 1971; Arnold, 1997; Vlassoff, 1990; Saeed, 2015, p. 17). Writers believe that "preferences for sons over daughters exist . . . in South Asia" (Bairagi & Langsten, 1986; Saeed, 2015, p. 17).

Common beliefs, family systems, and various traditions in this region may constitute some of the factors involved with marriage traditions in South Asian societies. Some researchers say that South Asian "marriage systems have to be seen in light of prevailing kinship and family systems" (Das Gupta, 2010; Jones, & Yeung, 2014, p. 1568). According to Saeed (2015), "in South Asian societies, especially in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, parents live with their sons in their old age" (p. 17). Derne (1994), states that "the most honorable way for a man to live [in South Asian cultures] is [to live] under one roof with his parents, brothers, wife, and children" (p. 223). This could be one of the reasons or ways to understand why the idea of joint family (including all family members, their spouses and children) living together under one roof is seen as more or less a common tradition in South Asian countries. As stated earlier by Shankar et al. (2013), this tradition may help fulfill family members' tasks of performing their "duty toward the household" and its members; taking care of one another perhaps by creating

codependence and accommodating one another's needs. Possibly some of these common cultural and traditional values may lead us to an understanding of the basis for South Asian marriage patterns to some extent that are in contrast with other Asian countries and their marriage patterns.

Marriages in South Asia.

Jones, & Yeung (2014), state that "South Asian marriage patterns differ fundamentally from those in East and Southeast Asia, particularly in the persistence of parent-arranged marriage," (p. 1568). According to Bowman, & Dollahite (2013), arranged marriage can be defined as "the arrangement of a marriage exclusively by a third party (someone other than the couple getting married) or by a "jointventure" [sic] of the third party and the child/person getting married" (p. 207). Scholars suggest that arranged marriages "have existed for millennia, and are widely instituted among many cultures around the world" (Bowman, & Dollahite, 2013, p. 207) including South Asia. Furthermore, it seems that "arranged marriage remains dominant [in present times] and is used to ensure marriage," (Caldwell, 2005, p. 285) of the young family members. Perhaps being unmarried is still not an acceptable way to live after a certain age in this region.

According to Caldwell (2005), "South Asia's marriage patterns reflect its cultural context," (p. 283). Conceivably family members, extended family, and society could be among those involved who may play the role of third parties that facilitate the process of arranging marriages in South Asian countries. This may further explain Shankar et al.'s (2013) idea of family members' "duty toward the household" to some extent. In addition, it seems that in South Asian societies marriages often precede menarche [the first

menstrual period] (Caldwell, 2005, p. 285; Caldwell, 1999; see also Percival, 1803, p. 213; Denham, 1912, p. 327; Davy, 1969) that may indicate early marriages especially among girls. According to Begum (2014), “obtaining a spouse becomes increasingly difficult with age, and tensions mount regarding preserving the daughter’s ‘virginity,’ without which a suitable groom will be impossible to find,” (p. 251). Authors inform that when a young woman “reaches puberty, her abundant sexual energy has to be channeled and the only recourse to ensure such channeling is via norms of “honor and respectability,” through marriage” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). Honor (sexual purity and perhaps family prestige) seems to be another important aspect in terms of South Asian marriages.

Family ties are important in South Asian families. However, glimpses of modern ideas such as love marriages or “self-arranged marriages” can be seen in some of the South Asian marriage scholarship. Although socially not preferred, it seems that occasional love marriages involving two adults making choices about their life partners (usually in urban areas) do happen; but family approval remains crucial for any such marriage to be successful. According to Bowman & Dollahite (2013), this is why, in successful cases of love marriages, the involved adults “still go through the formal processes of an arranged marriage in order to honor personal choice and respect that marriage binds two families in profound ways” (p. 208). It comes across as if disapproval from family may lead to loss of family ties that can isolate a person from the society and its network. So it seems family is central to all social activities, including marriage, in South Asia.

Relocation of brides after marriage is another common practice that comes to light in South Asian marriage tradition's literature. As Vogl (2013) states, relocation or "home-leaving is tantamount to marriage for South Asian women, so parental coresidence [sic] proxies for never-marriage," (p. 1019) or possibly broken marriage, if the parental co-residence after the marriage is prolonged. It can potentially be highly undesirable to the family as it may be difficult for them to hide the actual cause of such prolonged stay without a valid, acceptable reason. As stated by Begum (2014) "a daughter may be resented in the parental home after she reaches marriageable age and unwelcome (for staying with them) after her marriage" (p. 251). This could be one of the reasons for somewhat permanent relocation of brides to their in-laws' families, or an answer to why occasional short visits to married women's parents' house may be considered ideal.

Additionally, marriage practices in South Asian regions might entail various economic or social benefits. Family and its members being an important aspect of such marriages, conceivably become the major beneficiary group, besides society. Economic benefits of arranged marriages mainly seem to involve the gifts received (known as dowry) through marriage. Terian (2004) states that, "Dowry is most common in Asia and some European countries and generally in agricultural or pastoral societies" (p. 235). According to Banerjee (2014), the "practice of dowry is an expected part of marriage in cultures [such as South Asia] where arranged marriages are the norm," (p. 34).

It is believed by scholars such as Cladwell (2005) that arranged marriages "cannot be studied in isolation from dowry" (pp. 283-284).

According to Begum (2014):

‘Dowry’ refers to property, cash or goods given to the bridegroom as a consideration of marriage. The Act defines dowry as any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given either directly or indirectly by one party to a marriage by another party at any time before or after the marriage as a consideration of marriage. (p. 251)

Other benefits that may fall into a social category seem to be the newly acquired social status by the couple, family members, extended family, and the power over other family members that may come with the newly acquired social status. The couple’s changed social status from being single to married may allow them to enjoy their conjugal rights with society’s and family’s approval. Possibly family members’ social status is elevated or vice versa as the new member joins the family. On the other hand, it seems changed social status can bring challenges, especially to the bride as she is relocated to the husband’s house. According to D’Cruz & Bharat (2001), in “joint-family situations women enter as strangers and have no choice but to adapt and conform to the role given to them by the husband’s family.” It may appear that the husband’s family gains more power and social status over the bride as a new member of the family.

The process of marriage negotiation in South Asia is another important aspect that should be understood. Arranged marriages in South Asia are believed to be negotiated based on various important factors. Some of these factors seem to be economic status, religion, age, social class, and social caste. According to Bowman, & Dollahite, (2013)

South Asian “societies dictate many social norms and social expectations that shape marriage as an institution, including class, caste, and gender” (p. 217) among others.

Because of some of these common value systems across the South Asian region; it seems that arranged marriages and marriage at an early age are not a new concepts or phenomena. Warner (2004) state that in “many parts of . . . South Asia, marriages much earlier than puberty are not unusual” (p. 238-239). “It is a socially established practice that has been carried on from generation to generation. This is despite the existence of international and regional instruments that all the states in South Asia have ratified,” (Dhital, 2000; UNICEF ROSA, discussion paper).

Section 2: Hindu Marriages in India

Arranged marriages are believed to be “normative in many Asian cultures, such as . . . India (Applbaum, 1995). Specifically, among Hindus in India they continue to be the most popular form of organizing a marital relationship,” (Chawla, 2007, p. 5; see also Mullatti, 1995). Apparently, in India, “a majority (81%) of Indians are Hindu, 13.4% are Muslims, 8% are Buddhists, 4% are Jains, 2.3% are Christians, 2% are Sikhs, and about 0.6% are Bahai, Jews, and Zoroastrians” (Medora, 2007, p. 168). From these statistics it seems that, “Hinduism is the dominant religion and is practiced by over 80 percent of Indians” (Medora, 2007, p. 168). Consequently it is important to examine the religious roots of Hindu marriages in India.

According to Mullatti (1995):

Hinduism is polytheistic in nature. It also believes in the existence of God in humans, animals, and natural forces. It believes that God exists in the soul of the

individual, which ultimately merges into the universal cosmic force called ‘paramatma’ meaning ‘universal Soul’. These beliefs about the nature of God and human beings was earlier put into writing in the Sanskrit language, through Vedas, the Smritis and the Dharma Shastras. They were further vividly illustrated in the two most important epics of Indian mythology – the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. (p. 11)

These scriptures and their teachings seem to hold a great respect among Hindus. As stated by Medora (2007), “the Hindus follow the scriptures and teaching that are outlined in the Vedas (a collection of religious and philosophical poems and hymns), Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, the Mahabharata, and Ramayana” (p. 169). As stated by Shukla & Kapadia (2007), “*A religious duty*, a social necessity, a permanent indissoluble bond, a sacrament or an inevitable phenomenon – *vivaha* or marriage, is upheld as the most esteemed *samskara* [ritual] among all the Hindu *samskaras*” (p. 37). In fact, Chawla (2007) stresses that “the Sanskrit word for marriage – *vivaha* – translates into procuring/abducting a maiden from the house of her father to the house of her husband,” (p. 7). So it seems that historically the practice of relocating brides to their husband’s house has been in place and considered quite acceptable.

Hindu marriage is said to be “derived from laws interpreted in *Dharmashastras* [scriptures of righteous duty] which in turn have their roots in the 3000-year-old hymns [sic] called *Vedas* and *Smritis* . . . the oldest surviving [religious] documents” (Chawla, 2007, p. 6). She further says that “a general theme across these [Hindu] scriptures was that marriage was a duty and a religious sacrament that was required of all human beings

for the well-being of the community” (p. 7). Scriptures, especially the Mahabharata and Ramayana, seem to “stress the importance of work, knowledge, sacrifice, respect, devotion, service to others and the renunciation of worldly and material goods in later life” (Medora ,2007, p. 169; see also Chekki, 1996; Mullatti, 1995). According to Shukla & Kapadia (2007), “the *ashramadharma* theory of the Hindu life cycle comprises four stages, and an individual enters the second stage, (*grihasthyaashrama* or householder) only after getting married” (p. 38). Authors have said that “the second stage, *grihastha* [that] dealt with marriage . . . included the goals of *dharma* [righteous duty], progeny, and sex” (Chawla, 2007, p. 8). Ahuja (1993) informs that out of all three goals of *grihasthyaashram*, *Dharma* or social duty is considered the most important followed by procreation and sexual satisfaction. However, interestingly enough, writers inform that “once married, the 'conjugal relationship' between couples was discouraged from becoming too romanticized” (Chawla, 2007, p. 8). Perhaps because of these religious expectations, Hindus, especially Hindu women, are expected to sacrifice, surrender, renounce, procreate, devote, and perform their duties for the family, community, and the greater good before their personal desires.

Hindu Marriage and Caste System

In the Hindu faith, it is believed that every Hindu is born with certain duties based on one’s caste. Medora (2007) informs that “the caste system has religious elements and is interwoven into the Hindu faith and daily livelihood. Each caste is bound together by a common occupation, common customs, religious beliefs, and rituals,” (p. 171). It is evident in Hindu scriptures that there are certain guidelines and duties that are put in

place according to the caste into which one is born to maintain the social life and events, including marriages of Hindu devotees.

According to Mullati (1995):

These duties can be fulfilled by following the ‘Purusharthas’ – a set of [religious] guidelines for achieving the aims of man’s life – and ‘*Varanasrama*’ [hierarchical system] ‘*Dharma*’ [righteous duty] – a model of a hierarchical system of social organization based mainly on occupation. . . . The Varna system is a hierarchical classification by occupational categories, into Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra – Priestly, Warrior, Trader or Merchant, and farmer or menial classes, respectively. (p. 12)

It seems that these duties and one’s place in the social hierarchy could be crucial to the institution of marriage for Hindus. Bowman, & Dollahite (2013) draw upon the works of other authors such as Saha (1993) and Niranjana (2005) and state that “the caste system in India is the foundation upon which all of Hindu society is built (Saha, 1993). It has been in place for hundreds of years and dictates, based on heredity, the social status of families in India.” (p. 217). They further stress that the caste system “defines what jobs or professions one may pursue as well as whom one may marry (Niranjana, 2005). This system is so strict that there are numerous reports of violence against those who violate it” (Bowman, & Dollahite, 2013, p. 217; see also Yardley, 2010, and Clark, 2002). Perhaps, because of such reasons, marrying in one’s own caste is crucial to avoid social punishment from the community.

Family as a Focal Point

Hindu marriages, moral and social duty of an individual toward the family and community is believed to have great importance in a Hindu's life. Conceivably, marriage "represents the launching of the most universal institution – the family" (Terian, 2014, p. 235). Medora (2007) says that "despite the fact that Indian society has passed through significant cultural, economic, and social transformations, the family continues to be the most important institution that has survived through the ages" (p. 172). Chekki (1996), states that "marriage is regarded as a social duty toward the family and the community; an individual interest is regarded as subordinate to the family" (p. 410). Generally, it is believed that a Hindu marriage is not just a union of two individuals but a long-lasting bond between the two immediate and extended families, which also include their friends, caste members, village members, and neighbors (Mullati, 1995, p. 18; Chekki, 1996, p. 410). Perhaps these explanations provide an insight as to why India seems to be a more collectivistic community than individualistic in nature.

Because families are the central part of South Asian society such as India, decisions pertaining to its members and their marriages seem to be vital as a duty toward the household. Chawla (2007) says that "despite the promise and arrival of economic independence and changes . . . , many urban Hindu women continue to accept and choose arranged marriages" (p. 8). It is perhaps because of the respect and moral duty one has to show toward family and the decisions made by its members. From the information shared about the urban Hindu women "choosing" arranged marriage as opposed to "self-arranged or love marriages" in the above quote; it is quite difficult to foresee the

situations in which rural Hindu women must be going through in terms of marriage decisions and agency. According to Vogl, (2013), “Arranged marriage among Indian women born in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, only 5% report having arranged their marriages independently of their families (p. 1018; see also Desai and Andrist, 2010). In addition, it is reported that “an estimated 95% of all Hindu marriages in India are still arranged marriages (Chawla, 2007, p. 5; see also Bumiller, 1990; Chawla, 2004; Kapadia, 1958; Kapur, 1970; Mullatti, 1995). It is said that “traditionally, the elderly were greatly respected and obeyed by the family, the neighborhood and community” (Mullati, 1995, p. 22). Moreover, it is believed that “formal authority [decision-making power] was always centered on the oldest male” (Chawla, 2007, p. 8). Speculatively, one may infer that because of the prominence of the male authority in the house, marriage negotiations and decisions are highly influenced by male authority, and perhaps unquestionable.

Hindu Marriage Negotiations, Benefits and Beneficiaries

Hindu marriage negotiations are a critical part of the marriage process and believed to have influences from certain factors that may involve caste, class, religion, and education, to name a few. Historically, it was said that “all Hindu marriages were premised upon similarity of social standing, which often included the caste, class, religion, and education of the prospective couple” (Chawla, 2007, p. 6). Apparently the caste system “bonds people of the same caste together [e.g. marriage] but at the same time the caste system splits society up into sub-groups in which people socialize, work, conduct business, live, and marry within their own caste” (Medora, 2007, p. 171). As stated by Bowman, & Dollahite, (2013), for “most families, the key component for

[choosing] a future spouse was [to belong to] identical religion, and more specifically, identical caste. If this factor was not identical for both parties, there was no effort made to investigate the potential spouse further,” (p. 213). Marrying outside one’s religion and caste was believed to be a taboo in these cultures. This could be one of the primary reasons why marrying in the same religion and a specific caste within the religion is crucial in India. So one may contemplate that religion, religious scriptures, and the social hierarchical system that determines one’s caste is crucial and dictates Hindu marriages and marriage negotiations to a certain extent.

Education is also seen as another negotiating factor in Hindu marriages, as the groom’s family may have more negotiating power to demand more dowries because of their highly educated son, unlike most daughters. Willigen & Channa (1991), state that “education of young women is somewhat problematic because suitable husbands for such women must also be college-educated” (p. 369), which might be relatively difficult for parents. They further reiterate that even if such educated young men are found, “the parents of such [educated] young men demand more dowry for their sons. A consideration in sending a young woman to college will therefore be her parents' capacity to dower her adequately so as to obtain an appropriate groom,” (p. 369). One may deduce from this information that more educated the groom is, the higher dowry demand from the groom’s family can be expected. Probably, the more educated the bride is, the relatively harder it is to find an educationally compatible groom and a higher dowry needs to be paid by the bride’s family. Speculatively, it may delay age at marriage and influence the girl’s parents’ willingness to let their daughters pursue higher education,

which could prove to be problematic. It could mean that financial aspects may become central in such marriage negotiations.

As mentioned above, dowry is believed to be yet another potential factor that has its influence over marriage negotiations. Anderson (2007) says that “dowries have long been a custom in India and are presently an almost universal phenomenon” (p. 154). According to Mullatti (1995), “today, highly educated boys with government jobs or professionals like doctors and engineers are so highly sought after, that they can name their ‘prices’ . . . a stigmatic custom” (p. 19) called dowry. It seems that it “ensures parents a return on their investment in a son’s education (JAGORI 2012). Ultimately, the groom’s family holds the bargaining power, basing the dowry on his educational and occupational status,” (Begum, 2014, p. 251; also see Nangia 1997, p. 644). Mullatti (1995) says that dowry, “wherein cash, gold, and modern luxuries such as car, video, and others are given to the boys by the parents of the girls, to increase their status by the marriage” (p. 19). More “recently . . . dowry has come to involve a substantial transfer of wealth from the bride’s family to the groom’s, and has become a major factor in marriage negotiations” (Srinivasan & Lee, 2004, p. 1108; see also Nadagouda, Krishnaswamy, & Aruna, 1992; Paul, 1985; Teja, 1991).

Marriage Negotiations and Matchmakers

Marriage negotiations appear to be an important task in the Hindu marriage process and so are the people such as matchmakers, marriage brokers who carry out such responsibilities. Traditionally, “for centuries, Indian families have sought help from relatives, marriage brokers [also known as *bicholiyas*, *ghataks* etc.]. . . . They have relied

on kinship and caste networks, on marriage bureaus and on “word of mouth” (Titzmann, 2011, p. 239). In earlier times, it seems that “intermediaries called *sambhalas*, or traditional matchmakers, were employed to keep the genealogical history of each family, and ensure that the bride and groom were not related [tracing back] five to seven generations” (Chawla, 2007, p. 6; see also Sur, 1973). Additionally, it seems negotiations or “‘Exchange’ [of wealth, dowry] through matchmaking depended on the valuation of masculine and feminine qualities but also an assessment of the property status of possible partners. Adherence to codes regarding dowry and caste is an aspect of ‘respectability,’” (Kodoth, 2008, p. 273). According to Mullatti (1995) & Chawla (2007), there are seven criteria that are followed by contemporary matchmakers. These criteria are “kin; parents and relatives; caste; social structure; moral value compatibility; academic compatibility; occupational compatibility; the family's moral history; and horoscope compatibility (though not necessarily in this order)” (p. 6). However, as times are changing and technology is making its way; it seems that new addition in terms of marriage brokers have emerged. The research shows that the newspaper “now plays the role of a surrogate marriage broker. Newspapers have separate, systematically organized sections on matrimonials (in terms of alphabetically sequenced categories according to profession or caste)” (Shukla & Kapadia, 2007, p. 38). It is believed that “In the past two decades, parents have begun seeking matches for their children through matrimonial columns in newspapers, magazines, and now even via internet (Chawla, 2007, p. 6; Mullatti, 1995; see also “Rearranging Marriage” in the weekly magazine *India Today*, 2004).

According to Shukla & Kapadia (2007):

In India, the emergence of newer models and alternative strategies such as caste *melas* [fairs], caste record books, and matrimonial advertisements are becoming popular, along with matchmaking via agencies like marriage bureaus. The latest addition to the list is internet matchmaking sites, which have led to a remarkable revolution in the process of partner selection. The familial role of searching for prospective partners is increasingly being shared with the mass media. (p. 38)

As Shukla & Kapadia (2007) emphasize the collaborative role of mass media with traditional ways of matchmaking, it seems that technology has taken over a major part of matchmaking. However, the usage of mass media seems to be more urban-area based, and education seems to be an important prerequisite. Titzmann (2013) reports that “. . . about 80 percent of matrimonial website users are between 18 and 35 years old, have at least a college degree, and live in one of India's mega-cities. These findings confirm the overall impression of a predominantly urban middle-class phenomenon,” (p. 4). Titzmann (2011) found that “the first India-based websites dedicated to matrimonial matchmaking appeared on the World Wide Web in the late 1990s” (p. 239). It appears that the “online matrimonial market is led by three main websites: shaadi.com, bharatmatrimony.com, and jeevansathi.com . . . bharatmatrimony.com, which has developed a different business strategy by mainly addressing regional affiliations . . . [and] specialize in distinct castes” (Titzmann 2013, p. 5). According to the above quote it becomes apparent that, despite moving toward new ways of marriage matchmaking, and the involvement of the urban educated population and mass media; religion and religious social hierarchies still remain

strong in Hindu marriage markets as these mass media-based matrimonial advertisements seems to be subdivided based on religion, caste, class, and region to name a few.

Historical Religious Views toward Marriage and Gender Equality

Religion being an important part of Hindu marriages, various attitudes toward gender and gender roles should be understood from a religious point of view. The ancient attitudes may well have been different from contemporary religious understanding.

According to Terian (2014), “the rituals by which marriage is celebrated are as diverse as the cultures of which they are a part, but in various ways they all celebrate and strengthen the couple’s unity and kin network. [The] religious dimension they help reinforce the meaning of the event,” (p. 235). While examining the religious dimension, authors reveal that, currently, “the traditional Hindu marriage is viewed as a social charter for the establishment of a family. The scriptures stress the sanctity of marriage and the family,” (Chekki, 1996, p. 410). Apparently, women are mainly seen as producers of male heirs so that the family name can continue. Moreso, scholars observe that women “are aware that they are largely an instrument of procreation in the Hindu marriage system. By being relegated to the ‘inside’ their only connection to the outside is their husband, on whom they have little influence.” (Chawla, 2007, p. 8). Although it may appear from the above quotes that the religious interpretation of Hindu marriages and role of women is seen as secondary, while men control patriarchal structures that seem to have existed right from the beginning of times. However, some authors have offered a very different understanding of the ancient Hindu religion and Hindu religious beliefs that are in contrast to present religious understanding and gender roles.

Shankar et al. state that:

Although South Asian society [such as India], like many other societies globally, was and is patriarchal, the Vedas [Hindu scriptures], which are the philosophical roots of many Eastern faiths and cultures, such as Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism, provide ample evidence that current discourses, beliefs, and practices about male superiority are neither part of the South Asian culture nor faiths.

(p.255)

It seems as the time progressed, the interpretations of old scriptures have been understood differently, practiced differently, and read selectively as the old scriptures do seem to seek positive and equal status for women, unlike the male-dominated patriarchal version. Chekki (1996) draws upon the works of Buhler (1806), who discusses some verses that elaborate on scriptural attitudes toward women such as,

Manu Smriti (200 B.C.-A.D. 100) stated that:

Divinity resides in families in which the women are respected; where they are not, there is ruin. . . . Women must be honored and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-law who desire great good fortune. . . .Where women, verily, are honoured, there all sacred rites prove fruitless. . . .Where the female relations live in grief that family soon perishes completely; where, however, they do not suffer any grievance that family always prosper. (p. 411)

Furthermore, authors such as Shankar et al., (2013) state that women were given freedom in the original version of Hindu scriptures before new additions were made “by the authors, from subsequent periods in the history when the status of women was in a state

of decline” (p. 256). They further report that during the Vedic period “women were said to enjoy the freedoms of life as much as men in terms of staying unmarried, widow remarriage or second marriage, mate selection, delay in age at marriage to pursue education, and gender equality” (p. 253). According to Khan & Zaheen (2011), “During Vedic era women enjoyed high status. Woman was never considered as inferior to man. She had the rights to own the property of her father and her husband. After the Vedic period the status of woman was deteriorated” (p. 366). Apparently this status of equality and freedom that was said to have existed in 200 BC was disturbed by the introduction of Christianity and foreign invasions that continued till the mid-1900s.

According to Shankar et al., (2013):

During the 500 year period, from 200 BC to 300 AD, the Northern part of the undivided Indian subcontinent was ravaged by fierce wars between local rulers and successive invaders from foreign lands. . . . The marriageable age for both men and women was lowered around this time. Girls could now be married by 14 or 15 (this underwent further reductions in successive centuries) . . . Marriage was made compulsory for women by a rising patriarchy. (pp. 254-255)

Speculatively, it can be explored from the above explanation that may be the marriageable age was lowered and marriage was made mandatory to protect women from foreign invaders. According to Mullati (1995), “practices such as Sati (bride burning when her husband dies) and untouchability did not have sanction in the ancient Hindu texts. These customs seem to have developed in the politically unstable medieval times [8th through 18th century],” (p. 12). Perhaps because of these foreign invasions and

introduction of new cultures that have been brought to the locals through these invasions may have constituted the ethnically diverse nature of current India and strengthened the notion of patriarchy.

According to Medora (2007):

India is ethnically a very diverse, pluralistic, and the largest secular society in the world. Because of the many invasions and conquests, people of India belong to diverse ethnic groups, have significant cultural variations, adhere to a variety of different beliefs and lifestyles, and speak many different languages that few continents, let alone countries possess. (p. 167)

The above quote sheds light on India's pluralistic and diverse nature that may have an impact on how marriages and marriage laws in current India have evolved, and how they are viewed and practiced in contemporary times. Perhaps because of the invasions, protecting a girl's virginity may have become an issue and because of these reasons the age at marriage may have gone down, and made mandatory, during these times and continue to exist in contemporary India as child marriage.

Mullati (1996), states, "Hindu religion prescribes the marriage of a girl before she reaches puberty (i.e., prior to menarche). This injunction was related to the value of maintaining virginity of the girl before marriage. This gave rise to another cruel custom – that of child marriage," (p. 19). Apparently, child marriage has been viewed as a social issue in contemporary India by leaders, scholars, and human rights activists, among others. For these reasons, it becomes critical to understand, explore, and seek scholarly knowledge pertaining to child marriage practices.

Section 3: Child Marriage: A Social Problem

According to the United Nations, “child marriage refers to marriage where at least one of the parties is under the age of eighteen,” (Malhotra, Warner, McGonagle, & Lee-Rife, 2014, p. 1; Butt, 2015, p. 161; UNICEF, 2014, Burns, 2014). Child marriage may be defined as “a formal marriage or informal union before age 18” (UN, 2000). It seems that “child marriage is widespread and can lead to a lifetime of disadvantage and deprivation” (UNICEF, Child Marriage, 2014, Para1).

There is no refuting that child marriage is a reality for both boys and girls. However, girls seem to be more often negatively affected than boys. The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) 2011 report states, “Child marriage disproportionately and negatively affects girls, who are more likely to be married as children than boys” (Khanna, Verma, & Weiss, 2013; Mathur, Greene, & Malhotra, 2003; UNICEF, 2006; Save the Children, 2004; Burns, 2014, p. 152). According to the ICRW 2011 report, “over 60 million girls and women are affected by child marriage globally (Butt, 2015, p. 162; ICRW 2011). It is reported that, “more than 700 million women alive today were married before their 18th birthday” (Svanemyr, Venkatraman, Raj, Travers, & Sundaram, 2015, p. 1; UNICEF, 2014). It seems approximately “14 million girls under the age of 18 are married off each year” (Butt, 2015, p. 162; UNFPA, 2005). Child marriage is believed to be “both a grave violation of human rights and a stumbling block to achieving development goals related to gender, health, and education” (Svanemyr et al., 2015, p. 1; Stith, 2015, p. 2).

Although the practice of child marriage seems to be widespread (Ghosh, 2011, p. 199), it is believed to be particularly pervasive across South Asia and Africa where 50-70 percent of girls in some countries are married before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2009; Khanna, Verma, & Weiss, 2011, p. 1; Butt, 2015, p. 161). While the majority of child brides reported to reside in South Asia, “the practice is certainly not limited to developing nations, because many countries in the Western world allow marriages with parties who are under the age of eighteen” (Warner, 2004; Burns, 2014, p. 152).

Burns (2014) states, “Despite being one of the 158 countries with domestic legislation specifically banning the practice of child marriage, India has the highest number of child brides in the world (p. 153). Similar conclusions were drawn by other scholars (see Raj, McDougal, Silverman & Rusch, 2014; Burns, 2014; Ghosh, 2011; Nasrullah et al., 2014; Stith, 2015; Economic & Political Weekly, 2013). One of the reasons for such a status despite having laws banning the practice is perhaps because of the fact that, “for many of these countries with a high prevalence of child marriage, social and cultural values hold more weight in the community than state-enacted law; thus, domestic legislation banning child marriage is weakly enforced,” (Burns, 2014, p. 153, also see Raj, McDougal, Silverman & Rusch, 2014; Ghosh, 2011; Nasrullah et al., 2014; Stith, 2015). The question that arises is, how can one approach a social issue such as child marriage that poses a break with traditions? Furthermore,

According to United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2010:

It is projected that child marriage rates in South Asia are the second highest in the world, behind only West Africa. Nearly half (46 per cent) of young women in

South Asia aged 20-24 in 2010 were married before they turned 18. And if present trends continue then 130 million girls in South Asia will be married as children by 2030.

It is only natural for developing countries to be alarmed about the practice of child marriage that is critically affecting the girl child.

Moreover, according to Butt & Naveed, 2015:

The prevalence of child marriage varies substantially between and within countries [as a whole including both urban and rural population] in South Asia. Bangladesh has the highest prevalence of child marriages in the region (66 per cent) followed by Afghanistan (57 percent), Nepal (51 percent) and India (46 percent). These four countries are considered the region's "hot spots" because of their high child marriage prevalence. (p. 163)

According to these statistics, India comes fourth in terms of mixed population of child brides (urban and rural). However, it is believed that the, "girls living in rural areas are [the real] victims of child marriages, and the problem is worst in rural Bangladesh, with 70 percent of girls married early, followed by India with 56 percent" (Butt & Naveed, 2015, p. 163). With these recent statistics, India seems to stand second leading country in practicing child marriage. It is only natural for scholars and development organizations to contemplate over the conditions that are leading factors to the practice of child marriage.

Apparently, progress "in reducing rates of child marriage is being made in a number of countries, particularly among younger adolescents" (UNFPA, 2012).

However, it is believed that "global rates of child marriage remain alarmingly high and

require strengthened policy and programmatic efforts informed by strong evidence of what works” (Svanemyr et al., 2015, p. 1). In addition, Svanemyr et al. (2015) have pointed out that the present efforts are lacking their desired success, perhaps because of the lack of understanding of the root causes of the social issue itself. Svanemyr et al. (2015) state that “our understanding . . . [of] child marriage is limited . . . [and] . . . more segmented analyses are needed that cover . . . religion, ethnicity, education, social class and so on” (Greene, 2014; Svanemyr et al., 2015, p. 1).

Conceivably, an in-depth study of an environment (or possibly similar portrayal on popular media of such an environment) in which child marriage is practiced can be carried out. Such a study might explore, but not be limited to understanding the role of religion, ethnicity, education of its members, and social status based on caste in an Indian context. A study that could bring a certain degree of enlightenment that could perhaps pave the way for approaching, representing, addressing, or eradicating the practice of child marriage and bring about social change. But first, as Svanemyr et al. suggested, it is crucial that one must gain the knowledge of and understand, what the various conditions that lead to and promote the practice of child marriage are? What are the root causes? What have various scholars discovered through the lenses of religion, ethnicity, education, social class, and so on?

Conditions that Promote Child Marriage

Apparently, there are a number of different conditions that can lead to the practice of child marriage and its social promotion. These may include poverty, patriarchy, education, religious attitudes toward women, and family honor, to name a few. It is noted

by scholars that of the various factors of child marriage, there are a few important ones that are at the root of the practice.

For instance:

The most important factors [that promote the practice of child marriage] are poverty, illiteracy, and lack of awareness; [the] more a community is undeveloped economically and socially, particularly with respect to female education, the more it becomes prone to practice early marriage” (Ghosh, 2011, p. 207; Butt, & Naveed, 2015, p. 161; Khanna, Verma, & Weiss, 2011).

Moreover, “apart from class, race, age, religion, and ethnicity, gender is another vital dimension of social stratification, putting the female at a level of disadvantage” (Rao, Vidya, & Sriramy, 2015, p. 212; Svanemyr et al., 2015, p. 2; Butt, & Naveed, 2015, p. 161), and perhaps making them somewhat more vulnerable to societal discrimination and pressure.

Additionally, other scholars including Svanemyr et al., 2015; Jain & Kurz, 2007; UNFPA, 2013; reiterate that:

Studies from Africa and South Asia point to the root causes and exacerbating factors that contribute to child marriage – traditions and gender-discriminatory norms rooted in patriarchal values and ideologies, the lack of educational and economic alternatives to child marriage, as well as exacerbating social factors such as poverty, economic instability and conflict, and humanitarian crisis. (p. 2)

In terms of gender in the Indian context, Rao et al. (2015) assert that “gender seems to be one of the most dominant variables that influence human development from conception to death, particularly in Indian society” (p. 212).

Patriarchy, patriarchal values, and ideologies seem to make up another factor that may promote child marriage. Apparently, there are a number of different locations in which patriarchal ideologies may manifest, grow, and promote child marriage. Such locations may include but are not limited to, family, religion, and traditions, among others. It is believed that the family “is a crucial site for the development of gender identities, and male elders closely control life within and outside the family” (Ghosh, 2011, p. 205). Furthermore, it seems that “the patriarchal devaluing of girl children . . . that leads religious and family systems in many parts of the globe to devalue girl children through the practice of child marriage” (Stith, 2015, p. 17). South Asian societies, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and especially India, are believed to “have been deeply rooted in religion, traditions and customs. Most of the[se] traditions put emphasis on child marriages particular [sic] of females even without their consent” (Butt, & Naveed, 2015, p. 166). Girls seems to inherit “their mothers’ domestic chores and adopt stereotypical gender roles. Low self-esteem and self-worth are common. After marriage, her husband and in-laws control her life. Consequently, the girls enter a state of silence” (Rao, et al., 2015, p. 1). On the other hand, it appears that Hindu traditions and religious systems in India provide a male child with privileges and responsibilities to carry out important rituals and duties.

According to Vishnu Smriti: a Hindu scripture, a son is enjoined:

Let a son present the funeral oblations to his father, even though he inherits no property. Because he saves his father from the hell called *Put*, therefore he is called *put-tra* [son] by Svayambhu [God] himself. The father throws his debt on the son and the father obtains immortality if he see [sic] the fact of a living son.

Through a son he conquers the worlds, through a grandson he obtains immortality, and through a grandson's son he gains the world of the sun. (XV. 43-46)

No such statements seem to be made about girl children or women in recent interpretations of religious scriptures. Through such ideologies, duties, responsibilities, and value placed in male family members, patriarchy seems to receive religious support. Perhaps because of these reasons, the research shows that, during the young developing years, "as a girl unknowingly, the lines of Manu-Smriti (another Hindu religious scripture), gets incorporated in her mind" (Rao, et al., 2015, p. 1). These lines are further believed to be subconsciously accepted "by a young girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, [that] nothing must be done independent [sic], even in her own house" (Rao, et al., 2015, p. 1). Such patriarchal religious traditions said to "celebrate girls as young wives and mothers, not as the girls they are. This appropriation is a key component of patriarchal power and girls' disempowerment" (Stith, 2015, p. 6).

According to a religious Hindu scripture known as "Laws of Manu":

Wives who bear children, secure many blessings, who are worthy of worship and bless homes are as goddesses of fortune who reside in the houses of men. Woman

is the source of children, of the nurture of those born and of the care of men.

Offspring, the performance of religious rites, faithful service, highest conjugal happiness and heavenly bliss for the ancestors and oneself, depend on one's wife alone. She who controlling her thoughts, speech, and acts violates not her duty toward her lord [husband], dwells with him in heaven, and in this world is called by the virtuous a faithful wife. (Manusmrithi, IX.26-29)

The above quote provides a brief account of what a virtuous wife and her responsibilities are according to Hindu scriptures. Rao, et al., 2015, states that, such concepts of being dependent on men, serving them and being a virtuous wife in the future are incorporated in young girls' minds beginning right from childhood. Such concepts seem to stay alive in the name of traditions and religious sanctions for women to serve men, that not only seem to strengthen patriarchy but may give rise to patriarchal ideologies in the process. Scholars find that such reasons, "historically transmitted powerful influence of patriarchal ideology [for instance through religious sanctions] continues to reinforce custom and traditions such as child marriages that put women in [a] subservient position to men" (Nazrullah, Zakar, Zakar, Abbas, Safdar, Shaukat, & Kramer, 2014, p. 9).

Religion, one of the most important aspects of a society, sanctions such prescriptions and perceptions for and of men and women (which in turn may promote child marriage.) How then does one confront it? How can such situations be handled without offending members of a society that strongly believes in and practices such traditions? Speculatively, subjecting girls to such a lifestyle in the name of religious sanctions may affect not only how women are perceived, not only by the society, but also

by the women themselves. Key factors that influence perceptions of traditional Indian women that promote child marriage are discussed in the next section.

Family honor is believed to be yet another key factor that may promote the practice of child marriage. Butt & Naveed (2015) assert that the key drivers other than poverty that promote child marriage are the “socio-cultural notions of preserving traditions; honor (*izzat/laaj*); maintaining power control; male dominance; illiteracy or lack of education; and religious perceptions especially of women.” In a traditional Hindu society, where the caste system is still prevalent; the concept of family honor or *izzat* or *laaj* seems to be attached to the girl’s sexuality. Basham (1967), observed that, “A woman was thought to be naturally libidinous; an unmarried girl attaining puberty would proceed to find a lover, however strictly her parents guarded her” (p. 167). Basham’s observation draws attention to a lingering fear of failure of Hindu society and having an unmarried daughter in her puberty; failure to control her sexuality might cost them their honor. It is believed that if women or girls are given too much freedom, then it can damage the honor of a family and society at large.

According to Narad Smriti, an ancient religious Hindu scripture:

It is through independence that women go to ruin, though born in a noble family. Therefore the Lord of creatures has assigned a dependent condition to them. The father protects her during her infancy, the husband protects her when she is grown up, and the sons in her old age. A woman is unfit to enjoy independence. (Narad Smriti, XIII.30-31)

The above quote explicitly shows the need of controlling women and their sexuality. Ahmed-Ghosh (2009) asserts that the ancient texts such as Manusmriti reinforce such judgments on women and observes that, “In fact, fathers are called upon to give their daughters in marriage before they attain puberty because of fears regarding their uncontrolled sexuality, leading Manu to declare the marriageable age for girls to be 8-10 years old.” Such passages in the Manusmrithi provide an insight into the religious importance of being a male member of the household; the protector of women in every phase of life.

According to the scripture:

A father ought to protect a woman while she is a maiden, the husband when she is married and sons when the husband is no more. A woman ought never to remain independent. The woman must obey her father in childhood, the husband in youth and sons in old age. (Manusmrithi, V, 147).

Writers inform that through these religious texts the position of women is defined, “as dependent, inferior and simultaneously pure and impure in relation to men in marriage. This is done by defining the subservient role of women in the household as dependent daughters, wives, and mothers” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). The Hindu scriptures further prescribe certain duties to male members of a family toward women, in terms of timely marriage and care of female family members irrespective of age, relation or social status. It states that, “The father is to blame if he does not arrange for the daughter's marriage in proper time, the husband if he does not look after his wife properly and son if he does not protect his mother during her old age (Manusmrithi, 1, 85). Basham reiterates and points

out that, “it was even declared that a father who did not give his daughter in marriage before her first menstruation incurred the guilt of one procuring abortion (worse than many kinds of murder) for every menstrual period in which she remained unmarried.”

It seems that in order to serve such religiously prescribed duties to protect and marry daughters in proper time, “controlling the girl’s sexuality becomes even more imperative under a rigid caste system where exogamy, or marriage outside one’s caste, brings dishonor and shame to the family and community” (Ghosh, 2011, p. 209). In this regard, a girl’s sexuality and its protection may be seen as an issue of concern and a liability by her family. Perhaps, for these reasons, marrying off a girl as soon as possible means transferring the duty to protect her sexuality into the hands of her husband and his family. According to Karlekar (1998), “Control over her sexuality and its safe transference into the hands of her husband is of primary importance," (1745). This may allow a girl’s parents to discount any future possibility of being dishonored by their daughter’s sexuality. Besides, it is believed that, “One of the duties a man must fulfill to attain good karma (deeds in the present life that determine one's status in the next life) is to give his daughter away in marriage, referred to as *kanyadaan* (gifting/giving away of the daughter)” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009).

According to Butt, & Naveed:

Of all the other social constructions which instigate child marriage, the notion of ‘honour’ (*izzat*) appears to be the most important factor of the discourse. There is usually a marked pressure on parents to marry their daughters at an early age in order to lessen the risk of dishonour [sic] attached with the sex without marriage.

Child marriage therefore, becomes a convenient way to [foist] off the burden of protection and responsibility of preserving the honor. It is a common notion that child marriage is an effective way to prevent transgressing sexual behavior among young people, particularly girls.

It is observed that, “The belief that men's honor rests in the behavior and public image of their women is still prevalent in India and is the basis of direct control by men over women's sexual and marital behavior” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). A two-year study was conducted in Bihar and Jharkhand states in India where child marriage seems to be highly prevalent. The study resulted in two significant findings, “One, fathers (the main decision-makers in this regard) looked upon child marriage as guaranteeing their daughters’ safety and, two, the practice was driven by a strong fear of female sexual promiscuity and the ensuing “dishonor” (Economic & Political Weekly, 2013, p. 9). These findings suggest strong male authority toward female family members and an apparent need to control their sexuality through marriage. It is crucial for these reasons to further understand the attitudes toward women in a traditional patriarchal society such as India.

Attitudes toward Women in India and the Consequences of Child Marriage

India is known for many reasons, including that it is a country of 3 million gods. Women are often seen as reflections of the Hindu goddesses. However, according to Rao, Vidya, & Sriramy (2015), “in spite of India’s reputation for respecting women, to the extent of treating woman as a goddess, history tells us that women were ill-treated or neglected in various spheres of life across religions, regions, and communities” (p. 212).

Furthermore, “in India, the traditional attitude toward the girl child is that of indifference and neglect, an offshoot of prejudices nursed for centuries in our culture” (Sharma, Goel, & Gupta 2003, p. 66). When a child is born, “the first thing [that] comes to mind is whether it is a boy or a girl?” (Rao et al., 2015, p. 212). Apparently, Indian societies are still overwhelmingly patriarchal; boy infants seem to be highly celebrated as their births are prized and warmly welcomed.

However, a girl child:

Is an unknown intrusion; the cause of sorrow when she is born. A burden to parents, who have to amass a dowry for her. She is also the convenient workhorse. The one who has to be fed less than her male counterparts and [is] easy prey to exploitation. She is the girl child. In a society where women and children have few rights, she, by virtue of being both, has none. (Bachi Karkaria, cited in Sharma et al., 2003, p. 66)

Authors say that “a woman is born because of bad karma in the previous life and fulfilling the role of a wife constitutes penance for her previous life” (Khanna, 2002; Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). Furthermore, it is noted that, “Such ritualized rationalizations of women's subordinate status contribute to men's elevated sense of themselves, their masculinities, and empowerment” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009).

Additionally, it appears that the, “birth of a girl – especially a second or subsequent daughter – is often perceived as a crisis” (Rao et al., 2015, p. 213).

Speculatively, more daughters could mean more dowries to amass and more mouths to feed, which may create financial crisis in the family. Such attitudes toward women may

have their consequences. Among the abuses that many Indian women may face in their lives; it seems, “child marriage is one of the most prevalent forms of sexual abuse and exploitation, especially of girls” (Ghosh, 2011, p. 199). This practice is said to be often naturalized, accepted, and promoted as a traditional norm especially in patriarchal societies such as India.

Additionally:

The underlying reasons – if indeed they can be called reasons – are many: poverty, the low or even no value accorded to female education and health, the worry about having to pay a larger dowry if the girl is in her 20s, the fear of social disapproval if a daughter is not married, and, most significantly, the desire to control female sexuality. (Economic & Political Weekly, 2013, p. 9)

One of the consequences of child marriage seems to be the deschooling of a girl child. Ghosh (2011) asserts that “poverty and related problems promote early marriage by putting pressure on the daily expenses of a family related to education, maintenance, clothing, and the like” (p. 208). On the other hand, “child marriage contributes to ‘deschooling’ for a large number of girls, even though there are a fortunate few who could continue their educations even after marriage” (Ghosh, 2011, p. 208). However, in general, “once a [girl] child is married, her schooling is usually terminated because her domestic obligations to her husband and his family become the priority” (Burns, 2014, p. 156). Furthermore,

According to Khalid, & Nveed, 2015, in child marriage:

A girl suffers shocks and stresses as she leaves her family and is sent to a new family in shape of her in-laws where she has to undertake responsibility of domestic works. In the traditionalist society, these circumstances are taken as fate of the girl and she is supposed to adjust herself. (p. 171)

Gosh (2011) states that “the practice condemns children to an existence devoid of education, health, safety, and freedom of choice. Early marriage . . . ensures that girls accept their domestic and conjugal roles during childhood. . . . (p. 199-200). Furthermore, scholars believe that relocation of brides or “transition from her family to a new family (in-laws) hampers her self-confidence and personal development which put negative psychological effects on the young girl” (Khalid, & Naveed, 2015, p. 171). Writers observe that, “ Patrilocality (the bride moving to her husband's extended household after marriage) for women further confines her to her husband and his family spatially, creating for the new wife a situation of alienation and utmost dependency on her husband and in-laws” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). Apparently, these explanations seem to point toward physical, physiological, and psychological consequences of child marriage. Authors assert that, “Patrilocality in itself is an example of hegemonized familial masculinity that underlies the very basis of Indian patriarchy” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). Moreover, poverty seems to worsen these consequences as the poor families go through different stages of child marriage.

According to Dutt (2000):

Usually, there are three stages in child marriage: a betrothal or *sagai*, which is arranged while both children are very young. This is usually accompanied by payment of some money by the girl's family to that of the boy. The actual marriage ceremony or *vivah/shadi* is conducted within a few years when the girl's family has collected sufficient money. . . . Finally, the girl leaves her parental home on reaching puberty or sometimes even earlier, especially if her in-laws need an extra pair of hands for household or agricultural work. This is the final stage of the marriage, referred to as the *gauna*, and usually implies consummation of the relationship.

The above quote explains the economic hardships because of a girl's birth, especially to the poor. However, more than the economic hardship, these marriages may pose a greater risk to the health of a girl child as sometimes the girls may have to leave her parents' houses sooner rather than later. As a result, it appears that "forced sexual relations and early motherhood also undermine her [the girl child's] psychosocial condition and development" (Khalid, & Naveed, 2015, p. 171).

According to Dutt (2000):

Despite the three stages starting with the *sagai*, until the *gauna*, the girl usually leaves at a very tender age for her in-laws' home. Consequently, her first child is also likely to be born at an early age, with all the attendant ill effects on her and the baby's health.

Seemingly, when these young girls “become mothers, it may be much more difficult for them to instill a sense of self-identity within their children, because they have never been encouraged to develop their own” (Stith, 2015, p. 15). Protecting the girl child today seems to be an issue of major concern for developing countries (Ghosh, 2011, p. 199). Such scholarship seems to bring physiological, health, as well as psychosocial consequences of child marriage to the forefront.

Another consequence of child marriage seems to be the intergenerational transmission of social norms and domestic violence. Prior research “documents the role of intergenerational transmission of social norms related to marriage and family, including those regarding spousal violence, age at first birth, and family size, and how these related to gender roles and expectations” (Axinn, Clarkberg, & Thornton, 1994; Barber, 2001; Farre & Vella, 2009; Perlson & Greene, 2014). Much of this work has, “focused on transfer of norms from mother to child, documenting the role of mothers in affecting normative practices of both daughters and sons (Barber, 2001; Raj, Ghule, Battala, Dasgupta, Ritter, Nair, Saggurti, Silverman, & Balaiah, p. 1182). Srivastava (1995) commented that “the Indian family is a transmission belt for the diffusion of cultural standards to the next generation, a psychological agent of society, a shock absorber, and an institution of many enhancing and valuable qualities” (Medora, 2007, p. 173). Moreover, scholars report that “the influence of folktales is important in this context. People belonging to the older generation tell stories of the early years of their married life and these seem to create a moral basis for marrying early” (Ghosh, 2011, p. 209) and following the traditional power structure within the family.

According to Choudhry (2001)

The traditional family power structure is reinforced through well-known literary epics [such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*]. Examples include the dutiful son Rama, who willingly went into exile for 14 years to keep his father's promise, and the devoted son Sravana, who carried his blind parents on his shoulders on a pilgrimage across the continent. Such stories are highly symbolic. The desire to preserve and continue the core values that they exemplify remains very strong. (p. 379)

Stories such as those of the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Sravana Kumar*, among others seemingly lay out high moral and social expectations from a family and its members especially women. Such stories are seen as the symbols of high social and moral ideals. Apparently, women often are the ones who are expected to make sacrifices and live up to these ideals more than men. According to the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, the story describes how Prince Ram of Ayodhya went into 14 years of exile, but it was Sita's, wifely duty to follow her husband into exile without complaint, as her moral duty was supposed to lie with her husband (and the society in the epic seemingly expected her to know such duties). In the epic, Sita, the wife of Ram, must sacrifice her comforts of the palace to serve her husband in exile and if she doesn't then she may not be seen as a virtuous wife as described in the Hindu scriptures.

Such expectations and understanding of Hindu scriptures and epics that are seen as an integral part of a Hindu's life may further affect women's place and perceptions in such societies and may strengthen patriarchal ideologies. Such intergenerational

transitions of religious beliefs, gender roles, traditions, and cultural understandings may affect how moral duties as a Hindu may be seen, understood, and practiced in a society that may possibly promote practices such as child marriage.

It is believed that domestic violence is yet another major consequence of child marriage, “particularly where there is difference of ages between the spouses and joint family system. [The] girl is not supposed to leave her husband[‘s] house, no matter if he is abusive and undertakes violence with his wife” (Khalid, & Naveed, 2015, p. 172). And yet it seems that domestic violence “in the South Asian community . . . is massively underreported” (Shankar, Das & Atwal, 2013, p. 248).

Research reflects several reasons why women often do not report domestic violence. For instance, “some of these women have been raised in oppressive patriarchal family environments for generations and therefore do not see themselves as oppressed” (Shankar et al., 2013, p. 259). Perhaps they see it as a normal way of life. Mulally (2009), refers to this condition as “internalized oppression.” In addition, the burden of carrying and protecting a family’s honor (*izzat*) is often seemingly placed on women’s shoulders. Because of this, they may feel obligated to protect that honor and therefore may avoid reporting domestic violence incidents (Choudhary, 2013). Authors report that sometimes women may “believe that oppressive patriarchal discourses are part of their culture and faith and will therefore refrain from questioning them” (Shankar et al., 2013, p. 259). Past research has shown that one reason for not reporting domestic abuse is that domestic violence is often seen as a family matter that “must be managed with the help of family elders or extended family members” (Shankar et al., 2013, p. 259). Young girls growing

up in such oppressive patriarchal family environments may subconsciously develop acceptance toward such lifestyles as being normal. Possibly, girls who are married young often may not have the ability to understand the meaning of marriage and what it entails. Perhaps for this reason, it may be easier for the traditional families to mold them however they would want when they enter the husband's household. It may seem that early marriage not only "ensures that girls accept their domestic and conjugal roles during childhood, but it also puts them in a position in which they are unable to exercise a choice about their own sexual and reproductive health." (Ghosh, 2011, p. 199). Perhaps for these reasons, early marriage or child marriage is seen as a threat, and is believed that "it undermines a number of rights guaranteed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child" (UNICEF, 2009, p. 8). Apparently as a result of such concern, several efforts had been reported to address this issue, both politically and legally.

Yet another consequence of child marriage, perhaps indirect, is the life of a widow and the attitudes toward widows. According to Chaudhuri (2009), "child marriage also leaves numbers of young girls as widows, vulnerable to sexual exploitation and prostitution," (p. 11). Hence, it may be understood that widowhood and its consequences may become more intense if experienced by a child bride. According to Mastey (2009), "Widowhood in India is often described as a definitive and tragic moment in a woman's life – one in which her identity is stripped away with the death of her husband" (p. 191).

Chaudhuri (2009) asserts that:

Hindu scriptures such as the *Dharmasutras* (c. 500–200 BC) and *Dharmasastras*, especially the *Manusmriti* (c. 200 AD), prescribe that widows renounce worldly

joys, live an ascetic existence, wear white (the colour of mourning), sleep on the ground, and only eat once a day (subject to fasts and other food restrictions). (p. 11)

Similar observations are also supported by Mastey (2009) who says that these scriptures and ancient texts include the “statutes that a widow must remove all excess adornments, observe fasts, eat limited meals each day, forgo hot foods, and replace the red *sindoor* [vermillion] on her forehead with ash from her husband’s funeral pyre,” (p. 191). It seems that these sanctions were not enough and that there was a need for these texts to further “pronounce that a woman who is a widow cannot remarry” (Mastey, 2009, p. 191) and “remarriage of widows continues to be a taboo” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009).

Authors say that widows are allowed to wear only white because it “represents both mourning and traditional notions of purity. It comes across as a particularly oppressive colour; the widows live a death-like existence because of religious instruction to remain chaste out of respect for their deceased husbands” (Cladwell, 2012, p. 115-116). Chakravarti (1998) points out that, “The widow’s institutionalized marginality, a liminal state between being physically alive and being socially dead, was the ultimate cultural outcome of the deprivation of the widow of her sexuality as well as her personhood” (p. 64). When a Hindu woman becomes a widow, certain rituals are followed and she “takes on the expected signifiers of widowhood. Her bangles are smashed; . . . she is stripped of her colourful clothes and attired in a white sari: acts of cruelty and a radical transformation for a child, so innocent and full of life,” (Chaudhuri, 2009, p. 17) an “antithesis of what a Hindu widow should be” (Saltzman, 2005, p. 183).

The difficult life of a widow does not stop here, as writers assert that widows are “considered inauspicious and therefore excluded from weddings and other social, religious events, widows are still frequently ostracised [sic] from society and discriminated against” (Chaudhuri, 2009, p. 11). Ritual stigmatization is believed “to be continuing to this day. To give them some purpose in life, they are relegated to a life of prayer and seclusion” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). It appears that the “system of marriage places women in a situation of vulnerability after their husband’s death” (Mastey, 2009, p. 191), especially a child bride.

Political and Legal Efforts to Prevent Child Marriage

Efforts to address child marriage in India are reported to have started not very long ago. It seems that the “legal prevention of child marriage in India began during the 1880s when a serious campaign was launched to raise the age of consent . . . from 10 to 12 years under Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code” (Ghosh, 2011, p. 201). It has been reported that in 1891, “reformists proposed to attack a dimension of child marriage by raising the age of consent for consummation of marriage. Two well-publicized court cases in Bengal and Maharashtra were the provocation for the bill” (Tambe, 2000, p. 590). However, as scholars have reported, “child marriage was not only customary but was also strongly recommended by authoritative religious codes; the colonial states at the time were hesitant to intervene” (Sarkar, 2000).

During the British colonial period, it seems that “efforts were first made to control child marriage through the Child Marriage Restraint Act [CMRA], 1929” (Ghosh, 2011, p. 200). The “unprecedented campaign [was] orchestrated by the early women's

movement for the passage of the Child Marriage Restraint Act, or the Sarda Act as it was popularly called after its sponsor Harbilas Sarda” (Sinha, 2000, p. 629). This women’s movement was reported to be dominated by “three major all-India women's organizations, the Women's Indian Association (WIA), the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC), and the National Council of Women in India (NCWI)” (Sinha, 2000, p. 623-624). It is thought that this “legislation had little effect since most marriages were based on religious law, not civil law” (Harmon, & Kaufman, 2004).

Apparently, the Sarda Bill was believed to be unsuccessful “as organized women themselves recognized, [it] fell short of the reform called for by the women's movement and was seriously flawed as a legislative measure to check child marriages in India” (Sinha, 2000, p. 629). Much later, The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act [PCMA], 2006, reported to repeal the earlier CMRA and declared such marriages to be voidable” (Ghosh, 2011, p. 200). The new PCMA, which appears to prohibit marriage of girls below the age of 18 years (Economic & Political Weekly, 2013, p. 9), was finally enforced on January 11th 2007. It was put in place because the CMRA “did not, however, declare child marriage to be illegal or invalid,” the PCMA first put some penalties in place (Ghosh, 2011). For instance, authors say that such penalties included prison for a maximum period of three months or a fine of RS. 1,000 (which is less than \$20 US) on the bridegroom, his guardian, and anyone, regardless of religion, caste, class or any other factor, who performed such acts, even, for instance, the officiating priest (Ghosh, 2011; Burns, 2014). However, scholars inform say that there were limitations to the new act, too. It was indicated that the PCMA “does not make a child marriage invalid unless either

of the contracting parties objects to it within a stipulated period,” (Ghosh, 2011, p. 202). The core problem appears to have remained the same; the naturalization of the practice in the society that prevented reporting such marriages to the legal authorities, since it was typically never viewed as a wrongdoing at first place. In fact, authors inform that “a marriage is considered to be a life-long bond in rural India and any break down in the conjugal relation is treated as a bad omen” (Ghosh, 2011, p. 202). Besides, it would be rare to find someone (outside the involved families and close relatives) who would take upon the responsibility of reporting such marriages, and the question of “who would take care of maintenance and residence of the girl or custody of the child?” could then present difficulties. (Ghosh, 2011, p. 202). The practice seems to be still prevalent and the social situation of a girl child bride is believed to be the same as it was before. But the question remains, why?

Child Marriage Prohibition Laws vs. Social and Cultural Values

Notwithstanding the enforcement of PCMA in 2007, which apparently raised the legal age of marriage to 18 for girls and 21 for boys; the core problem believed to have remained the same. Child marriage and how it is viewed through the traditional, socio-cultural, and religious lens seems to be an important issue. Rao et al. (2015) asserts that, “in India, early marriage of girls has received religious and social sanctions. Despite the laws, that helped increasing the legal age of marriage to 18 for girls, there are strong cultural pressures on parents to marry daughters early” (p. 214). Furthermore, authors point out that “these age-at-marriage laws are atypically enforced in the region, as marriage is viewed as a family rather than civil matter, governed by religion or culture

rather than law” (Raj, McDougal, Silverman, & Rusch, 2014, p. 2; see also Khanna, Verma, and Weiss 2013). Apparently, respect for “tradition, including the hierarchy implicit in social relationships, is the norm. Family solidarity and mutual dependence are encouraged” (Choudhary, 2001, p. 378).

Ghosh (2011) states that, “despite several legal reforms since independence, social life in rural India centres [sic] mostly around the institutions of family, kinship, caste, and religion” (p. 205). Family and family structure seem to dictate and distribute power among Indian Hindu family members. The family structure seems to lay out expectations and obligations each family member has toward the household and its honor.

According to Choudhary (2001)

Family in India is the center of all social organization. Family and kinship provide the basis of the individual’s identity as well as facilitating continuity of culture and religion. In a traditional South Asian family, elders live with their children, preferably with their son(s), in a common (joint) household. To respect, honor, and look after one’s parents is considered a moral obligation and an ideal of human life. In a traditional household, the oldest male has material power and remains the head of the family. (p. 378)

Hence, any matter that might bring dishonor to the family may often remain undisclosed to the public or outside the community. Seemingly, at the “core of the family system are respect for elders and filial piety. Parents [are] to be honored and revered. Elders are valued for their experience and wisdom; they are consulted for advice, support, and

resolution of family conflicts” (Choudhary 2001, p. 378). As a result, authors said that “since its inception in 1929, domestic legislation in India aimed at preventing child marriage has experienced minimal, if any, success as cultural and social norms reign supreme over weakly enforced state-enacted law” (Child Marriage, *supra* note 60; Burns, 2014, p. 159). Individual families seem to be important. However, scholars agree that “collective identity is valued, and individualism is equated with self-centeredness. Furthermore, the community is seen as an extended family” (Choudhary 2001, p. 378).

Perhaps because of these reasons, it may seem that any matter of honor is often dealt with within the individual or extended family that is the community in traditional ways and not by the legal system. As an amalgamation of such socio-cultural beliefs combined with certain economic factors, such as poverty, it seems that child marriage has become a tradition itself.

Ghosh (2011) asserts that:

Child marriage itself has become a tradition or norm as a result of the combination of certain social, cultural, and economic factors. The influence of such a norm is more profound in the life of the members of a community that maintains strong social and community bonds through the persistence of kinship ties, religious obligations, and social practices. (p. 205 & 207)

Yet another challenge in implementing laws seems to be the pluralistic nature of Indian family law. Burns (2014) states that, “Pluralism is when a group of people of various social classes, religions, or races coexist in a society but maintain their different sets of rules and traditions” (p. 159; see also DePaul, 2013). Scholars believe that this pluralistic

nature of Indian family law is “undoubtedly a factor adding to the complexity behind enforcing domestic legislation. . . . Hindu law, for example, includes a collection of different micro legal systems” (Burns, 2014, p. 159). Similarly, Indian Muslim families are permitted to follow their own religiously sanctioned law, known as Sharia law. There seems to be no single streamlined set of marriage laws in India, which may create confusion and difficulty in addressing the issue of marriage, including child marriage.

Apparently, “there is a silent complicity in child marriage in India, and many rural and backward communities treat it as normal,” (Ghosh, 2011, p. 199). Furthermore, it seems that women in all “social classes are groomed in a patriarchal and patrilocal society, in one way or another, for marriage and motherhood” (Ghosh, 2011, p. 207). Moreover, it is believed that “child marriage disproportionately affects females of poor, low-educated families residing in rural areas” (Nasrullah, Zakar, Abbas, Safdar, Shaukat & Kramer, 2014, p. 3).

Because of the continued practice of child marriage despite it being unconstitutional; controversies are bound to arise. Portrayal of child marriage on the Indian television drama series known as “*Balika Vadhu: Kacchi Umr ke Pakke Rishte*” (*BV*) translated as, “*Child bride: Firm Relationships at a Tender Age*” (broadcast on the *Colors* television channel) seems to have evoked such a controversy in the Indian Parliament. Certain politicians in the Indian Parliament saw *BV*’s child marriage portrayal as unconstitutional. In this regard, it is important to review the relevant literature how mass media itself engages in bringing about social change through its portrayals. The context is set in the next section through giving an account of the development of Indian

television and the role of government and political leaders in controlling and regulating media content, and the role of mass media such as television in bringing about social change through its portrayals.

Section 4: Indian Mass Media: A Brief Background

Exploring the development of Indian television may inform us how media content has been regulated, if it is regulated, and help in identifying those with influence over media content for one reason or the other.

The development of Indian television can be divided in two eras. The first is state-owned, and the second encompasses the rise of cable and satellite channels. Television came to India in 1959, (Gokulsing, 2004, p. 7), and for the first three decades almost all broadcasting was in the hands of the state, and the content was primarily focused toward news or information about economic development (Jensen, & Oster, 2007, p. 5). According to Rao, “*Doordarshan*, the state operated television system and the only one allowed to broadcast news, started its modest operations in 1959” (Rao, 2008, p.v194). Rao also reported that “without any competition, *Doordarshan*’s programming remained dull, noncommercial in nature, and directed only toward educational and socio-economic issues” (Rao, 2008, p. 194). It is believed that the state had complete control over media and their content until the advent of cable and satellite services in India.

According to Jeffrey (2006), “it was the arrival in the 1990s of satellite television . . . and its popular entertainment, that began to . . . undermine the importance of government-controlled television,” (p. 205, 208; see also Page & Crawley, 2001). Apparently, the problem in regulating and controlling the media content arises because

“all of the services were uplinked from locations outside of India because the government had reserved the right to uplink from within the country exclusively for *Doordarshan*” (Rao, 2008, p. 194). According to Jeffrey (2006), “the question of whether government could exercise meaningful control over broadcasters based in other countries who beamed into India from satellites Indians did not own and Indian governments could not regulate” (p. 220) arise. It is argued that “the dominance of land-based, controllable-by-government, broadcast media ended for good” (Jeffrey, 2006, p. 219). One gets the impression that because of the invasion of satellite broadcasting in India, media development has seen rapid growth and Indian “media have become commercialized, regionalized, and vernacularized” (Downey, & Neyazi, 2014, p. 476). It looks as if there has been an ongoing struggle to control content by the political elites ever since. Authors suggest that one of the reasons is that there is no centralized media regulatory system in India.

According to Rajkhwa (2015) draws upon scholars such as Iyer, 2000; Kalra, 2011; Kumar, 2007; Scrampical et al., 1997; Singhal and Rogers, 2001:

As for the regulatory environment in India, it is described by most scholars and practitioners as being highly decentralized. The press is monitored by the Press Council of India (PCI) (which can issue guidelines but not impose penalties), cinema by the Central Board for Film Certification (CBFC) and advertising by the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI). The Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act (1995, amended 2000) governs entertainment broadcasting, with the Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC) serving as its regulator. It

is an industry membership body. The broadcast news media have two similar industry bodies that are entrusted with self-regulation, namely, the News Broadcasters Association (NBA) and the Broadcast Editors' Association (BEA). (p. 870)

Although the media regulatory system is decentralized in India and often seems to fail in self-regulation and appears to be unable to impose any penalties; it is believed that political elites keep trying to find ways to control the media content by influencing media entrepreneurs who seek political alliance and economic gain. According to Downey & Neyazi (2014), "Political elites still attempt to maintain control . . . in networked media systems. New pragmatic entrepreneurs have emerged with decidedly dubious records and with twin goals of maximizing their economic and political power" (p. 476). They further assert that, "media institutions are either owned by political parties or by individuals who are explicitly committed to a political party" (Downey & Neyazi, 2014, p. 484) which may lead one to speculate that the power or influence (direct or indirect) politicians may have over media and media content in terms of what is regulated, allowed, shown, and not shown.

According to Rajkhowa (2015), "media scholarship has long examined the role of regulation in mediated societies (and specifically liberal democracies) as both a 'positive' and 'negative' dimension of state-media industry relations" (p. 867; see also Picard, 1985). In some situations where politicians may want to uphold the constitution or perhaps further their political agendas; spontaneous demands for censorship may arise, or calls for the banning of certain mass media content to either regulate the media content

and its constitutional compliance, or to indirectly further their political agendas. As stated by Varadarajan (2012) and others, “there is a fine line between censorship and regulation, and all unilateral attempts to enforce regulatory prescriptions, without undertaking due diligence in matters of constitutionality and public interest, will result in retrogressive outcomes” (Rajkhowa, 2015, p. 870).

Muller (2003) asserts that “censorship is not above politics but a means thereto, and censorial decisions are bound to reflect the concerns of the political elite.” Rajkhowa (2015) says that there are two important questions that one must ask: “What are the objectives of media regulation and in whose interests is it exercised? What is the relationship between specific forms of regulation and the wider political environment from which it emerges?” (p. 868; see also Freedman, 2012). Seemingly political control can be a positive or negative force depending upon the purpose of regulation.

Historically, politicians often seem to influence media and media content to serve their political interests and may demand regulation, or censorship of certain media contents. For instance,

According to Jeffrey (2006):

In a celebrated recognition of the possible power of television in the run-up to the post-emergency elections of 1977, Delhi’s television station was ordered [by the then prime minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi] to screen *Bobby*, the blockbuster film of 1974, in an attempt to minimize the crowd at an opposition rally. (p. 216)

Moreover, Ghosh (2005) reports that in the early 1990s, when live broadcasting of current affairs was attempted as an innovative experiment to use media, “the [then] Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao had them cancelled within days. ‘We cannot have live broadcasts, it is too dangerous’ he told the television network’s boss” (p. 189; see also Jeffrey, 2006, p. 215). Furthermore,

According to Rajgopal (2001):

The advent of television provided fertile ground for the rise of the “Hindutva” or the right-wing politics that has long-term repercussions on the nature and the course of Indian politics. The serialization of *Ramayana*, a Hindu epic, on state-run television (*Doordarshan*) was exploited by the right-wing Bhartaya Janata Party (BJP) to mobilize Hindu upper-caste voters, particularly in north India. The Ram Janmabhumi-Babri mosque controversy received greater national attention because of the popularity of the serialization of *Ramayana* (Rajagopal 2001 p. 3). The controversy also empowered the “Hindutva” forces to gain national significance. From just two seats in the Parliament in 1984, the BJP got 85 seats in the 1989 Lok Sabha elections.

The above quote shows that a combination of media regulation, control, influence, religious beliefs, and political agendas were used and channeled to achieve political gain and control. From the above literature it seems that the state government and political leaders have been trying to control and influence media content for a very long time. Perhaps one may speculate if current political leaders are still attempting to control and influence media content, and portrayals, for either constitutional compliance reasons or

their personal political agendas. This understanding and the Indian Parliamentary controversy regarding *BV*'s media content became an encouragement to investigate and form the basis in part for this research project. It became imperative to study what role mass media plays in mediating social change and as a change agent in addressing social issues, despite various pressures from various sources.

Media for Social Change

Seemingly, media such as television, through its mediation role in representing and portraying our society, plays a central role in determining what is accepted as normal and in the identification and construction of social problems or social deviance.

According to Fang (2008):

We live in a world of mediated communication. That will not change except to increase the world's sum of mediated communication. The genie will not go back into the bottle. As the new millennium unfolds, mediated communication is regarded as a weapon that opposing cultures both feel threatened by and wield to spread their own messages. (p. 350)

As Fang points out, today we live in a world of mediated communication. Mass media mediates communication about almost every aspect of human life, social, political, and economic. It is said that, "media have certainly become important institutions of mediation in Indian society and provide an institutionalized arena of interactions to different social and political actors" (Downey & Neyazi, 2014, p. 477). Moreover, given the background of Indian mass media, especially television and its mediation role, it becomes essential to know more about the possible role of mass media as a social agent

especially in light of mediating various social issues. Van Dijk (1993) argues that “television programs mirror dominant gender relations and patriarchal values that still remain in post-modern societies. ” However, is it true of every television program or there are some programs that focus on facilitating social change through its portrayals and narratives?

Mass media has been recognized for trying a variety of strategies to address various social issues in the past. Entertainment education (henceforth E-E) is considered one such strategy, inter alia, which has been and can be used to bring about behavioral and attitudinal change among traditional Indian community members. Previous studies have demonstrated that mass media, in particular the use of E-E or *edutainment* programming in mass media, has been successful in facilitating government messages about sensitive social issues in India; especially on television.

Television in India and social issues.

As Johnson (2001) points out, “television, once thought of as a luxury, has in the past years become a perceived necessity... the communities that used to be defined by their own oral traditions and stories are now being structured and reorganized by the medium of television” (p. 147). It appears that television in India is no longer a privilege afforded only to the elite classes; rather almost a majority of Indians have access to it. Television has now made its way into the humblest homes including the rural parts of India where child marriage, among other social issues of concern, is mainly practiced. The presence of television in the rural, poorest parts of India presents an opportunity for mass media to reach out to the target community and address social problems such as

child marriage, perhaps in a very effective way. It is argued that people watch television, learn new things, and socialize by watching and imitating these virtual and fictional portrayals of their environments or societies. As Baudrillard suggests, “one must think instead of the media as if they were, in outer orbit, a kind of genetic code that directs the mutation of the real as hyper-real...” (Cited in Durham, 2006, p. 473). People consume, inform themselves, make meaning, and socialize through mediated communication. Hence, in the context of India it is crucial to understand the power, presence, and opportunity of mass media, especially television, to address social problems such as child marriage. Therefore, media (through its mediation role in representing our society) plays a central role in determining what is accepted as “normal” and in the identification and construction of social problems or social deviance.

Media play a crucial role in defining what is a social problem and what is not, and what is accepted as cultural norm. For instance, it is common on American television to see an unmarried mother or an unmarried couple living together. However, it may be culturally inappropriate in India to present such situations as acceptable.

As Ullah & Naseer draws on Gunter & McAleer (1990), they assert that:

Television presents to its larger and attentive audience a certain image of the world, providing a framework for what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in society, and also sends out implicit and explicit messages of what the world is like. In its portrayal of ‘normal’ life, it reflects many important social roles. (p.

25)

As mentioned before and reflected in the above quote, media plays a crucial role in defining what is accepted as cultural norm and what is not through its portrayals. This further reiterates media's power and potential as a tool to facilitate social change or hold it back through its portrayals and discourses in its narratives. As McQuail (1984) points out, "The mass media can serve to repress as well as to liberate, to unite as well as fragment society, both to promote and to hold back change" (p. 64). For instance, mass media can be used to reinforce gender relations. According to Ullah & Naseer (2011), "[the] male uses television texts to reinforce and perpetuate patriarchal cultural norms and thereby maintain males' dominancy" (p. 27). Other authors assert that, "through stories, a fictional representation of our social structure and social relations are presented. These fictionalized representations provide a mirror of the world, showing how power is allocated in society and how dominance and submission are idealized (Aaliya and Malik, 2012, p. 5; see also; Gerbner, 1972). Moreover, it is observed that, "The representation of gender relations actually reflects the social, cultural, political and economic values of the society" (Dines & Humez, 1994; Gauntlett, 2002; see also Ullah & Naseer, 2011, p. 26). Such representations can facilitate deeper and better understanding of a society which can help address certain social issues in a culturally appropriate way. According to Dasgupta et al. (2012), "The glorification, mystification, and romanticizing of value systems of the past, from child brides to self-effacement of women, amply prove that the media can be biased or can be used as a consolidating tool for empowering patriarchal norms" (p. 14). Hence, the power of media cannot be overlooked and needs to be realized and recognized constantly to channel it away from self-effacement of women to women's empowerment.

Television dramas and social change.

One consequence of the recognition of the power of media to represent reality has been the development of television dramas that used an E-E strategy to address social problems (Singhal & Rogers, 1999).

As defined by Singhal & Rogers (2004):

Entertainment-education (E-E) is the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience members' knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, shift norms, and change overt behavior. (p. 5)

These television dramas were successful in gaining the attention of their audiences and facilitating social change in relation to sensitive issues such as gender equality, illiteracy, etc.

According to Singhal et al. (2004):

In the initial era of E-E, two main organizations drove the international diffusion of E-E projects: Population Communications International (PCI) [now known as PCI Media Impact], a non-governmental organization headquartered in New York City, and Johns Hopkins University's Center for Communication Programs (JHU/CCP). (p. 7)

In 1984, India launched its first entertainment- education television drama series, *Hum Log* (We People) with the help of PCI Media Impact. *Hum Log* "was part of a coordinated effort to increase the status of women" (Singhal et al., 2004, p. 108). Major themes of *Hum Log* were gender equality, tolerance, and nationalism. The producers of

Hum Log were strongly influenced by Miguel Sabido's methodology that "purposely incorporated principles of Bandura's social learning theory in the design of positive, negative, and transitional role models" (Singhal, et al., 2004, p. 9). Bandura argues that people learn new information and behaviors by watching other people. This is also known as modeling or observational learning.

Another example of E-E programming is the Indian drama series *Jasoos Vijay* (Detective Vijay), a 120-episode entertainment-education detective series broadcast in India from June 2002 to April 2003. Its intent was to raise awareness and to shift social norms, and to reduce stigma about certain social taboos and issues. *Jasoos Vijay* adopted an E-E model of "engaging narratives centering on a key protagonist, with multiple cliffhangers and denouements (Singhal et al. 2004, p. 5)." Its approach to engage with cliffhangers traced to capture its audience's attention.

In Nigeria the television drama series *Cock Crow at Dawn*, broadcast every week during 1980 and 1981, was designed to encourage acceptance of modern agricultural practices by middle and upper-class farmers. A study of the impact of the program indicated that its content influenced regular viewers, leading them to improve their farming practices (De-Goshie, 1986). Although it was aimed at farming practices, those practices have their influence on the well-being of a family, as well as on its economic stability, which may affect one's social interactions and status in society and marriage arrangements.

Commercial television dramas and social change.

There have been some purely commercial television dramas which were not intentionally designed by using any strategies such as E-E, but which have had a strong impact in mediating social reality by raising taboo issues through their portrayals, discourses and narratives, however incidentally. New themes may be taken up because of a change in political climate that may allow for the expression of new ideas that do not accord with traditional values. To give one example, after the military dictatorship ended in Brazil, older themes such as, “good and evil were replaced by more complex stories . . . female orgasm, homosexuality, and divorce are some of the issues that the Brazilian *telenovelas* have opened up to a mass audience” (Brown, L. (2011) p. xx). For example, the telenovela *Malu Mulher* was about a divorced women, “whose experiences [desventuras] let taboo themes and issues into electronic fiction without fear and with a great deal of competence . . . abortion, orgasm, and homosexuality were brought in to *TV Globo*’s most successful series (*Images da Abertura, Veja (Sao Paulo)*, 1980)” (see also, Straubhaar, 1989, p. 9). *Malu Mulher* brought to the forefront some of the most taboo issues of the time.

Even though the content of *Malu Mulher* was shocking, the program gained popularity because its narrative resonated with its audience. Its relevance to contemporary issues may have helped the show to engage with its audience at a very emotional level, especially with the women. The miniseries effectively delivered a social message. As the Brazilian scholar Almeida explains, “By politicizing the private realm and giving visibility to representative claims that demand equal rights for women, *Malu*

Mulher emphasized new discourses that oppose discrimination and violence, promoting new gender roles” (see also, Porto, 2012, p. 138). Since the telenovela challenged social mores, resistance from society was inevitable: “In 1980, a group which came to be known as the *Mulhers de Santana* [Women of Santana, a suburb of Sao Paulo], started a movement against sex and violence on television, specifically *Coracao Alado*; *Malu Mulher*; and *Amizada Colorida* [Spicy Friendship]” (Straubhaar, 1989). The president of Brazil was deluged with letters requesting him to take action and establish greater control over media. As a result, *Malu Mulher* stopped broadcasting in 1980. However, *Malu Mulher* helped push telenovelas to incorporate women’s issues and their emerging demands, (Almeida, 2007, p. 2)” (see also, Porto, 2012, p. 138).

Yet another example of a commercial television drama that showcased social issues was *Maude*, which was produced in the United States by Norman Lear in the 1970s at the height of the second wave of feminism. According to Osborne-Thompson (2000), “The show's theme song posits *Maude* as the [then] current incarnation of an eclectic line of quasi-feminists or sexually liberated "sisters" and "bra burners," such as Lady Godiva, Joan of Arc, Betsy Ross and Isadora Duncan” (p. 63). In the show, *Maude* becomes pregnant, but she decides not to have the child, but to have an abortion. *Malu Mulher* and *Maude* was each a highly successful *commercial* television drama series. They were not intended to be social interventions. However, both *Malu Mulher* and *Maude* ended up serving purposes to bring about social change through the portrayal of taboo/social issues. Such portrayals can help build a connection with its audiences and help them relate to the drama series through its portrayal of women and their struggles of

life. For instance, Danielle Blumenthal (1997) argues that “women [both old and young] meant to get in touch with themselves and achieve this through [watching] soap operas. This self-discovery and emotional truth are dependent on their favourite soap-opera characters.” Moreover, “it provides for experiences, learning and pleasure for women in which feminine discourse can be spoken of and appreciated. Soaps also constitute “affective alliances” (Grossberg, 1992) based on shared emotional responses” (Aaliya & Malik, 2012, p. 9).

The above examples help show that there was a continuous contestation, or as Hall (1982) would say, the ideological *site of struggle* could be seen in these portrayals. These *site of struggle* in which “the different categories’ views are fought out, but the dominant category successfully monopolizes and projects its view of the world as the best and natural, into which they socialize the subordinate” (Ullah & Naseer, 2011, p. 27). In this sense, media professionals may create these spaces where the ideological *site of struggle* based on various social issues can manifest and a debate can take place to bring about social and behavioral change. Writers state that in mass media “socially constructed roles can be negotiated, mediated and left fluid instead of something fixed and eternal. Mass media, especially television, has an important role in constructing a secondary discourse about society and power relationships” (Ullah & Naseer, 2011, p. 26). Creating such spaces in mass media where certain “socially constructed” roles may be left fluid without pigeonholing them into fixed categories, (good or bad, white or black) rather creating a fluid grey space, may help facilitate negotiations to challenge, question, or support certain social issues or rights and start a dialogue.

The focus of this study is another highly commercial television program, the Indian drama known as *Balika Vadhu (BV)*, that focuses on the social issue of child marriage. This study attempted to study the portrayals of child marriage, gender roles and women's rights in *BV*. The next section will discuss the specific research questions of this study.

Section 5: The Research Questions

It is often seen that media studies are usually focused on analyzing the effects of mass media programs on its audience. However, it is equally important to analyze how mass media such as popular television itself addresses or portrays social issues, especially the ones that pose a break with tradition in a society. In India child marriage is one such issue. This study examined how *Balika Vadhu (BV)* an Indian commercial television drama series portrayed the issue of child marriage in India. Furthermore, it examined whether *BV* reinforced gender inequality or supported the rights and voices of women.

RQ1: How does *BV* portray child marriage?

As McQuail (1984) points out, "The mass media can serve to repress as well as to liberate, to unite as well as fragment society, both to promote and to hold back change" (p. 64). Furthermore, according to Dasgupta et.al. (2012), "The glorification, mystification, and romanticizing of value systems of the past, from child brides to self-effacement of women, amply prove that the media can be biased or can be used as a consolidating tool for empowering patriarchal norms" (p. 14). Moreover, Khattri (2011) states that "A large number of researches have been done in western developed countries where as very few studies have been undertaken with respect to Soap Opera [drama

series] in India” (p. 244). According to Khorana, S. (2012), “prime-time soap operas are a relatively new and under-studied production area in the Indian context” (p. 612). For these reasons, it was important to determine if a television program, drama series, or soap opera such as *BV* reinforced or glorified the practice of child marriage through its portrayal.

RQ2: How did *BV* portray (ideological) gender roles and women’s rights?

The review of literature indicates that research and scholarship analyzing the issue of child marriage requires further investigation in terms of gender roles, religion, caste, class, honor, health, son preference, family patterns, and relocation of bride, to name a few. According to scholars such as Greene, (2014); Svanemyre; Venkatraman, Raj, Travers, & Sundaram, (2015), our understanding of the issue of child marriage is limited, creating a need for more research in the area. Research that involves a more segmented analysis that covers but is not limited to the religious, ethnic, literacy, and other social aspects of a society that practices child marriage (p. 1).

According to Okonofua (2013):

Evidence is increasingly accumulating to suggest that child marriage is not just a religious or cultural practice but is driven largely by poverty, ignorance and illiteracy, gender and social discrimination against the girl child, a misconception of the need to "protect" the girl's sexuality, . . . and inadequate implementation of laws and policies that protect the rights and social development of children and adolescents. (p. 9)

In India one of the major social issues seems to be gender inequality. William and Best (1994) “measured-sex role ideology across 14 countries and found that the most male-dominated ideologies were in Nigeria, Pakistan, and India. India is a patriarchal society, and men generally assume greater power than women” (Bowman, & Dollahite, 2013, p. 217). Apparently, Indian society still seems to be highly patriarchal and women are still struggling to gain equality in all aspects and at all levels and social spheres of society. Perhaps, mass media are no different from any other space, and it seems that women are still commonly portrayed in a subservient way. As Thoman (1986) states, "According to the defenders of television, television is a business and its task is not to create a social conscience in the viewing public, but to deliver an audience to its advertisers” (p. 2). Apparently, it may be difficult to convince advertisers to sponsor a program that involves sensitive social issues or taboo issues that may cause some kind of controversy. In response to the needs of the sponsors, perhaps it is possible that producers generally wind up reinforcing social values, cultural norms, and traditional practices in their programming to avoid any risk, cultural disagreement, or controversy from its audiences or other members of society. According to Chakrabarti (2014), “at the heart of commercial television anywhere lies the relentless search for audiences that can be sold to advertisers” (p. 479). Consequently, a second objective of this research on *BV* was to examine whether it reinforced patriarchal norms, women’s submission, and gender inequality or supported the rights and voices of women through its portrayal of child marriage.

To understand and to achieve the goals of this research project, it was imperative to study *BV*'s discourse and make sense out of it, in response to the above queries. Hence, understanding what discourse analysis is, what discourse theory offers in terms of power, knowledge, and hegemony; and how it facilitated building the conceptual framework for the current study became an important part of this project. These are discussed in the methods chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter presents the research methods that the current study employed. In particular, 24 episodes from *Balika Vadhu (BV)*, an Indian television drama series, were analyzed for the study. The purpose of the study was to examine how the discourse and discursive structures of *BV* portrayed child marriage and whether it reinforced gender inequality or supported the rights and voices of women in the context of traditional Indian societies. Consequently, the research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: How does *BV* represent/portray child marriage?

RQ2: How does *BV* portray/address (ideological) gender roles and women's rights?

These research questions were best answered through the usage of qualitative methodology or methods. For this study, critical discourse analysis method was chosen to examine how through discourse, Indian media such as television addressed child marriage and whether it reinforced gender inequality or supported the rights and voices of women in traditional Indian Hindu societies.

In this chapter, the first section, "Discourse and Discourse Analysis" with its two subsections, "Textually-based Discourse Analysis method," and "Text," puts forward the basis of employing this research method for the current study, including the sampled episode selection rationale and process. The second section, "Text analysis," elaborates on the text analysis guidelines of the research method in general and the conceptual guidelines employed. The third section, "Reflexivity" reveals upon my role and position

as a researcher in the realm of the present study. The last section, “practice analysis of a single *BV* episode,” presents the accounts of employing discourse analysis as a method and approach to one of the episodes that helped to re-evaluate the tool and to take further steps to make it better.

The design of this study is qualitative. I invested my “thoughts in the belief that to understand the performance of humans in a particular context, one is required to attain a deeper understanding of their day-to-day activities and the meanings assigned to those activities by them or the society” (Sharma, 2006). In addition,

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as:

multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researcher study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 2)

The above quote emphasizes the elements of qualitative research methods and their importance. That is primarily, to be interpretive and naturalistic. An interpretive method is based on an understanding that the knowledge is socially co-constructed rather than being a personal experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Gergen, 1994; Giorgi, 1994; Marion, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2000). In other words, knowledge is co-constructed through the mutual social interactions of community members in a certain culture, their shared environments, mutual understanding and acceptance of unique traditions, actions, experiences, and existence of living or nonliving things in that environment. Additionally, the meaning given to each aspect of such mutual existence is

facilitated through the knowledge gained from the past and present, as well as an understanding of what the future might look like. This knowledge is perhaps nurtured and sustained through the shared social experiences of how realities were understood by the community members in the past that may have informed the present and perhaps the future.

Furthermore, not only are realities multiples and co-constructed but, most importantly, understood from various perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Different communities may have different realities of their own environments in which they live. Additionally, as Marshall and Rossman (1989) state: “One cannot understand human behavior without understanding the framework within which subjects interpret their thoughts, feelings, and actions” (p. 49). Context is vital to understanding certain actions performed by the characters, subjects, or the community members, however, it “is influenced by a wide range of factors such as religion, ideology, culture, and language, which are critical to how people see, understand, and interpret their world (Gergen, 1994; Schwandt, 2000).

Moreover, in light of the current study and to answer the research questions, it was crucial to understand India’s cultural, social, religious, and ideological that informed *BV* and its characters to act in a certain way. One method to achieve this was by creating a thematic normative description, a narrative that could link human thoughts and activities to their contexts in a thematic way. These narratives could have silences, unwritten, spoken and unspoken instances that could carry information which could explain the connection between human thoughts and activities to their contexts. One such

method or an approach that could fulfill the above-mentioned requirements of a research enquiry is Discourse Analysis. Cheek (2004) states that “discourse analysis has gained increasing prominence in qualitative research in the past decade” (p. 2) that has the potential of challenging our ways of thinking, and understanding of the world around us and the aspects of the reality we live in our everyday life.

Discourse Analysis: An Approach, Not a Method

The current study employed textually-based discourse analysis research method or rather an approach that included thorough analysis of chosen text from the storylines of *BV*. It is crucial to foreground that discourse analysis is not a single method but rather an approach (Meyer, 2001). Discourse analysis research method has been interpreted and approached from various perspectives by different scholars (see Gumperz, 1982; Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Chafe, 1994; Duranti, 1997; van Dijk, 1997; Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton, 2001; Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2004; Thompson, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; van Dijk, 2008; Gee, 2012; Gee & Handford, 2012). People in a variety of academic disciplines use the term “Discourse Analysis” for what they do, how they do it, or both (Johnstone, 2008, p. 1). As Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) state, “discourse analysis is not just one approach, but a series of interdisciplinary approaches that can be used to explore many different social domains in many different types of studies” (p. 1). Because of the approaches’ diverse and interdisciplinary appeal; each individual research project may require its own customized framework and understanding of this approach. Therefore there are no firm sets of rules, steps or

guidelines for employing a discourse analysis. Hence, “discourse analysis is not a unified, unitary approach” (Cheek, 2004, p. 6).

Scholars such as Gee (2014) approached discourse analysis as “the study of language in use” (p. 8). According to him, a theory about the nature of language-in-use is basically a theory about, “saying (information)-doing (action)-being (identity) and [which] gains its meaning from the ‘game’ or practice [of what] it is part of and enacts” (p. 8, 11). In other words, there are three aspects that facilitate the domain of language in use. These aspects of *language in use* that also facilitate any discourse are as follows: first, *information*; second, *action*; and the third *identity*.

According to Gee, the first aspect, *information*, is created when we say something (using language) while communicating. When we say something, we create, share, and learn about certain *information*. The second aspect comes to existence through our *actions* (when we do something or take an action, e.g., taking a stand by being silent about an issue, or writing a blog, or delivering a speech, or showing anger using language, or a peace protest, or accepting a practice etc.) based on what *information* we believe in or are subconsciously forced to believe in. The third aspect, our *identity* or the idea of one’s *being* or who we are as an individual is created through the *game* or repeated *practice* of the first two aspects that is what we *say* (create, learn or share *information*) and what *actions* we take to support what we say, makes us who we are and creates our identity. Hence, language-in-use is basically what we talk about, how we support it through our actions, and how we practice what we say by taking various

actions repeatedly in our lives. Through this language in use, we create a conversation; a discourse; a dialogue about various aspects of life.

Furthermore, according to Gee, without language it would be difficult to articulate and practice all three aspects that are essential to facilitate any discourse. Hence, language-in-use has been identified as a primary domain under study in his version of discourse analysis and is interested in deep analysis of words and grammar structures of languages. However, other scholars' interpretations of discourse analysis could be different from that of certain scholars, such as Gee, and their DA interpretations that are mainly focused on the linguistics aspect of a language.

Other scholars, such as Blommaert (2005), suggest that "discourse has a broader meaning and defined it as 'meaningful symbolic behavior' in any mode." These modes (spaces, fields such as cultural mode, educational mode, gender mode, generational mode etc.) go beyond the field of linguistics. In this sense, discourse analysis can be understood that involves more than just the study of words and grammar structures of a language because language has the potential to offer more than that. There is a reason why the approach is called *discourse analysis* rather than *language analysis*. For instance,

Johnstone (2008) points out:

Calling what we do "discourse analysis" rather than "language analysis" underscores the fact that we are not centrally focused on language as an abstract system. We tend instead to be interested in what happens when people draw on the knowledge they have about language, knowledge based on their memories of

things. . . . This knowledge – a set of generalizations, which can sometimes be stated as rules, about what words generally mean. . . . (p. 3)

Such knowledge or sets of generalizations of what “truth” or reality is that further constitutes the rules in a certain society, need to be studied carefully and understood in order to make sense of the world we live in.

According to van Dijk, the relationship between discourse and knowledge is pragmatic. This is because, “any discourse systematically presupposes that you know many things” which Johnstone (2008) referred to as knowledge or a set of generalizations. These many things, for instance, could be the general knowledge (or the background knowledge) that a person is assumed to have from his or her upbringing in a certain culture. For instance, because I am from India, one can assume or presuppose that from my traditional Indian upbringing as a Hindu woman, I know about Hindu religion and its cultural traditions. People can take that for granted and presuppose without asking or confirming first. The next question could be; what is the source of this presupposed knowledge? How can people be so confident to assume that I should and must have this knowledge?

According to Johnstone (2008), “discourse is both the source of this knowledge (people’s generalizations about language are made on the basis of the discourse in which they participate) and the result of it (people apply what they already know in creating and interpreting new discourse)” (p. 3). Learning the knowledge from the past through generational discourses, and applying it in our everyday lives by regularly practicing it helps us to sustain the knowledge the way it existed before. On the other hand, one can

discover/identify/question to create new interpretations of the same knowledge to generate new discourse and dialogue about the same phenomenon.

This relationship or the connection between the new interpretations/knowledge and discourse, which has roots in and evolved from the old interpretations, knowledge and discourses of the past, is what Foucault referred to as intertextuality. This explains that sometimes what was considered as *truth* or acceptable practice in the past may have acquired a new status as unacceptable and *not true* in the present times through the new interpretations of the same phenomenon that existed in the past.

Foucault's understanding of justice systems sheds light on such a concept. For instance, beheading a person publicly in the United States or other parts of the world as a legal punishment for a crime is no longer the accepted truth; however, it used to be. This new interpretation, however, did stem from the past practice of beheading, discourse about the subject of punishment, how people who discussed it understood it over the time and felt the need to change what the present truth about punishment is and should be. Moreover, the present idea about punishment today might change in the future and a new idea or truth about what punishment could be may arise in the future.

According to Foucault (1980) the main aspect of Discourse Analysis (DA) is to understand how certain ideas come to be understood as "truth" and for him, "DA, studies the ways that discourses are formed and circulated within texts, which in turn act to produce a particular understanding or knowledge about the world that comes to accepted as 'truth.'" Although the method has gained popularity over time among projects that are conducted by scholars from disciplines other than linguistics, Johnstone (2008) noted that

“... in one way or another, they [research projects] all involve studying language and its effects.” There are two forms of discourse analysis that have been broadly accepted by the scholars of this approach.

Two Forms of Discourse Analysis

Gee (2014) explains that there are “two forms of discourse analysis: descriptive and critical” (p. 8). He explains that the *descriptive approach* is more interested in discussing and describing how language (or any other domain) works in terms of its rules and structures. In other words to understand the domain of language it should be done through studying its grammar structures, words, etc. (and other structures or rules of any other domain) of a certain kind of text. Its foremost goal is to “describe the rules that determine the structure of texts in a variety of languages [or other domains], as well as scholarship in the context of systemic-functional linguistics [or other disciplines]” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 27). The goal of this approach is to maintain the status quo by “not being motivated by the practical applications” of such rule-focused descriptions (Gee, 2014, p. 9) to the world. In other words, the scholars of this approach are concerned only with understanding and providing the description of a certain phenomenon, but they are not interested in applying this new knowledge any further in practical projects for the society that might benefit from it. It is similar to finding out and describing the rules of how various mathematical formulas and their rules work, but not using the knowledge to apply in perhaps a space research project in physics to learn more about space and benefit humanity. Another example could be describing the practice of child marriage in India in its purest form including traditional rules, cultural norms, and rituals of the practice by

creating a great in-depth description, but not using the knowledge acquired through the description to actually question the practice, and help the victims of child marriage by bringing about social change. It restricts itself to pure description of what it is and its rules describing how it works and not applying that knowledge to question existing knowledge or create new knowledge.

However, on the other hand, the critical form of discourse analysis attempts to address this lacking. This DA form agrees that “critical social theory describes the human world not as a system in, or tending to, equilibrium, but a system characterized by dominance, exploitation, struggle, oppression, and power” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 28) that tends to question the status quo. Although critical approach scholars may want to offer deep explanations through descriptions; most importantly “they also want to speak to and, perhaps, intervene in, institutional, social, or political issues, problems, and controversies in the world. They want to apply their work to the world in some fashion” (Gee, 2014, p. 9).

Furthermore, scholars of such critical approaches, “tend to be interested in the dominated groups rather than in those who dominate them; their research about struggles over power is (at least in principle) meant to help empower the relatively powerless” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 28). Although, I have discussed the two existing forms of discourse analysis; scholars such as Gee (2014) assert that, “all discourse analysis needs to be critical, not because discourse analysts are or need to be political, but because language itself is . . . political” (p. 9) that facilitates any communication, discourse, or “actual instances of communicative action in the medium of language” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 2).

Gee (2014) further explains that:

Language is a key way we humans make and break our world, our institutions, and our relationships through how we deal with social goods [such as money, power, status, acceptance etc.]. Thus discourse analysis can illuminate problems and controversies in the world. It can illuminate issues about distribution of social goods, who gets helped and who gets hurt. (p. 10)

There is no doubt that language is an integral part of discourse analysis; however, it is more than just language and its rules. There are interlocking elements that form our understanding of the world in which we live. According to Johnstone (2008), scholars “influenced by Foucault (1972, 1980) use ‘discourse’ in somewhat different sense. She states that ‘discourses’ in this sense “. . . are conventional ways of talking that both create and are created by conventional ways of thinking. These linked ways of talking and thinking constitute ideologies (sets of interrelated ideas) and serve to circulate power in society” (p. 3). In other words it is the concept of intertextuality, as Foucault would say, that connects past to present and future and helps us make sense of the world in which we live.

Additionally, “[the concept of] ‘recontextualization’ is a concept developed in the sociology of education (Bernstein, 1990) which can be fruitfully operationalized, put to work, within discourse and text analysis” (Fairclough, 2003) in terms of intertextuality. Such understanding is often represented, recreated, and mediated by mass media, such as television, and presented to us through them. These understandings and presentations are often, “characterized by specific properties of recontextualization – the appropriation of

elements of one social practice [child marriage] within another [religion] placing the former within the context of the latter, and transforming it in particular ways [tradition or truth] in the process” (Bernstein, 1990; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999). However, one may still ask why discourse analysis, why not any other qualitative method. This is because “what distinguishes discourse analysis from other sorts of study that bear on human language and communication lies not in the questions discourse analysts ask but in the ways they try to answer them: by analyzing discourse. . . .” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 4).

Additionally, Cheek (1997) states that, “discourse analysis provides insights into the functioning of bodies of knowledge in their specific situated contexts by generating interpretive claims with regard to the power effects of a discourse on groups of people, without claims of generalizability to other contexts.” In other words, DA approach recognizes the fact that each context in which a discourse takes place is unique and cannot be generalized to other contexts.

Moreover, one of the aims of conducting discourse analysis in terms of its *critical goals* is to “carry out critical research, that is, to investigate and analyze power relationships in society and to formulate normative perspectives from which a critique of such relations can be made with an eye on the possibilities for social change,” Jorgensen & Phillips (2002). This critical approach of DA facilitates the possibilities of moving beyond the learning, and creating knowledge and also applying this gained knowledge to the world in order to bring about social change.

Additionally, scholars such as Johnstone (2008) state that, “Discourse analysis sheds light on how speakers indicate their semantic intentions and how hearers interpret

what they hear . . .” (p. 6). This method allowed me to have the freedom to make sense of what was said, how it was said and with what intention by examining the thematic aspects of discursive structures that were facilitated by the language in use among other elements in *BV*.

Moreover, “discourse analysis differs from other traditions, such as semiotics and ethnomethodology, in that it emphasizes analysis of the power inherent in social relations” (Lupton, 1992). Discourse analysis as a method and approach in this regard further helped me to understand how social relations worked in terms of power in the *BV* storylines that were chosen for the study. Furthermore, one of the uses that DA facilitates has convinced me to settle on this approach; it was to comprehend how people understand their lives, their actions, decisions, and other processes of their lives in the world in which they live.

For instance Johnstone (2008) states that:

Discourse analysis has been used in the study of how people define and create lifespan processes . . . how decisions are made, resources are allocated, and social adaptation or conflict accomplished in public and private life. . . . discourse analysis can help in answering any question that could be asked about humans in society. (p. 7)

As mentioned previously in the chapter, the DA method initially gained popularity among linguists, but later scholars from other fields started expressing their interest in it. As appropriately put forward by Johnstone (2008), “. . . some [scholars who used this approach] would identify themselves primarily as linguists; others, however, would

identify themselves primarily with other fields of study such as . . . communication . . . and some . . . in the interdisciplinary endeavor of discourse studies.” Hence, the understanding of the method has evolved over the time. To understand what discourse analysis is, one must understand what, “discourse,” means and how it is defined by various scholars first.

Discourse

There are diverse and numerous definitions of discourse. Discourse has been defined as “a group of ideas or patterned way of thinking that can be identified in textual and verbal communications, and can also be located in wider social structures” (Lupton, 1992, p. 145). Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) define discourse as, “a particular way of representing the world (or parts of the world)” (p. 143). Other scholars such as Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton (2001), propose a definition that has three main categories; first, anything that is beyond a sentence; second, language in use; third, a broader range of social practice that includes nonlinguistic or nonspecific instances of language, (p. 1). Van Dijk (1998) defined discourse as a practical, social, and cultural phenomenon in language forms of text and talk. Furthermore, Johnstone (2008) explains, “what most people mean when they say ‘language’ is talk, communication, discourse . . . discourse usually means actual instances of communicative action in the medium of language.” Discourse has been defined differently by diverse scholars. However, Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) state that “underlying the word “discourse” is the general idea that *language* is structured according to different patterns that people’s utterances follow

when they take part in different domains of social life. . . . ‘discourse analysis’ is the analysis of these patterns” (p. 1).

Historically, there have been two main views of analyzing text. First, the Structuralist view (also known as *descriptive* form of discourse analysis discussed earlier) and second, the poststructuralist view (also known as *critical* form of discourse analysis discussed earlier). Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) asserts that, “Structuralism [pure descriptions’ of grammar structures, rules, and words] has often been criticized for being unable to account for change.” (p. 139). By change the authors mean the ‘practical applications’ of the descriptions (or knowledge/information) in the actual world to bring about some kind of social change.

On the other hand, the poststructuralist Critical Discourse Analysis view, although has emerged from structuralism (descriptions), has been especially concerned with the practice, or actual applications of language in use, as an aspect of analyzing text and accounting for change. Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) explain this understanding by stating that “discourse analysis, although indebted to structuralism, has striven not to inherit this problem” (p. 139), of ignoring to account for change and the need for a critical view. This particular understanding of analyzing text facilitated, “poststructuralism to fuse the two levels [of conducting discourse analysis] . . . , [that is the]structure and practice [of a text], into a single process, whereby the structure, rather than being an underlying entity, exists only in the discursive practices that reproduce or transform it.” (p. 139). According to this understanding, there are many varieties of

discourse analysis that have developed and have two main goals or approaches that are being either descriptive or critical.

Each approach has its own assumptions. For instance, Ideological Discourse Analysis (IDA) has its own assumptions and goals. Ideologies could be defined as “systems that are at the basis of the socio-political cognitions of groups (Lau and Sears, 1986; Rosenberg, 1988; van Dijk 1995, p. 138). Thus, “ideologies organize social group attitudes consisting of schematically organized general opinions about relevant social issues, such as abortion, nuclear energy or affirmative action (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; van Dijk, 1995, p. 138) among others such as child marriage. IDA and the “presupposition of such analyses is that ideologies of speakers or writers may be uncovered by close reading, understanding or systematic analysis, if language users explicitly or unwittingly express their ideologies through language and communication” (p. 135).

Similarly, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has its own assumptions. CDA “regards ‘language as social practice’ (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997), and takes consideration of the context of language use to be crucial (Wodak, 2000; Benke, 2000). CDA takes particular interest in the relationship between language and power” (Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak, 2011, p. 1-2) that goes beyond just the ideologies. According to van Dijk & T. A. (1993), CDA is a, “study of the relations between discourse, power, dominance, social inequality and the position of the discourse analyst in such social relationships” (p. 1). In this regard, dominance is defined as “the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups, that results in social inequality, including

political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial, and gender inequality” (van Dijk & T. A., 1993, p. 1).

The present study identifies with the critical goals or approach to discourse analysis that, “leads to questioning the status quo and often leads to questions about power and inequality” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 29). Critical discourse analysis is relatively recent approach to examination of systematic bodies of knowledge arising from the traditions of critical social theory and linguistic analysis (Powers 2007, Baker and Galanski 2001; Fairclough 1995; Gavey 1997; Gray 1999, Hinshaw, Feetham and Shaver 1999; McNay 1992; Phillips and Hardy 2002; Phillips and Jorgensen 2002; Titscher, Meyer, Wodak and Vetter 2000; Wodak and Meyer 2001; Wood and Kroger 2000). Furthermore, reiterating that critical discourse analysis is not a single method but rather an approach (Meyer, 2001); the present study mainly conceptualizes its framework based on Fairclough’s version of Critical Discourse Analysis.

Fairclough’s “key concepts for analysis . . . are, ‘intertextuality,’ and, ‘interdiscursivity” (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 139). In general, “for critical discourse analysts, discourse is a form of social practice which both *constitutes* the social world and is *constituted* by other social practices. As [a] social practice, discourse is in a *dialectical* relationship with other social dimensions” (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 61). In other words, “it is necessary to draw on earlier productions of meaning in order to be understood, but that some elements may also put together in a new way, bringing about a change in the discursive structures” (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 139). Additionally, “each social practice is located within a network of practices, and networks of practices

are held in place by social relations of power, the shifting articulations of practices within and across networks linked to the shifting dynamics and struggles over power” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999).

Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis: An Approach

This study employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodological approach and more specifically a certain CDA approach known as, “Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis,” as a research method to achieve a better understanding of the content, or more appropriately, the *text* of *BV*. This research approach helped to understand how the discourse and thematic discursive structures of *BV* portrayed child marriage in the context of traditional Indian society. Moreover, whether *BV* reinforced gender inequality or supported the rights and voices of women in the context of traditional Indian societies and by extension, myself (because I am also an Indian woman and a member of an Indian traditional society). This will be discussed in the later part of the chapter. However, in the beginning of the study the urgent concerns were, how do I answer these questions? Is there any discourse analysis model in existence that one can follow to find answers to such questions?

According to Gill, “Discourse Analysis (DA) is the name given to a variety of different approaches to the study of texts, developed from different theoretical traditions and diverse disciplinary locations,” (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000, p. 172). The application of the Discourse Analysis research method to diverse disciplines has so far prevented a singular perspective (Cheek and Rudge, 1994) but such a perspective may not be necessary (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Fairclough’s framework provides a general

understanding of the approach. He proposes six different phases of conducting Critical Discourse Analysis. This includes identifying the research problem, formulating research questions, choosing the text/material, transcribing the text, analyzing the text, and discussing the results. I referred to this framework to conceptualize my research, not in a specific sense but rather in a general sense. In other words, I did not follow Fairclough's framework word for word. CDA allows the freedom to borrow from existing frameworks, modify and create one's own if needed. As a result, I did follow the above framework but not in the particular order or form as outlined above.

My first step of Fairclough's framework started with the knowledge of the Indian Parliament controversy regarding *Balika Vadhu*. It was showcased far and wide in various Indian media, in the news; it helped me become curious in identifying the practice of child marriage and the question of how it is depicted and represented on the Indian prime time television as the research problem. Based on the controversy I chose the text/material, followed by formulating the questions, watching the selected text followed by transcribing, analyzing and then discussing the results. This would be further discussed in detail later in this chapter.

But then again, the first and foremost critical question is, what constitutes a 'text' for the purposes of a Critical Discourse Analysis research project? Generally, the material with which discourse analysis works consists of actual instances of discourse, which are sometimes referred to as "texts" (Johnstone, 2008, p. 20). However, there are many kinds of approaches to doing discourse analysis that constitute what would be the text for that particular research project.

Text

According to Van Dijk (1997), there are many versions of discourse analysis. Some versions focus on detailed analysis of text but some do not. Fairclough (2003) uses the term ‘textually oriented discourse analyses’ for the version of critical discourse analysis that focuses on detailed analysis of *text*, which is the method this study employed.

Before going any further, it is necessary to understand what I understood by the word, ‘*text*’ in the context of the current study. Commonly, “*text*” refers to written and printed language. However, it is more than that. As pointed out by Gee (2005), the “primary function of human language is to support the performance of social activities and social identities and to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions” (p. 1). In other words, language does not operate in a vacuum; rather, it is a part of a bigger and holistic process and performance of society and its activities. Additionally, to capture the discourses facilitated by the performance of social activities and identities, it is important to go beyond language and expand the definition of *text*. As Fairclough (2003) explains, “the term discourse (in what is widely called ‘discourse analysis’) signals the particular view of language in use . . . as an element of social life which is closely interconnected with other elements” (p. 3). As discussed before (on page 4 of this chapter), language-in-use basically a theory about, “saying (information)-doing (action)-being (identity) and [which] gains its meaning from the ‘game’ or practice [of what] it is part of and enacts” (Gee, 2014, p. 8, 11).

Discourse analysts work with material of many kinds, including transcripts of audio-or video-recorded interactions, written documents, texts transmitted via oral tradition such as proverbs, and printouts of online communication (Johnstone, 2008). However, other scholars such as Fairclough use the term “*text*” in a very broad sense. He states that “written and printed texts such as shopping list and newspaper articles are “texts,” but so also are transcripts of (spoken) conversation and interviews, as well as television programs and web-pages” (p. 3). He further explains that, “texts such as television programmes [sic] involve not only language but also visual images and sound effects” (p. 3). As Gee (2005), explains, “Discourse analysis is always a movement from context to language and language to context” (p. 14). Language and context in this sense are composed of many elements that inform one another, such as religion, social norms, tradition, history, etc., that determine the way of talking (information), being (identity) and inform certain actions (doing) taken by the members of a certain society . Hence, this particular understanding and approach to the Discourse Analysis method allowed me to choose certain *BV* episodes that comprised the *text* that was later analyzed for the purposes of this study.

Access to Text/Research Material for the Critical Discourse Analysis

Links or URLs to all *BV* episodes could be found online. All the episodes were available on YouTube, and were accessed without any problem. In addition, written updates of *BV* episodes were also accessed from desi-tashan.com without any difficulty. Although access to the research text was available, choosing the right text/sample material is crucial to any research project. Johnstone (2008) states that, “every choice

about what to count as a text for analysis is a choice not only about what to include but also about what to exclude” (p. 21). It is crucial to draw boundaries and decide upon what would be considered as a complete unit of text.

Johnstone (2008) asserts that:

Such choices about what and how much to treat as a complete unit and where to draw its boundaries have important ramifications for the conclusions we draw. A text, in other words, might be one discussion or a whole series of television debates, a single email or an extended correspondence, one conversation or all the talk that constitutes a relationship (p. 21).

In the case of *BV*, more than 1,900 episodes have been aired in India since its launch on July 21, 2008. The show is still broadcast from 8:00 to 8:30 pm, Monday through Thursday. Over the history of the program several story lines have been developed. I watched the series from the summer of 2009 (end of June through end of July) more than once to identify storylines that served the purpose of this study. I watched *BV* episodes to the point of saturation. When nothing new was happening and themes and topics were being repeated, it was an indication to stop. The criteria for selecting particular story lines were rooted in the Parliament controversy and the research questions that emerged from the literature. I selected 12 episodes before and 12 episodes after the controversy. Hence, for the purpose of this study, the complete unit or ‘text’ chosen was the 24 sampled episodes of *BV* that were aired immediately before and after the Parliament controversy questioning the content of the drama series that took place on the July 14 2009. I analyzed the selected *BV* episodes to see how the drama series re-presented or portrayed

the issue of child marriage, gender roles, and women's rights. Additionally, I also selected *BV* episodes involving turns in the plot that reveal how women's voices were treated and attitudes toward women's rights or power relationships between the characters were portrayed.

Text Analysis Guidelines

After watching and taking notes and transcribing relevant exchanges of all 24 sampled episodes of *BV*; the written text was ready. Now that it is established what *text* meant for the purposes of the present study, the next step was to understand the text, but how? To answer any question, “ we obviously need to think about what our ‘text’ is about, since clearly what a person is talking about has a bearing on what is said and how it is said,” (Johnstone 2008, p. 9). Similarly in *BV* it was crucial to understand its characters' positions in terms of what their beliefs were to make sense of what, how and why of the selected text.

Johnstone (2008) further asserts that:

We ... need to think about who said it...who is thought, in its particular sociocultural context, to be responsible for what it says, who the intended audience was and who the actual hearers...were, because who the participants in a situation are and how their roles are defined clearly influences what gets said and how. (p. 9)

In order to understand some or more of the above concepts, Johnstone (2008) suggests, “a list of six aspects of shaping of texts. These constitute a *heuristic* for exploring, in a systematic way, what is potentially interesting and important about a text or a set of

texts,” (p. 9). A heuristic is a “set of discovery procedures for systematic application or a set of topics for systematic consideration” (Johnstone 2008, p. 9-10). The heuristic suggested by Johnstone (2008) that draws upon a number of scholarly works done by various discourse analysts from a variety of academic fields beyond linguistics is as follows:

1. Discourse is shaped by the world, and discourse shapes the world.
2. Discourse is shaped by language, and discourse shapes language.
3. Discourse is shaped by participants, and discourse shapes participants.
4. Discourse is shaped by prior discourse, and discourse shapes the possibilities for future discourse.
5. Discourse is shaped by its medium, and discourse shapes the possibilities of its medium.
6. Discourse is shaped by purpose, and discourse shapes possible purposes.

Although the above heuristic provides a sense of direction one may think about; the crucial point here is to understand the meaning of the word procedure in the realm of discourse analysis as opposed to a general understanding of it. Johnstone (2008) suggests that, “unlike the procedures that include [step by step] instructions of putting together a toy...the procedures of heuristic do not need to be followed in any particular order, and there is no fixed way of following them,” (p. 10). Furthermore, these are just guidelines as discourse analysis done by different scholars on similar topics could bring about different results. There is “no guarantee that using it will result in a single definitive

explanation; it is more like a set of tools for thinking with” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 10) rather than producing similar results.

While analyzing *BV*’s text, I took reference from the above heuristic. I mainly focused on the third aspect of the heuristic, that is the *Discourse is shaped by participants, and discourse shapes participants*, and the fourth aspect, that is, *discourse is shaped by prior discourse, and discourse shapes the possibilities for future discourse*, as those aspects were central to the storyline and to the research questions asked in the current study. The above-mentioned aspects provided me with an insight of what to look for in the text, to seek an understanding of how discourses in the text were shaped by the participants, their conversations, understanding, submissions or questionings, among other aspects, and vice versa; and noting how previous discourses that were discussed in the sampled text provided the basis for the main conversations between the characters. What kind of references to the previous discourses, perhaps related to traditions, religion, practices or norms were made? How such did references provide the basis for new discourses to emerge in the sampled text?

Additionally, in order to analyze and interpret the text, I also referred to a combination of the seven strategies suggested by Rose (2001, p. 158), and a checklist for discourse analysis based on the works of Fairclough (2003, pp. 191-4), Rose (2001, p. 161) and Tonkiss (1998, pp. 258-60; Hay, 2005, p. 180). I combined both recommendations (see Appendix). However, I resonated with one of these recommendations more than others that mainly guided this study which is to “identify

key themes to reveal how the drama series is embedded within particular discursive structures.”

These recommendations along with the above heuristic guided the discourse analysis of the current study. During the analysis process, I particularly resonated with the thematic approach to the text rather than following the above heuristic as well as the recommendations above step by step in its totality. In other words, I focused on the emerging themes in the sampled text that informed me how discourse is shaped by the participants and vice versa. Additionally how discourse is shaped by prior discourse of a particular culture and vice versa. Consequently, several rounds of analysis were applied to the selected text in order to identify emerging key themes and their organization, presentation, and understanding in the context of *BV*. And by extension, to understand these emerging key themes in the context of traditional Indian Hindu societies and their intertextuality in terms of religion, traditions, castes, class, gender, and honor, among others. A number of themes emerged during the analysis process. Moreover, there were instances during the analysis where a particular dialogue, scene, silences, body language, expressions, voices, sounds, events, spoken or unspoken instances, styling among other elements shed light and provided insights on *BV*'s position in terms of gender roles, issue of child marriage, and women's rights. These findings will be discussed later in Chapters Four and Five.

In totality, the findings of the discourse analysis were a multifaceted thematic, normative description of the complexities of the various elements that play a role in meaning making and determining how the world of *BV* functioned. The analysis

facilitated an understanding of the approach or strategies that the actors of mass media professionals of *BV* took to address a social issue, such as child marriage, that posed a break with tradition and attempted to balance certain elements that may have helped it succeed. However, apart from what has already been discussed above, it is very crucial for any researcher to reflect upon his/her role in the process of conducting a research project such as this one and the concept of reflexivity.

In order for a researcher to be reflexive, it is important that one must let the text reveal the categories rather than imposing pre-existing categories that may exist in the mind of the researcher. According to Waitt (2005), a researcher should demonstrate “that the categories that you allocate arose from the data rather than being taken-for-granted categories from elsewhere that you imposed on your results” (Hay, 2005, p. 180). Hence, I watched the selected *BV* text more than once as one has to keep going back to make sure that the understanding of the text has been attempted to the fullest and not any of the possible elements were left behind to one’s best ability; though it is impossible to achieve in its totality.

This was also done to facilitate the natural emergence of themes and elements that helped me understand the text in a conceptual way. In the process I kept making notes of emerging and overlapping themes (each time the text was revisited) which were later developed into overarching themes and subthemes. While doing so, I referred to the above guidelines, heuristic, and Fairclough’s framework.

I watched all 24 episodes at least seven to eight times. In the first round I simply watched all episodes starting from the June 1 of 2009 and did not take any notes. The

purpose was to get familiar and get absorbed in the text. At the end of the first round, I felt the need to move back and watch the episodes aired at the very end of the month of June 2009. This was done to get a better sense of the storyline in progress, which felt incomplete otherwise. Hence, in the second round I started watching the episodes from June 29, onward. In the following round, I has gotten quite familiar with the text and started the process of transcribing the text on paper. Johnstone (2008) informs that “highly detailed transcripts are often hard to read, whereas easy-to-read transcripts include less specific information. No transcription system could possibly be ideal for all purposes” (p. 23).

As a researcher of the present study I made sure that the information useful to address the research questions was included and other unnecessary details were avoided in transcriptions. In case of the episodes where significant turns and twists to the story related to the purposes of the present study were not prominent; I used a written synopsis of the episode provided by the website desi-tashan.com that kept regular track of each individual telecast of *BV* episode. I made sure that there was a consistency between the written synopsis, my personal transcribed notes, and the actual episode storyline, and that no information was missing. This was achieved by watching the episode on one computer and having the written synopsis of the same episode on the other computer, and my personal transcribed notes simultaneously to check if any details were missing.

According to Johnstone (2008):

A transcription needs to be accurate in the sense that it includes what it claims to include. But it cannot include everything, and the most useful transcriptions in

discourse analysis research are those which highlight what the researcher is interested in and do not include too much distracting extraneous detail. (p. 23)

After finishing the third round, I went back to the text for the fourth time to start identifying key themes that included various discourses that were present in the text, how these discourses were textured together and mixed together. At this point I developed an inclination toward the thematic approach to the text as some of the key themes started to surface. These included gender roles, patriarchy, child marriage, its consequence among others, and helped me understand and analyze the text normatively. Furthermore, I still tried to follow the above guidelines and went back to the recommended steps. However; I felt a disconnection and interruption in the flow of analysis and making sense of the text.

As it felt like I have to stop in the middle of a process where various themes were emerging and starting to make sense and go to the next recommendation in the guidelines and then start to look for new thing.

As a result, thematic approach to the text emerged as the strongest and natural way of analyzing the text for me as a researcher for this particular research project. Consequently, I followed and focused on the thematic approach, kept going back to the text for three more times. I kept looking for new emerging themes, how they interplayed and textured together, transcribed, organized the themes, and analyzed the entire unit of text to make sense of the sample and its processes.

In the end, while watching the selected episodes for the eighth time, I made sure to check if anything new was emerging or was missed previously. By this point, I had the transcripts with key themes and subthemes that were re-presented in the text. This

facilitated the organization of the analysis into systematic and similar categories/subcategories. Furthermore, there is one more concept that has crucial concerns and needs to be understood. As,

Foucault (1972) suggests that:

All preconceptions must be held in suspense. They must not be rejected definitely, of course, but the tranquility with which they are accepted must be disturbed; we must show that they do not come about by themselves, but are always the results of a construction the rules of which must be known and the justification of which must be scrutinized. (Cited in Hay, 2005, p. 180)

It is important to acknowledge that the task of totally suspending one's own understanding and response to the text in order to start with fresh eyes is impossible. Nevertheless, one must try to get as close as possible. In order to achieve this, I, being an Indian Hindu married woman myself, often included my own life experiences that reflected my understanding of the context. This practice sometimes provided a clear sense of what was going on in my mind. It sometimes helped me to put myself in a certain character's situation and ask questions pertaining to my personal experiences in similar situations. Furthermore, if I had not had such experiences, I tried to imagine myself in that particular situation to keep a check on my own understanding and preconceptions of what would have happened in those situations. According to Foucault (1972), "reading, listening, or looking at the text with fresh eyes is an essential starting point given that the objective of discourse analysis is to disclose the 'naturalness' of

constructed categories, subjectivities, particularities, accountability, and responsibility” (Hay, 2005, p. 180).

Reflexivity: My Position as a Researcher

As an Indian woman, I have strong views about child marriage, the situation of women in India, and women’s rights. I brought my views into dialogue with the material of the text so that the reader can distinguish between the two. As Waitt (2005) points out, reflexivity enables one and the reader to see “how your position within the project has changed through its design and implementation” (Hay, 2005, p. 180). Hence, it was crucial that I “give careful consideration to a reflexive statement that discusses [my] position within the project and how it changed through its design and implementation” (Hay, 2005, p. 180).

I was born in India’s capital, New Delhi. My father is from Rajasthan, one of the states where child marriage is still a prevalent traditional practice. He lived in a very remote village with no electricity; women had to go and fetch water from the water wells in clay pots. My father used to walk through the dense forests with wild animals to go to the school barefoot. My parents did not come from a wealthy family and my grandparents on both sides were farmers. Even today, there is no proper bus or transportation to get to my father’s village. If you are lucky then you may find a ride but if not, you will have to walk around 10 kilometers on foot. I remember those times from my childhood. My mother is from Uttar Pradesh, (UP) which is the most populous state in India and shares the border with part of the state of Rajasthan. The part of Rajasthan and UP surrounding the borders of the two states from which my parents come is known as the Braj region. It

is said to be the home land and birthplace of Lord Krishna. Hence, my parents, belonging to the Braj region spoke the same language, i.e., *Braj Bhasha* (Braj language) and shared the same traditions, culture, and religion. My family and I follow the Hindu religious faith and practice Hindu traditions. Hindu traditional societies follow the caste system. It is a system of hierarchies that was put in place in ancient India on the basis of people's occupations. However, in contemporary India, these castes have become more of a hierarchy of power and oppression. Additionally, it has become harder to identify anyone's caste based on the occupations at the present time because of the fact that the variety of occupations that were exclusively carried out by a particular caste in ancient India is now been carried out by all the castes and their members. The lines have blurred in terms of occupations, but the caste hierarchy is still immensely prevalent in terms of social status, power, and interactions. The four castes in a traditional Hindu society are *Brahmin* (priestly caste, teachers, and educators), *Kshatriya* (warrior caste, kings, and soldiers), *Vaishya* (entrepreneurs), and *Shudra* (the service caste which aids the other three top castes). There is a fourth sub-caste that still belongs to the service caste however, this sub-caste does the menial jobs involving human waste and refuse that no one else would want to associate with. Hence, no one wants to touch or come near the members of this caste and for these same reasons the members of this sub-caste are called Untouchables.

My family belongs to the topmost caste in Hindu religious social hierarchy, i.e., the Brahmin caste (the priestly caste) and is highly respected. Consequently, as a family we did not face oppression based on caste however we did face it because of the social

class since we were poor farmers. Later my father finished his education in music, moved to New Delhi and secured a government job that provided us stability and elevated our social class two-fold. First, it elevated us financially and secondly, because of the fact that now we were living in a “city” rather than a rural village which others could only wish for.

After my parents moved to New Delhi (the capital of India), I was born. Since we were away from the village, no one knew how we lived but they thought we have a lot of money. But the reality was that we still did not have enough money. I remember vividly that I and my other three siblings with my parents used to live in a 20ft. x 20ft. kitchen that happened to be our living room, bedroom, study room, and bathroom. We used to sleep on the floor on single bedding having both my parents sleeping on each end making sure that we were secure.

During those times my father never sacrificed our education. He would explain and tell us why he was not able to buy us fancy clothes or toys. He would tell us to save whatever money we could for a book or for an important occasion such as welcoming and hosting a guest. Slowly, with great hard work, my family became financially stable and became a part of middle class families in India. Although, I was born in New Delhi, because of my parents’ rural background I had spent a lot of time in the villages of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh as a growing child, teenager, and an adult, visiting my grandparents’ house, (once or twice a year for a total period of about three to four months in a year) and extended family, (the majority of whom live in rural Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) experiencing the life people of that community lead and believed in. I had been

practicing and observing the rituals of the Rajasthani community in my everyday life directly through my family and indirectly through my extended family and friends. Our extended families to the most part still struggle every day to make ends meet, and are very traditional.

My female cousins dropped out of school when they were of a certain age and had hit puberty. Their menstruation cycles started; making them sexually mature and therefore dangerous to allow to move about freely in society. So they spent all day at home helping their mother, brothers, and father.

I have experienced gender differences not so much in my own family but in my extended family. My male cousins were allowed to go anywhere anytime. However, my female cousins and I were to stay at home and help in the kitchen.

I have to admit, though, that my aunts never forced me to help them in the kitchen but silently they always wanted me to. Watching my peers, I felt a social pressure to be a “good girl” and perform all those tasks with my cousins. Otherwise I would have been judged by my relatives in silence. They often talked ill about other girls in their absence because of their not being active about helping without being asked during their visits. They always said that “no one will come up to you and ask for help, a good, well-cultured girl doesn’t need to be told. Rather she should know what is expected of her and do it anyway, even if told not to. A good girl always insists and does it.”

This is why, even though I was a privileged child of a family that lived in the huge city of new Delhi, and went to school to get education unlike my cousins; I was still judged based on how much I helped in the house, kitchen, how much I spoke, how loud I

spoke, what I wore, how I wore it, where I went, with whom, and at what time of day, etc. I was judged all the time.

My mother always used to caution me so that I would not accidentally give anyone a chance to talk ill about me behind my back to other relatives and bring a bad name to my family. She did it mostly to keep me informed rather than to pressure me.

Moreover, I am an Indian married woman, a wife, and a daughter-in-law experiencing similar family struggles to those that Anandi, Gehna, Sumitra, Sugna, and Dadisa, (the various characters of *Balika Vadhu*) or any other Indian married woman would experience.

Furthermore, the fact that I have been in the United States of America for almost 10 years has had its own unique impact on my life. As an Indian married woman, I had many responsibilities and expectation of how to behave in the presence of my family and in society. However, living in the U.S. has provided me with some freedom to live my life the way I want, but only to a certain extent. My responsibilities have not changed, but rather increased because of the fact that I live in the US. I do have the freedom to wake up whenever I want to instead of waking up at 5AM; clean the house, take a shower and then enter the kitchen to prepare a meal for the family. I have the freedom to not make breakfast in the morning. I have the freedom to go to the library by myself when it's dark, among other things.

In addition, although I am so far away from our family; the technology has made it possible to remain connected 365 days round the clock every year. My husband and I talk to our family everyday both in the morning and at night using Skype. Every time I

When I speak with my family I have to make sure that I am properly dressed, in the sense that I do not have an outfit that has a deep neckline or one that is exposing more than it should.

I have to make sure that I have red vermillion in my head parting, bracelets on my wrists, a *bindi* (red dot on the forehead), among other things, because these are the symbols of a traditional married Hindu woman. If any of these are missing, it upsets my family. Not wearing these things would mean bringing a bad omen to the family and harm to the husband. This goes for all the festivals and special events of the traditional Hindu society of which I am a part. I am somehow expected to be more Indian than the Indians who are living in India especially in the presence of my extended family; otherwise it will bring a bad name to the family.

Furthermore, living in the US doesn't change anything in terms of keeping traditional fasts such as *Karwachauth* (for the longevity of the husband's life), among others. My husband never pressured or required me to keep this fast and instead he tells me to forget it. However, it is expected of me to keep it; otherwise I can only imagine the judgments that I would have to go through. Even though I am given the freedom of not keeping the *Karwachauth* fast, I will still keep it because the thought of skipping the fast and then something happening to my husband terrifies me. I would never be able to forgive myself. As a result, I am afraid to even entertain any thought of not keeping the fast. Perhaps, because of this reason it is hard to find any married Hindu woman who doesn't keep the fast. Additionally, this brings me to an understanding and realization that I am also a part of such traditional social conditioning or thinking that forces me to follow traditions out of fear that I may or may not want to follow.

The point is that, even though during the times I am not in India, I still feel as if I am there because my responsibilities to be a good daughter-in-law, daughter, sister, and other roles, do not change. I am rather under much stricter surveillance because I am in a foreign country and a foreign culture. Hence, I am expected to stick to my roots more strongly than anyone else who is in India.

Even after ten years in the US, nothing has changed much. I constantly feel that people in India are waiting for me to make a mistake so that they can point their fingers at me and blame it on the fact that I am in a foreign country and I have forgotten my Indian way of living life. In other words, I have become a bad woman. Although I have freedom from my immediate family, it feels that it is my responsibility to save them from the society and its judgments, and to follow the traditions. I have seen my mother all my life following these traditions whether she wanted to or not. Because of my upbringing and conditioning to the traditional ways of life which are so strongly ingrained in me, I do not even attempt to change it because of the fear of being judged and more so bringing a bad name to my family. This fear of being judged is more from within than from the outsides. I became the worst critique of my own actions; doing something outside the traditional Hindu norm makes me feel guilty. As a result, despite being in the US for 10 years, I have never been to a bar; I do not know the taste of alcohol, not that I want to but this is the fact. Even though no one is watching or forcing me, I do not go outside after dark unless someone is with me. These are just a few things that I practice every day.

Thus, my position allowed me to be both an insider and an outsider. I was and am an insider because I am living the struggles of being an Indian Hindu daughter, wife,

sister, aunt, and daughter-in-law among others, both in rural and urban settings. I was and am an outsider because I grew up in the city, earned a college education in New Delhi, and I am doing my graduate study in the USA, unlike the majority of women in my immediate and extended family living in rural India, or in *BV*'s case, its characters such as Anandi, Sugna, Gehna, Dadisa, or Sumitra, among others. I have experienced patriarchal oppression, gender differences, lack of rights, and restrictions in the name of security, responsibility, honor, moral duty, and sacrifice throughout my life. I have seen women within my extended families whose husbands died, who were then stripped of the bright colors that once symbolized joy and adorned a properly married woman. Furthermore, my personal experiences became important as it helped illuminate the nuances of the culture of the study.

Additionally, it is crucial for researchers in general to use their own experiences in the culture they are studying or analyzing, reflexively, to understand their *self* and *self-other* interactions (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Acknowledging my position will also help the reader to understand where I as a researcher was coming from and what my thought processes were. I trust that this has further facilitated me to get a better understanding of the text I analyzed. Thus, I believe that my cultural position as an Indian woman, as an insider, and as an outsider, was an asset to this study.

Practice Analysis of Single *BV* Episode

Before the formal discourse analysis of the sampled text, a small practice analysis of single *BV* episode was employed. The practice analysis was completed on the episode that was aired on July 1, 2009. The sampled episode was watched three times before it

was transcribed to obtain the data. It was then analyzed based on the combination of the analysis guidelines and Fairclough's framework provided earlier in the chapter but primarily a thematic, normative approach was employed to the analysis. The episode was given four attempts or rounds of analysis. Themes such as age, gender roles, traditions, power, women's rights, and modern thoughts, among others, emerged. The final analysis employed the normative thematic approach.

Additionally, during the practice analysis I realized that the July 1st episode picked up the storyline somewhere in the middle which felt incomplete to me as a researcher. Hence, I went back to see if the storyline felt more complete if last few episodes from the previous month were included. Indeed, the inclusion of those episodes made the storyline more sensible and somewhat complete for me and this is why the final sampled text included episodes from June 29 onwards until July 30.

Because of the fact that textually based discourse analyses was performed again during the formal and final discourse analysis of the sampled text, the findings are carefully discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the qualitative research design of the present study. Specifically, the study employed textually based Discourse Analysis methods that included a total of 24 *BV* episodes that included 12 episodes before India's Parliament controversy and 12 after the controversy to analyze the effect and *BV*'s approach toward the issue of child marriage, gender roles and women's rights. A set of Fairclough's frameworks for discourse analysis, a heuristic and guidelines were consulted and a

thematic normative approach was employed to facilitate the final analysis. Before the final discourse analysis was employed, a practice analysis of a single *BV* episode was conducted on the June 1, 2009 *BV* episode to estimate the effectiveness of the method. The method indeed helped answer the research questions in focus. The findings of the practice analysis shed light on *BV*'s position on the issues of child marriage, gender roles, and women's rights. Many themes emerged that informed the findings of the practice analysis of the single *BV* episode and further facilitated the final analysis.

Chapter 4: A Discourse Analysis of Selected Episodes

Introduction

The drama series *Balika Vadhu* (*BV*) was heavily criticized in the Indian Parliament on July 14, 2009 for its treatment of child marriage since child marriage is illegal in India. *BV* was accused of being unconstitutional and glorifying child marriage. However, the show is still being broadcast. This chapter analyzed 24 selected episodes of *BV* to see what assumptions and values are promoted regarding child marriage, gender, and women's rights. The episodes chosen for this study (June 29, 2009- July 30, 2009) were taken from the time period when *BV* was criticized in the Indian Parliament.

The overarching question this study attempted to address was: How to portray a social issue such as child marriage (on media such as television) that poses a break with tradition without offending both the lawmakers (political leaders, government officials, etc.) and the people who view it as tradition (the audience). This dissertation attempted to answer two specific research questions through a critical discourse analysis of the portrayal of child marriage in *BV*. This study is guided by the following research question.

RQ1: How does *BV* represent/portray child marriage?

RQ2: How does *BV* portray/address (ideological) gender roles and women's rights?

To answer these research questions I applied the CDA methodological approach to examine 24 selected *BV* episodes. I situate the plot in the normative discourse on Hindu traditions including child marriage, showing how *BV*'s text problematizes

traditional practices in terms of polarizing discourses on traditions such as patriarchy and honor, among others, particularly in terms of traditional Hindu religious views of women's status and their roles, and emphasizing women's rights.

This chapter is divided into four major sections. First, Characters of the drama series; second, Synopsis of the selected episodes; third, Analysis of the selected *BV* episodes; fourth, Summary of the chapter. The first section of this chapter introduces *BV*'s central character Kalyani Devi and her family. The second section provides a synopsis and the plot of the selected episodes to put forward the context for the analysis. The third section examines the selected *BV* episodes by analyzing the themes that emerged in the text and how it problematizes traditional practices that are related to the practice of child marriage, gender, and women's rights through its portrayal. This section is further subdivided into two parts and six major themes that emerged in the drama series. The two parts are: First, Representation of child marriage; second, Portrayal of gender roles and women's rights. The six major themes (further subdivided into subthemes) are: Plight of a widow; Generational differences on social issues; Negotiating through disclaimers, captions, and comments; Patriarchy; Honor; and Women's rights: The struggles, negotiations, and advocacy. The last section provides a brief summary of the chapter.

Section 1: Characters of the Drama Series

***BV*'s central character Kalyani Devi and her family.**

Kalyani Devi is popularly addressed as Dadisa (respected Grandmother) Maajisa or Maasa (respected mother). The story of *BV* revolves around Dadisa's family, as laid out in figure 1 below:

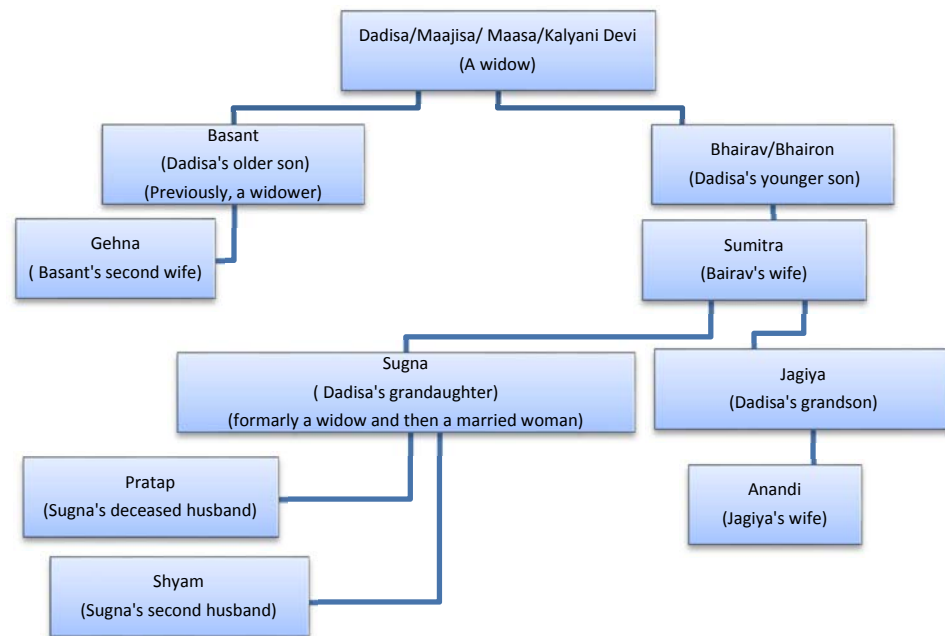


Figure 1: Dadisa's family tree.

It is important to describe Dadisa's family structure and hierarchy because the characters' family status, social status, actions toward others, and ideological power relationships more generally, are shaped by it. Additionally, brief elaboration of relationships in the family and an introduction to the main characters' personalities, along with their approximate ages, is provided below. Relationships and age determine to a

significant extent each character's power to negotiate change with one another, among other elements.

The Family.

Dadisa.

Kalyani Devi/Dadisa/Maasa/Maajisa is in her 70s. Dadisa is a widow. Although she is a woman, as the senior-most person in the family, she is also considered the symbolic head of the family. She is bound by tradition and overlooks the human aspect of certain situations in order to uphold the traditions and reputation of her family. No one dares to go against her wishes.



Figure 2: Kalyani Devi.

(Source: Google.com)

To some extent Dadisa represents the mindset of people living in a traditional Hindu society. But Dadisa is aware of the idea of women's rights. In the episodes analyzed for this study, she wants the best for *Sugna*, but is torn between traditions, love for her granddaughter, and some understanding and acceptance of the new idea of

women's rights. She has to decide whether Sugna should live the life of a traditional Hindu widow or remarry, be happy, and practice her rights.

Basant Singh.

Dadisa's eldest son is an alcoholic in his 50s. Like a traditional son, he is dedicated to his mother. His first wife died after several miscarriages without producing an heir.



Figure 3: Basant Singh.

(Source: Google.com)

At his mother's urging he remarried in order to have a male child, something that is important according to Hindu tradition. His second wife, Gehna, as per his demands was a very young, virgin woman. Basant is mainly driven by filial piety and patriarchal traditions. He gets agitated if challenged.

Gehna Basant Singh.

Gehna is approximately 15 years old. She was literally bought by Dadisa to be married to Basant, who is more than twice her age and a widower. She comes from a poverty-stricken family and her parents couldn't resist Dadisa's marriage offer, as she offered to pay for the ceremony and other expenses. Gehna did not want to marry an old

man, but she went through it because she saw herself as a burden to her poor family and this marriage could bring them relief. Initially Gehna resented Basant, and that resulted in constant friction between the two and Dadisa.



Figure 4: Gehna Basant Singh.

(Source: Google.com)

She was forced into the marriage, and she is forced every night by her husband who wants her to conceive his heir as soon as possible. But Gehna resists and Basant feels threatened.

Bhairav Singh.

Dadisa's younger son Bhairav is in his early 40s. He is a practical man who makes his own judgments about right and wrong, but feels helpless when confronted by his mother's determination to follow tradition. He wants to respect his mother's wishes, but he also wants to do what is morally right and fair to his daughter Sugna and daughter-in-law Anandi.



Figure 5: Bhairav Singh.

(Source: Google.com)

He respects and follows traditions, too, but not blindly. He often finds himself torn between his duty as a traditional son, a father and father-in-law. He supports women's empowerment and the inclusion of widows in society. His children were married at a young age because of Dadisa's determination to follow tradition, but he insisted that Sugna should not go to live with her husband until she was old enough to cope with the responsibilities and implications of being a married woman.

Sumitra Bhairav Singh.

Sumitra is Bhairav's wife and the mother of Jagat and Sugna. She is in her late 30s, and is a passive person with a great deal of patience and tolerance. She is the model dutiful Hindu wife, daughter-in-law, loving mother, and supportive mother-in-law. But she does not blindly follow tradition.



Figure 6: Sumitra Bhairav Singh.

(Source: Google.com)

She is determined that her daughter and daughter-in-law not be subjected to the injustices of child marriage. However, she does it without confronting Dadisa because of her dedication to filial piety toward the elderly. She tries her best to give them the same opportunities that her son enjoys. But this is difficult, sometimes close to impossible, because Dadisa stands in the way.

Sugna.

Bhairav and Sumitra's daughter Sugna is approximately 15 years old. She was married to Pratap as a child but lived with her own parents. She was very annoyed that her parents refused to send her to her husband's house and often complained to her mother.



Figure 7: Sugna getting ready for her gauna ceremony.

(Source: Google.com)

However, she met her husband secretly and one day in a moment of passion became intimate with him, as a result of which she became pregnant. The day her husband came to bring her home, he was attacked and died. After this incident Sugna led a challenging life as a child widow.



Figure 8: Sugna as a child widow

(Source: Google.com)

When Shyam (her future husband) asked to marry her, she refused, but later agreed for the sake of her unborn child. Sacrificing one's own desires for the sake of one's children is seen as a good quality in an ideal Hindu women. Sugna is dedicated to her first husband, in keeping with the religious beliefs which prohibit widow remarriage.

She blames her fate for the loss her first husband, and believes that her life has no meaning after her first husband's death. She feels guilty, and that she has become unfaithful and disrespectful to her first husband by marrying Shyam.

Pratap Singh.

Pratap is Sugna's deceased husband. Sugna is pregnant with his child.



Figure 9: Pratap: Sugna's first husband

(Source: Google.com)

Shyam Singh.

Shyam, Sugna's second husband, is approximately 18 years old and educated. He respects traditions but also advocates for new ideas. He has great respect for Sugna and would do anything to save her honor. He believes in women's rights, widow remarriage, and the idea that widows should be included in social events, rituals, and festivities.



Figure 10: Shyam: Sugna's second husband

(Source: Google.com)

He confronts the opposition of his own family and society when he decides to marry a widow, Sugna, who is pregnant with someone else's child. But he faces hurdles because of filial piety.

Jagat Singh/Jagiya.

Jagat is Bhairav and Sumitra's son, Sugna's brother, and Dadisa's grandson. He is a 12-year-old boy who would much rather play cricket with his friends than pay attention to studies or homework. He is the favorite grandchild of his Dadisa, also because he is the only male child in the family. He often insults and ignores Anandi, his wife, because he knows that he will not be in trouble because he is her husband, and husbands have power over their wives. Besides, Dadisa always takes his side over Anandi regardless of whose fault it might truly be.



Figure 11: Jagat Singh

(Source: Google.com)

One day he is pulled out of a match and informed that he is getting married. He initially did not like his wife Anandi as she has too much attitude according to him, and she also gets a lot of attention from his parents. But slowly he sees a different side of the coin when she starts helping him with his homework, but not always.

Anandi Jagat Singh.

Anandi is Jagiya's wife. She is a cheerful 10-11 year old who is the only daughter of her parents and is thus pampered. Her parents are not rich. She loves going to school but her studies are cut short when her parents decide to get her married to a respectable wealthy family at the tender age, as is the tradition in their village.



Figure 12: Anandi Jagat Singh

(Source: Google.com)

She is distraught at first to leave her parents, her friends, and village to go to a new setting where she faces some hostility because of Dadisa, but slowly she learns to adjust to the new surroundings and accept her new family with support from her loving in-laws. Dadisa keeps her in line and makes sure that she never relaxes and keeps busy. She is often reminded by Dadisa that she is a daughter-in-law of the house and not just a child in her parents' house. There is a difference between being a daughter and a daughter-in-law. She needs to conform to her role, and control her behavior toward the family members. Anandi forgets sometimes and starts behaving as a child and in these moments she gets in trouble. Dadisa demands from Anandi filial piety toward the elderly and unconditional dedication, respect, and loyalty to her husband and other members of the family. Anandi tries every day to mold herself in this traditional role because this is the right way for her to live her life.

Section 2: Synopsis of the Selected *BV* Episodes

This section provides a synopsis and the plot of the 24 selected episodes to provide context for the Critical Discourse Analysis. The storyline starts from the day when Sugna was getting ready for her second wedding with Shyam, and Dadisa goes back to Sugna's first wedding's *gauna* ceremony flashback. Dadisa recalls the death of Pratap, Sugna's first husband, who was murdered on his way to Sugna's parents' house for *gauna* the ceremony, bringing his bride home to his own house. Dadisa knew that as a widow Sugna would have to sacrifice her own happiness to tradition. Shortly thereafter, the family learns about Sugna's pregnancy. Dadisa was distraught at the disgrace it brought to the family. No one could know about this; otherwise, the family's honor will be lost.

Sugna was not allowed to stay in the house because she was a widow. However, Shyam came forward and asked for her hand in marriage. Sugna agreed to the second marriage only because of her unborn child's future. Dadisa does not know what to do. She wants to respect tradition but also wants Sugna to be happy. It takes some time for her to accept the idea of widow remarriage.

The day of Sugna's second marriage is fixed, and she is allowed to come to the house and wear colored clothes instead of the white saree worn by a Hindu widow. Some community members consider that Dadisa has taken a brave step in permitting Sugna's marriage and they praise her. However, Sugna appears to be sad.

On the day of Sugna's second wedding, the guests arrive for the celebrations. Shyam, the groom, comes with his family. He insists that Dadisa should come forward

and give her blessings. But, Dadisa is a widow and should stay away from auspicious ceremonies. Shyam gets support from Bhairav and other community members and convinces Dadisa to come forward and bless him.

Shyam is concerned enough to hide from his own parents the fact that Sugna is pregnant. But they learn about Sugna's pregnancy, and refuse to go on with the wedding. They ask Shyam to leave with them. Shyam refuses and insists on marrying Sugna. His father disowns him and leaves.

The revelations at the wedding ceremony reignite an old quarrel between Shyam's family and Dadisa's family. Shyam's father tries to take revenge for what he sees as the dishonor of his family through the marriage of his son to a widow carrying another man's child, and so he sets fire to Dadisa's grain storage. Basant wants to retaliate for the attacks of Shyam's father. However, Bhairon, Sugna's father, urges that they must not retaliate because the two families are now related by marriage, and a bride's family must always be respectful to the groom's family. With assistance from the police, a peace contract is signed between the two families.

Sugna is not ready to consummate the marriage. Shyam tries to please her by not insisting that they sleep together. He shows patience and seems to be willing to wait as long as Sugna needs.

Section 3: Analysis, Interpretation and Synthesis of Selected *BV* Episodes

This section provides critical discourse analysis of the 24 selected *BV* episodes, their interpretations and synthesis in response to the three research questions of this study. The Critical Discourse Analysis is thematic and normative in nature. This section

is further subdivided into two parts. These two parts are: First, Representation of child marriage; Second, Portrayal of gender roles and women's rights. The first part addressed the major themes: Plight of a widow; Generational Differences on social issues; and Negotiating through disclaimers, captions, and comments. The second part focused on the following major themes: Patriarchy; Honor; and Women's Rights: The struggles, negotiations, and advocacy. Each major theme has subthemes and will be discussed individually in the following paragraphs.

Part I: Representation of child marriage.

This part attempts to address the first research question pertaining to the portrayal of child marriage in *BV*. This will be done by discussing the major themes of Plight of a widow; and Generational differences on social issues in the following paragraphs. Each major theme has subthemes that further shed light on *BV*'s position on the social issue of child marriage, its representation, and portrayal in *BV*.

Plight of a widow.

One of the major themes that emerged in *BV*'s portrayal was the plight of a widow or – more precisely – a child widow. It brings forth a very crucial issue of child marriage, perhaps not directly but certainly indirectly. One may argue that widowhood may occur in any woman's life at any age or stage and may not be seen necessarily a direct consequence of child marriage. However, it can force hard consequences on the life of a child bride who becomes a widow during her childhood. According to Chaudhuri (2009), "child marriage also leaves numbers of young girls as widows, vulnerable to sexual exploitation and prostitution," (p. 11). Families, especially poor families, seem to

abandon their widowed daughters, perhaps because, as Chaudhuri (2009) reports in her analysis, “Disguised as religion, it’s just about money. One less mouth to feed. Four saris saved, one bed, and a corner is saved in the family room” (p. 13).

Thus, it may be understood that widowhood and its consequences may become more intense if experienced by a child bride. In this sense, the life of a child widow such as Sugna could be both directly and indirectly affected by her child marriage. Had Sugna not married when she was a child, she would have escaped the consequences of becoming a widow during her childhood even before she could start a married life with Pratap, and even before she could understand the life of a married woman, let alone the life of a widow. In *BV*’s portrayal of Sugna’s life, the plight of the Hindu widow can be seen, especially the plight of a child widow.

In *BV*, Sugna is depicted as living the traditional life of a Hindu widow. She speaks very little and shows no interest in her surroundings. She is withdrawn from her surroundings, crying and seeking refuge in memories of her first husband and the time they spent together. In *BV*, the contrast between her life as a widow and how happy and cheerful she was with her first husband, Pratap, is emphasized a lot. It almost seems that *BV* is justifying Sugna as a devoted, virtuous, and loyal wife who cares about her first husband more than anything. According to the Hindu scriptures such as the Laws of Manu, which states, “Him to whom her father may give her, or her brother with the father's permission, she shall obey as long as he lives, and when he is dead, she must not insult (his memory)” (1969, p. 149) by remarrying or thinking about any other men, as

widow remarriage is forbidden by Hindu scriptures, and a woman must always control her (sexual) thoughts.

BV portrays her as saying yes to the second marriage only to protect her first husband's unborn child and not for her own desires. Madora (2007) states that, "Marriage is not viewed as a means of attaining personal happiness, or a means of sharing one's life with a person one loves. Instead, family unity, family togetherness, and common family goals are of primary importance, and personal considerations are only secondary" (p. 182). She is always shown being happy with her first husband in her memories, and when she comes to reality, where she is getting ready to be married for the second time, she is always shown as unhappy, sad, gloomy, crying, uninterested, and unenthusiastic. It almost seems as if she is sacrificing her life for her unborn child to give him a father and a lifetime protector; otherwise she does not have any interest in Shyam. She is always shown staying away from Shyam, not sleeping in the same room or bed with him, even after the second marriage is concluded. The ancient scriptures "assert for women their place in marriage and society" (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009) and state that "A faithful wife, who desires to dwell (after death) with her husband, must never do anything that might displease him who took her hand, whether he be alive or dead" (The Laws of Manu, 1969, p. 156). Perhaps, marrying again could indicate that Sugna is doing something that might displease her deceased husband and she would then not be able to dwell him after death. Sugna seems to blame herself for her first husband's death. She appears to accept that his death is the fate that she was born with.

She reflects:

Sugna: With what fate was I born? I lost my husband. After his death, I was known as Pratap's widow, but after this [second] marriage, your [Pratap's] name that was attached to my name will also be lost forever. Pratap, are you watching that I will not be able to give your name to your own child? But, I promise, even if I get married to someone else, my heart and soul will always be yours . . . always.

Sugna's self-reflection above can be understood as her blaming her fate for not being able to keep her husband safe, as she says "she lost her husband" rather than "her husband is taken" from her by fate. The word choice of *lost* as opposed to *taken* reflects her "internalized oppression," as something is generally considered "lost" if it is not properly guarded or taken care of; the blame rests with the person who had possessed it. One of the righteous duties or virtuous behaviors of a married woman is believed to be performing regular fasts for the longevity and prosperity of her husband.¹ Every calendar year, "Hindus worldwide observe religious rituals like *karwachauth*, a full day of fasting by married women to ensure the longevity of their husbands. The marital family becomes her haven and path to heaven, especially if she fulfills these roles efficiently and her

¹ The researcher of this study performs such fasts regularly. I do these fasts for the similar reasons for which I use the *pallu*. It bothers me if my family is being judged by society for my actions. As for fasting, I fear the thought that, God forbid if something happens to my husband, then I will be blamed for not keeping the fasts for his longevity. It would be even worse because I will blame myself for putting my husband's life in danger by not doing something as simple as keeping a fast. I will be blamed further for my husband's fate. The thought of something happening to my husband urges me to believe in the tradition and just keep the fasts, even though my husband never forced or asked me to keep such fasts. He usually tells me to forget about these fasts and enjoy myself. But I keep them anyway. To make me feel better and to support me, my husband keeps these fasts along with me. I tell him not to do it because the community members make fun of him for keeping fasts for a wife's longevity. I do not want them to make fun of my husband because it hurts. But my husband says that it only makes sense because he also wants me to have a long and healthy life. This way we both can be together longer.

husband outlives her,” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). However, men are not required to practice any such fasting for the longevity of their wives. Traditionally, a widow seems to be blamed for the death of their husband, for her virtue has not preserved his life. Scholars observe that, “A widow’s inauspiciousness is also linked to the fact that she outlives her husband. She is thus cursed and referred to as a ‘husband eater’ because she caused the death of her husband before her own” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). Perhaps when Sugna speaks about her fate, it also provides an insight into the Hindu traditional beliefs in the *karma* of previous lives, which decides one’s fate in next life. Conceivably, blaming her fate is actually blaming her *karma* in the past life that was not good enough for her to earn a good fate in her present life, and that is why she lost her husband and became a widow.

According to Medora (2007):

The belief in the law of *karma* and the belief that one should be passive and accepting of difficulties in life in order to be rewarded in the next life are contrary to beliefs in most other cultures. This belief often encourages individuals to be passive and acceptant of problems. Family life cycle transitions can sometimes be stressful and problematic when they collide with values of passivity, obedience, and sacrifice. (p. 179)

It is mentioned by an author that “a woman is born because of bad karma in the previous life and fulfilling the role of a wife constitutes penance for her previous life” (Khanna, 2002). Sugna’s chance to do penance by being a virtuous wife was also taken away from her by her fate, her karma in a previous life. Sugna’s self-blame and unmovable loyalty

toward her first husband reflects on her traditional dedication to her husband as a traditional virtuous wife. In this regard, *BV* seems to reinforce the traditional beliefs of Hindu widowhood to some extent.

On the contrary, Basant, who was also a widowed man, was not shown as having such strong feelings for his first wife. If a man loses his wife, there are no restrictions on his future life. Indeed, men are encouraged to remarry in the name of carrying on the lineage of the family. Dadisa (in episodes earlier than the sampled ones) was impatient to arrange a second marriage for her son as soon as possible. She wanted Basant to produce an heir, a boy. She was also concerned about Basant's loneliness. It is understood through scholarly works that "the rate of remarriage of widowers is much higher than that of widows" (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). There is no comment in *BV* on the difference between what happens to a widow and a widower, confirming that *BV* does not *question* many traditional Hindu beliefs in terms of gender and widowhood in its portrayals, but rather *reinforces* them. In Sugna's case, widow remarriage became a looming issue among the families involved, unlike in Basant's case.

In the following example, the portrayal of Sugna in *BV* seems to be in accord with traditional patriarchal values that reinforce the belief that a woman's life has no meaning without her husband. For instance, in the July 15, 2009 episode, Sugna's uncle and aunt come to meet her after her second wedding, with Shyam, concludes.

Sugna's uncle says to her:

Uncle: My little girl has suffered through so much in such a tender age. We heard about your second marriage, we cannot express how much joy it brought to us. By

God's grace, my little girl has started a new life once again. All the joys of life are back now.

From the above dialogue, a woman's fate seemed to be tied to that of her husband. It appears that a woman's life ends with her husband's death, as Sugna's uncle emphasizes that, "*all the joys of life are back now*" that Sugna is married again and has a husband to start "*a new life again*," which was not possible for a widow. Such relations of women's fate to her husband's are also illustrated in *BV* through the blessings given to the married women of the house, such as Anandi (Dadisa's granddaughter-in-law; another child bride). In the episode aired on July 7, 2009, the departing guests at Sugna's second wedding bless Anandi by saying, "may your husband and your luck always remain safe." (*suhaag bhaag sada salamat rahe tharo*)² Similarly scholars observe the language used at the time of performing a wedding. The priest generally utters words to address the bride such as *sumangali* (auspicious married woman), *saubhagywati* (fortunate married woman), and *pativrata* (worshipper of her husband)" (Chakravarti, 1998; Sogani, 2002; Khanna, 2002; Ahmed-Ghosh 1998; 2004; 2009) seems to further reinforce the need for setting the ultimate goal of young girls' lives to becoming an auspicious married woman.

To remain auspicious, *sumangali*, and *saubhagywati*, it becomes very important that a woman's husband is safe and alive, above all else. If a woman's husband dies, she is to live a colorless life without pleasure. Both Sugna and Dadisa are widows. Portrayals of their life in *BV* show the sacrifices they have to make in order to lead a widow's virtuous, colorless life. Moreover, the life of a widow is more challenging for a child

² I receive the same blessing or a similar one from my relatives. One of the most common ones is, "may god give you a son, and may your brothers and nephews live long."

bride such as Sugna than for an older widow such as Dadisa, who has seen and lived life and has the maturity level to process and handle the consequences of becoming a widow.

Widows and their colorless lives.

Dadisa, a widow, is shown never wearing vibrantly colored clothes, applying no *sindoor*, (vermillion, a red powder that only a married woman can apply to her hair parting) or colored *bindi*. (a red dot on the forehead that is the sign of a married woman) Rather, she is shown wearing pastel clothes and a sandalwood-paste *bindi* on her forehead. The sandalwood *bindi* is a sign of being highly religious and devoted to God. Widows are expected to be devoted to God after they lose their husbands.³ It is believed that “perceptions of widows’ sexuality as threatening and the construction of men’s masculinity in preserving the purity of women, as explicated through religious texts” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). Sugna, as a widow, was not allowed to live with the rest of the family, enjoy vibrant colors, or eat delicious food. Even her shadow could bring misfortune to other family members, especially men. This portrayal appears to be in line with one traditional restriction placed on a widow – to stay away from the family for a certain period of time because it is inauspicious for family members, especially men, to come in contact with the bad fortune of a widow. Scholars further assert that “ritual stigmatization of widows continues to this day. To give them some purpose in life, they are relegated to a life of prayer and seclusion. This denial of widows’ sexuality and paranoia [regarding] their disruptive powers is assured through the insistence that they

³ The researcher’s grandmother, who is a widow, leaves very early in the morning for a nearby temple where she spends most of her time praying. She also applies a sandalwood *bindi* on her forehead to express her spiritual connection to God and her disinterest in the regular festivities of life.

become ascetics” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). In one of the episodes when Sugna’s fate as a widow was being decided by the elders of the family;

Dadisa says:

Dadisa: Until Sugna completes her husband’s one-year death anniversary, she will have to live in the room situated outside, in the far backside of the main house. She will have to make her own food without any butter, oil, or spices. And for her whose life is filled with such great bitterness by God; it is a sin for her to even touch any sweets.

Sugna must live a colorless, tasteless, and strict life. She must complete one year getting used to such a life with no excitement, so that later it becomes easier for her to live this way for the rest of her life, just as Dadisa did. It appears as if she is being punished for her husband’s death and has to serve a yearlong sentence living outside the main house by herself in seclusion with strict instructions and diets to follow. She must not come near other family members and must stay away from the main house, as her shadow may threaten the safety of male members, especially Jagiya, her brother and the only male heir of the family. Dadisa has to protect him from the inauspicious shadow of a widow. Sugna was still getting used to the life of a widow when she was finally allowed back in the house because of her prospects of a second marriage, to Shyam. In one of the sampled episodes, aired on July 3, 2009, Sugna, shown in a white saree, (traditionally, a widow’s symbol of her colorless life) was about to offer a spoonful of yogurt to her brother Jagiya before he left for school. This is a very common ritual in rural India.⁴ Just as Sugna was

⁴ My family also observes this ritual regularly. I offer yogurt to my brothers and other family members before they leave the house, especially if they are leaving for something important such as a job interview,

about to put the spoonful of yogurt in Jagiya's mouth, Dadisa stops her by holding her hand firmly and says:

Dadisa: Daughter Sugna! Jagiya is not just your brother anymore. He is Anandi's husband too, right? Let this auspicious ritual be performed by his wife's hands only.

Sugna sadly and quietly followed Dadisa's instructions, moved away from Jagiya, and let Anandi do the ritual instead.

The above dialogue unequivocally suggests Dadisa's fear of Sugna casting an inauspicious shadow on Jagiya's life. This was because Sugna was a widow and she could bring the same misfortune to Jagiya, which thought terrified Dadisa. However, she also loved Sugna. Dadisa politely but firmly asked Sugna to stay away. Though she did not mention the actual reason to the girl, Sugna seemed to know why. Although Dadisa was polite verbally, her strong tight grip on Sugna's wrist hurt Sugna and conveyed quite clearly Dadisa's anger and fear regarding Sugna's action. Although done by Dadisa, a woman, such an action is still apparently a manifestation of patriarchy and patriarchal values that are highly internalized by the society, including women, who subconsciously appear to become advocates and implementers of such ideologies.

It was clear from Dadisa's body language, the sternness of her voice, and her concerned expression that she did not want Sugna anywhere near Jagiya. Sugna understood, as was clear from her sad expression in response to Dadisa's comment.

Dadisa's response to Sugna's changed social status, from being an auspicious *suhagan*

or a faraway journey, etc. The ritual is supposed to bring safety to the family member and protects him from evil forces.

(married woman) to an inauspicious *vidhwa*, (widow) illustrates the sacrifices expected of a widow – even staying away from her own younger brother. In this sense *BV* seems to be in accord with traditional Hindu beliefs and values.

In another example, *BV* returns in a flashback to the day when Sugna was dressed to welcome her first husband as a newlywed bride for her *gauna* ceremony. When Sugna's family learns the shocking news of Pratap's death on the way to the ceremony, everyone starts crying. However, tradition has to be followed, and Dadisa immediately starts taking off Sugna's jewelry, saying to Sugna while crying:

Dadisa: Now you have nothing to do with these colors, girl. You will have to give up your desires for these. This happiness is not in your fate anymore.

Dadisa takes off Sugna's *mangalsutra*, a necklace that carries equivalent symbolism to a Western wedding ring, or is rather even more precious. It is the symbol of a virtuous Indian Hindu married woman's identity. It is everything to her, and if it is taken, it is almost as if she loses her identity as well as her "personhood."

Sugna pleads to her: "No Dadisa . . . no . . . Dadisa don't take it (the mangalsutra) off. . . .(cries)."

Dadisa responds: I can't erase the blackness of your fate. . . .

In the above conversation, Dadisa is shown taking off Sugna's symbols of being a married woman. Now that Sugna is no longer a married woman, she does not have a right to wear anything pretty, beautiful, or valuable. Dadisa makes it clear when she says "*I can't erase the blackness of your fate. . . .*" that since Sugna has become a widow, her life has no light or hope. It is observed that "Traditionally and even today, often widows have

to dissociate from the material world. The texts and traditions require them to wear white sarees . . . not wear any jewelry or make-up and break or remove their bangles, which are signs of marriage” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009).

Sugna’s colorless life is taken over by darkness and seems to be set in stone. She has lost everything. Horrified, Sugna begs Dadisa not to take off her *mangalsutra*. She refuses to believe that she is no longer allowed to wear it. She refuses to accept that her husband is dead and her life is over. She appears to be too horrified to even think about the life of a widow. It becomes clear as Dadisa continues to take off Sugna’s jewelry, erases the vermillion or *sindoor* in her hair parting, and removes the red dot or *bindi* in the middle of her forehead, among the other symbols of a married woman. In this portrayal, the women present at the scene did not stop Dadisa and said nothing; rather, they accepted that “this is the way it is when a woman becomes a widow” and “it is the common understanding and natural way of behaving.”

Such a portrayal highlights the consequences of becoming a child widow and the struggles a child widow has to go through. In this sense, *BV* seems to humanize the issue of child marriage by portraying Sugna’s terrifying emotional turmoil, and provides a visual spectacle through which one is compelled to at least think, without necessarily deciding whether the tradition of child marriage is good or bad.

BV usually seems to portray both the newer- and older-generational characters traditionally for the most part. *BV* invests mainly in its older generation characters as major holders of traditions, particularly Dadisa. On the contrary, *BV* also displays disagreements between generations in regard to various social issues, along with the other

consequences of child marriage, such as education and the devaluing of the girl child.

The following paragraphs will focus on such a difference and discuss how *BV* problematizes certain social issues and certain consequences of child marriage.

Generational differences on social issues.

Child marriage.

BV addresses the issue of child marriage through generational differences that are apparent in the attitudes of *BV*'s characters. There is a clear example of generational clash between Dadisa and Bhairav (her younger son) over the issue of child marriage. Bhairav did not agree with Dadisa's decision to marry off his daughter Sugna, and his son Jagiya, while they were still children. He tried to stop Dadisa without being disrespectful, but failed and gave into filial piety. However, Bhairav did succeed in convincing Dadisa to postpone Sugna's *gauna* ceremony until she was old enough to understand what married life entailed. Dadisa agreed to this with reservations, because society and tradition allows for some flexibility in terms of when the *gauna* ceremony should be performed. In this regard, *BV* attempts to find a middle ground where traditions are followed, but uses the existing flexibilities offered by such traditions as the basis to argue for and defend the desired delay to prevent the actual consummation of Sugna's marriage itself. In other words, *BV* uses traditions to question traditions without demonizing them.

Additionally, child marriage, attitudes toward women, and generational differences are also explored in *BV* through yet another example, the portrayal of Gehna's marriage. Gehna is a young, beautiful, virgin girl from a poor family who is married to a far older man, Basant, Dadisa's older son. It was Dadisa who decided that Basant should

remarry, but Basant set forth conditions for the bride chosen for him. Despite being a widower, Basant is powerful because he is a man. Being from a rich family adds to his power. He insisted that his bride must be young and a virgin. The only way Dadisa could find such a girl was in an extremely poor family. Girls are considered a burden in poor families, because such families do not have enough money or social status to find a good match for their daughters. According to tradition, Dadisa doing a good deed (*bhala* or *ehsaan*) for the girl and her family by offering her son's hand in marriage. Dadisa had borne all the wedding expenses in order to acquire (or, more correctly, quite literally buy) a second beautiful young virgin wife for her son. Dadisa's wealth and higher social status gives her the power to secure such a girl, but actually the real power is granted by the tradition that gives her the right to do this. According to tradition, Gehna had to accept her father's decision that she would marry Dadisa's son. In this regard, *BV* is rife with traditional behavior. However, *BV* seems to also problematize their marriage in its portrayals.

BV shows the problems with such a marriage in terms of the generational differences because of Gehna and Basant's age. Gehna was not happy to marry a man twice her age. Knowing how Gehna feels, Basant is hesitant and uncomfortable all the time. Gehna and Basant do not communicate very well and their relationship as husband and wife is very tentative. They are often portrayed as not talking to each other; rather, they are shown giving each other unpleasant looks and ignoring each other. It almost seems that they are dragging the marriage as a mutual albatross, in the name of tradition and their families' honor. In one episode, when the jeweler is showing jewelry to the

women of the family for Sugna's upcoming second wedding, Basant suggests that Gehna should choose a piece of jewelry for herself. He does not address this to Gehna directly; he rather suggests it to Sumitra, despite the fact that Gehna was sitting next to Sumitra. This shows that he is hesitant and still trying to win her affection. Portrayals of Gehna and Basant's relationship highlight the unpleasant consequences of child marriage where age differences are vast and tension between spouses leads to an unhappy life. However, *BV* portrays these issues, such as Dadisa's power to get a young virgin beautiful child bride for Basant, his power as a man to be able to lay out his precise specifications for his second young child bride, and his constant attempts to woo Gehna, in a quite nonvindictive way. *BV* shows how child marriage is embedded in power relationships without necessarily depicting Basant or Dadisa as evil characters, or demonizing the tradition. *BV* rather seems to be focusing on the consequences of such a marriage where, because of generational differences, the institution of marriage may be seen differently by a young bride such as Gehna, who might still dream of being with a young husband. But an older groom such as Basant believes that the tradition of getting a younger wife is right.

Moreover, in the portrayal of Gehna's life, besides highlighting the consequences of her child marriage, *BV* also seems to provide a voice to women like her. Even though Gehna did not have any control over the marriage decision, she shows resistance silently by not cooperating in the bedroom with her husband. *BV* shows that although Basant has power, he cannot forcefully win his wife's respect or affection. He often gets frustrated and feels defeated. He cannot reveal this silent defeat to anyone, because it will diminish

his power to control a woman and will make him subject to ridicule. Gehna knows this very well and uses it to her advantage as much as she can. In this regard, *BV* appears to give some agency to child brides, without being openly confrontational.

Negotiating through disclaimers, captions, and closing messages.

BV addresses child marriage directly by showing a disclaimer at the beginning of each episode stating that *BV* opposes child marriage. For instance, the July 16 episode included the following disclaimers:

- (1) In research conducted among 20-24 year-old married women by the National Family Health Survey (NFHS_3) in 2005-2006, it was found that almost 45 % women were married when they were less than 18 years old.
- (2) We protest with full force against child marriage. In a progressive country, there should not be a place for such an evil tradition.
- (3) This drama series “Balika Vadhu” is a small effort to uproot child marriage, so that a better future can be built for future generations.

Additionally, before resuming after the commercial breaks, *BV* inserted captions. The following caption appeared in the July 20 and 21, 2009 episodes:

- (4) Through Child marriage, we throw the present as well as the future of a girl child in to the darkness.
- (5) Child marriage is injustice and cruelty toward innocent children.

Each *BV* episode ended with a closing message that was perhaps meant to help viewers absorb the message of the series. These messages were quite varied. For example, the

following messages invite viewers to empathize with Sugna's situation as she was about to remarry.

(6) It's true . . . It is not easy to forget memories from the past . . . but . . . for a golden future, it is necessary to forget [the] past and accept the present.

(7) For a widow, who has accepted the darkness of hopelessness that came with widowhood, it is difficult to immediately accept the gift of light brought by remarriage.

These messages are very effective because they invite viewers to enter into the situation of characters, rather than didactically telling them what to think.⁵ They help to open people's minds to other ways of thinking about how things should be or could be.

Some of the closing messages address the difficulties of challenging traditional norms:

(8) Whenever someone has raised his/her voice against ruthless traditional blind beliefs and taken a step to stop it . . . one ends up facing the rage of fundamentalist society's wrath.

(9) In spite of its being legal, society has still not accepted widow-remarriage. Often, fearing society's scorn, people are forced to take bitter decisions.

Others urge the audience to be open to change:

⁵ In order to see how I would feel if I had to forget my first husband and accept a new person in his place, I started to consider the thought in my mind. I discovered that Hindu traditions are deeply embedded in me and the mere thought frightened me. It felt as if I was committing a sin by even entertaining the thought of a different man.

(10) Custom-ridden society is so influenced by beliefs and opinions that it forgets to see the difference between right and wrong and accepting new ideas becomes a farfetched possibility.

Another caption warns about the psychological effects of tradition, in this case the possibility that guilt over violating the taboo against widow remarriage might affect a second marriage and make it unhappy.

(11) Thoughts augmented because of widowhood, and old traditions often give birth to pessimistic thoughts in a young widow's mind which could affect her life after remarrying.

Sometimes an episode ended by posing a question to the audience. For example, in reference to Sugna's life as a child bride and her remarriage, *BV* asked:

(12) Are we not responsible for this child bride's situation?

(13) A man who is a widower with children does not face any difficulty remarrying; however, a young woman widow faces many difficulties and goes through many challenges when she remarries. What kind of one-sided thinking is this?

These captions, disclaimers, closing messages, and discursive structures show *BV*'s efforts to challenge the tradition of child marriage. Rather, *BV* urges its audience to revisit, re-evaluate, and understand the phenomenon by critically reflecting on the situations depicted in the drama series.

Another matter that takes center stage is the education of girl children.

Education for the girl child.

Another point of contention between the older and younger generations is the issue of education for girls. Dadisa is often shown expressing her opinion that boys are more important than girls, and education is only important for boys. She believes that Anandi and Sugna should focus on household work, taking care of the men of the family, and producing heirs for the family. Dadisa and Bhairav seem to differ in opinion when it comes to the issue of education for a child bride such as Anandi. Bhairav succeeded in convincing Dadisa to let Anandi continue her studies, but Dadisa is still not happy about Anandi getting an education. She believes that once a girl is married, her only priority is to serve the husband's household.

Anandi's mother-in-law Sumitra, another representative of the younger generation, supports her husband Bhairav and his idea of providing Anandi with education, unlike Dadisa. Sumitra is shown as a passive and submissive character. However, she has her own way of being active in bringing desirable change to the family. Though she does not argue or question Dadisa's actions because of filial piety; she expresses her opinion to her husband and keeps Bhairav informed about the children and Dadisa's actions toward them; however, she carefully does so respectfully and not as gossip. Bhairav and Sumitra work as a team, making sure of both children's education without confronting Dadisa.

In this regard, all these portrayals seem subtle, nonvindictive, without confrontation or without any attempt to demonize the traditions. However, *BV*'s use of generational difference sometimes changes to portray other aspects and consequences of

child marriages which provide an understanding of the context within which its characters operate. For example, instead of using the difference it sometimes changes its approach by using its very existence. It uses the porous nature of generational walls through which older generational traditions get absorbed into newer generation over time, and is often understood as reality or truth by the young, reinforcing those same traditions. Because of such understanding, a child bride may get subjected to internalized patriarchal oppression and subordination to men. In turn, her actions become nothing but a manifestation of such patriarchal traditions. She ends up doing the same things to her daughters-in-law and grand-daughters-in-law which were done to her by her mother-in-law, all the while understanding her own actions as truth, the reality of life, and completely natural. The following paragraphs will discuss this concept in detail.

Understanding generational differences.

BV appears to accept the premise that Dadisa has earned her authority by being a virtuous woman all her life. When she was young, she was like Anandi, a young child bride, who did not have any say or power in the household. She followed all the traditional guidelines prescribed for a virtuous wife and daughter-in-law. Now she is entitled to command respect and hold power over the younger generation and the daughters-in-law who are still in the process of gaining power as the years go by. She believes that her daughters-in-law should earn their power through obedience as she did. She was once oppressed by this social system, its rules, and rituals, and now, without realizing it, she becomes part of the same social system. Unknowingly she now supports and defends this system through implementing the same oppressive rules and traditions

on her daughters-in-law, without even realizing it. Perhaps she thinks this is the ‘normal’ way of life that a traditional Hindu woman knows and is used to. It seems to be the “internalized oppression” that a woman might experience and start recognizing as a “truth” of her life. Perhaps because of this internalized oppression, Dadisa argues that education for girls is a waste of time. Hence, she does not like the idea of Anandi getting educated. Although Dadisa agreed to Anandi’s education reluctantly through Bhairav’s perseverance, she needed to maintain her authority by scolding Anandi for not following the traditional rules for a virtuous daughter-in-law and wife. It is tradition that gives her authority and power, so she must uphold it. *BV* seems to empathize with such a situation and the characters that go through these situations, such as Dadisa, without demonizing them.

Moreover, *BV* appears to be understanding of why the older generation does not want to let go of traditions and accept new ideas, such as women’s rights. Perhaps, if they agree to change, then the power they worked all their life to achieve will be lost. Additionally, they perceive such practices as normal and the only truthful ways of seeing life. In a way they do not know any alternative. This sympathetic approach to the older generation and their upholding of traditions may have helped *BV* connect with its audience, which includes older as well as younger viewers.

Furthermore, *BV* urges both the older generation to be more accepting of change, and also encourages the younger generation to be more sympathetic and understanding of the older generation. In this regard, *BV* seems to recognize that any change in attitudes does not come overnight – it takes time. In this sense *BV*’s portrayals seem to have a

sense of understanding and patience in unravelling these generational differences, and seem to seek social change by empathizing with them. This strategy shows in some of the episodes, especially in regard to Sugna's remarriage, as widow remarriage is unacceptable traditionally, and Dadisa is all about following traditions. This will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Dadisa's decision to allow Sugna to remarry did not happen overnight. She only decided after hearing arguments presented by Bhairav, Shyam, Gehna, and Badiji, and discussions about Sugna's future over time in the episodes prior to the sampled ones. Her inner turmoil is shown in the episode broadcast on July 3, 2009 where she addresses the Goddess Durga (Devi Maa/mother goddess).

She says:

Dadisa: Mother Goddess, I have seen many ups and downs in this life, gone through a lot of painful times. The blows of fate have made this Kalyani (Dadisa's actual name) so rigid. At first, the appeals of my own family didn't reach my heart. Everyone thinks that this old woman is not concerned about anything else but society, caste, and traditions, that she does not care about her own granddaughter Sugna. But it is not like that, mother goddess . . . it is not like that. You understand everything, my pain, my fear. You know everything. . . . this time please don't let any problem, any hurdle, prevent Sugna's wedding. A girl should reach her in-laws' house happily. Then I will go to your temple barefoot every day before sunrise for forty days to light the lamp. This is my promise. Just end my girl's sorrows. Please fill her life with all happiness, mother goddess. At least

now fill her life with happiness. (Dadisa sits with folded hands in prayer and starts crying.)

In the Hindu religious faith, it is very common for people to turn to the gods when they are in a difficult situation, and to share their emotions, doubts, wishes, concerns and helplessness by talking to them. *BV* uses this convention to great effect to show Dadisa's inner turmoil. In the above dialogue it is clear that Dadisa strictly keeps up with the traditions on the surface, but wants something else in her heart. She knows widow remarriage is taboo, but in her heart she wants Sugna to be happy. She understands that these traditions may not be the best answer, but it is hard to challenge them. She cannot openly discuss these dilemmas with anyone because she is the one who is keeping the family traditions alive, and if she shows any weakness then everything will be at risk. She must stay strong and turn only to the family deities for comfort.

The producers of *BV* seem to understand and empathize with the turmoil, dilemmas, and inner struggles of the older generation, appearing to indicate an understanding of the audience's struggles and its desire for change, while recognizing that it is not easy to question traditions, and frightening to try to overturn them overnight. Such a perspective might have helped *BV* to gain trust from its traditional audience members, and at least bring the issue of traditional practices such as child marriage to the public space, and then perhaps to think about it.

Looking back at the examples discussed above, on one hand *BV* seems to reinforce traditional norms, but by showing the human costs of child marriage, the restrictions put on widows, opposition to widow remarriage, the threat to education, the

burden of household chores, the devaluing of the girl child, subservient women, and strong patriarchal values, it becomes a critical voice, but in a non-threatening way. There is no direct attack on tradition; simply by presenting the direct or indirect consequences of child marriage, the status of child brides and widows, and the taboo on widow remarriage, *BV* makes its point.

Part II: Portrayal of gender roles and women's rights.

This part attempts to address the second research question pertaining to the portrayal of gender roles and women's rights in *BV*. This will be done by discussing the major themes of Patriarchy; Honor; and Women's Rights in the following paragraphs. Each major theme has subthemes that further shed light on *BV*'s position on gender roles and women's rights.

Patriarchy.

As child marriage seems to be directly related to patriarchal traditions, it was unsurprising to see this latter theme emerge in selected episodes of *BV*. It becomes an important dramatic trope in the storylines of *BV*. The theme of patriarchy surfaced again and again in *BV*'s discourse. It was apparent in its character portrayals, their styling, women's mannerisms in the presence of men, gender roles, power relationships within the family, joint family as a focal point, men seen as the head of the family, elders entitled to respect and care that give them power over the young, and men seen as responsible for decision-making, providing for and protecting women, to name a few. The portrayal of Dadisa's character and her family in *BV* shows how the characters seem

to follow these patriarchal traditions in their daily lives sometimes strictly, and sometimes less so.

Dadisa's character is generally portrayed as conforming to traditions such as patriarchy in *BV*. For example; her relationship with her sons is portrayed quite traditionally. Dadisa is the eldest member of her family and the fact that she is portrayed as a widow meant that there was no elder male head of the household. This absence of elderly male authority made way for Dadisa's sons to assume the decision-making responsibility and Dadisa to become a symbolic head of the household. Both the sons are always shown with Dadisa in every family decision-making situation. If there is a decision that needs to be taken, Dadisa is shown consulting with her sons rather than making the decision or carrying out an important task herself independently.

One of the examples from a sampled episode aired on July 16, 2009, when Dadisa's grain storage was set on fire. The news was brought to the family by one of their servants. Dadisa was sitting in the living room with her two sons unintelligibly discussing something. The servant comes running and says:

Servant: Hukum (sir) our grain storage has caught on fire.

Basant: What?

Bhairon, Basant and Dadisa are shocked and concerned.

Dadisa: It's on fire!!! There were a lot of grains that was stored there. Oh! What a great loss!!! How did this happen? Several people along with the security guard are always there...then how did it happen? Did you extinguish the fire yet or not?

It was only Dadisa and her two sons who were discussing the matter. Other women of the house came out from the kitchen but remained silent. Sumitra and Gehna were standing at a corner and listening with great concern, but never contributed to the discussion. It seemed from their expressions that they may have had many questions but, because of cultural values, they may not speak out of turn. For instance, Sumitra was shown opening her mouth and leaning forward as if she was going to say something, but then she looks around and backs up to resume her position and stay silent. Moreover, women were shown looking at each other with tense and curious expressions as if they want to know what exactly happened, but they stay quiet in the corner and wait for the truth to reveal itself in its own time. Women must keep quiet, especially when elderly members and male members of the family are already discussing the matter, because it is with those other members in whom the responsibility and decision-making power lies. This sheds light on the gender roles, along with patriarchal values, that are maintained in *BV*'s portrayals.

Continuing with the conversation Dadisa says:

Dadisa: I want to go there immediately. (Bhairon and Basant look at Dadisa and look back at each other without commenting on her remark, and continue with their conversation)

Basant: but . . . Who did it?

Bhairon: Bhaisahab, (elder brother) nothing will happen by standing here and getting angry. We should go to the grain storage before everything buns and turns into dust. Let's go. (Both start to leave and Dadisa joins them.)

From the above conversation it seems that when Dadisa expressed her wish to go to the grain storage, both sons just looked at her but did not respond either in agreement or disagreement; rather, they completely ignored her and kept discussing the matter among themselves. Bhairon wanted to leave immediately. Later, when they started to leave, Dadisa joined them.

From the above discourse it appears that the responsibility for taking care of the situation was primarily discussed between the two sons, and they acted as if they were the only ones who needed to take the lead in the matter. Dadisa, on the other hand, was present yet again as symbolic head of the household, and a bit of a tag-along. Both sons listen to her, but the final decision was made without any actual consultation or exchange of words with Dadisa.

In another scene from the sampled episodes (July 14, 2009), Dadisa is shown sitting with her sons, taking care of the payments owed for her granddaughter Sugna's wedding. But she is just shown sitting and looking at her sons, who were carrying out the actual task of calculating the expenses, counting the money and managing the account books. She is simply shown sitting there watching and symbolically heading the task. She casually says:

Dadisa: Basant, make sure you count properly and the calculations are not messy.

Basant: Okay, Dadisa.

Bhairon: Dadisa, you don't worry, we are here and we will take care of everything. You just sit and relax (says with utmost respect and loving care).

From her next response it shows that she was content with her symbolic role as a household head. She seemed to accept the fact that when her sons were there to take care of the responsibilities of the house, then there was no need for her, a woman, to intervene. She says:

Dadisa: You are right, Bhairon, I don't know why I am bothering myself when you two are here (she then smiles).

She smiles at the end of the dialogue, expressing a sense of pride that she seems to enjoy while looking at her sons – that her sons are now all grown up and have taken charge of the household. She need not worry anymore. Having sons in itself is a matter of pride for a traditional Hindu woman. This sense of joy, despite being respectfully undermined by the male family members, shows the portrayal and reinforcement of the subconsciously ingrained understanding of the expectations and roles a traditional woman must have in a patriarchal society. *BV* in general seems to portray gender roles for women that remain in the background when it comes to running the household and decision-making. When important matters are discussed, women of the family (except for Dadisa) are shown either working in the kitchen or standing in the corners, quietly listening but not contributing. However, it was curious to note that Dadisa seems to have more authority over men than any other woman in the household. The next paragraph discusses why she possesses that authority, despite being a woman. This brings out yet another layer of patriarchal tradition.

It appears in some of *BV*'s discourse, that although patriarchy is a major theme, it is tempered by other values that are attached to elderly members of the family. The age of

a family member (and the attendant respect that they are traditionally entitled to) seems to place some power even into the hands of females. Dadisa was portrayed as the symbolic head of the family. Her word carried weight in every family decision, despite her being a woman. Whether her words were followed through completely, partially, or not at all was a different issue, but she *was* listened to. She was given respect and obeyed as a senior and an elderly member of the family. In *BV*, the power dynamics of patriarchy on one hand seemed to give control to the male members, such as Dadisa's sons, but the factor of her age also required them to respect and care for her as elderly, which gave Dadisa some power and control over her sons.

For instance, going back to the scene from July 16, 2009, when Dadisa's grain storage was set on fire by Sugna's father-in-law to take revenge on Dadisa's family. Basant was angry and wanted to retaliate and bring harm to Sugna's in-laws.

He says:

Basant: Nothing is going to happen by itself, mother. . . .we will have to do something ourselves.

Dadisa: What a great loss!!! All the food grains are burnt. And besides, what can you do anyways?

Basant: Something or the other needs to be done, MaaSaa. Madan Singh has fallen down very low this time. And if we don't reciprocate, then it will be us who will regret it later.

(Basant starts to make a phone call to someone and asks him to bring some people with him to start a fight with Madan Singh. Bhairon stops him.)

Women of the house are once again watching the conversation quietly. Basant is convinced, in the above conversation, that the only way to handle the situation is to retaliate against Madan Singh and teach him a lesson. But Bhairav thinks differently.

Bhairon says:

Bhairon: Madan Singh is our relative now. It would not be praiseworthy or look good on our part.

Basant: Okay, (with anger) then what shall we do, then? Should we let him do whatever he wishes to? No, Bhairon, not at all. Now, before he does something similar again, we will have to do something or the other for sure.

Dadisa: No!!! (with determination) . . . Bhairon is right. He is right. In this moment it would not be advisable to do anything from our side.

Basant: But MaaSaa...

Dadisa: Hey!!! Haven't you heard? How much more you are going to argue with your mother? I have told you that it will not be advisable to do anything at this moment, and that is final.

The above conversation clearly shows Dadisa's power over her son Basant. When Basant keeps arguing she makes sure to bring out the age and relationship to remind him of his traditional duties to be respectful to the elderly, and moreso to his mother when she asks "How much more you are going to argue with your mother?" She then uses her power and tells Basant to stop arguing and follow her decisions.

Her power in this case seems to stand on its own. However, Bhairav's support of the decision provides further strength to her word. In this sense, her voice seems to

depend on Bhairav's support. This brings up another question: is deferring to age a manifestation of hierarchy and power located within the model of patriarchy itself? In this sense Dadisa having power because of her age still reinforces patriarchal traditions despite her being a woman.

Another patriarchal tradition that was visible in *BV*'s portrayal was men's responsibility toward women. The responsibility of males to provide and protect the elderly and the women of the family is explicit in the portrayals of Dadisa's joint family that lives together under one roof. Family is the focal point in *BV*'s portrayals in terms of its members and their "duty to the household." Dadisa's sons take care of not only Dadisa, who is a woman, an elderly member of the family, a mother, and a widow; but also Dadisa's widowed granddaughter Sugna, because the sons are responsible for widows' care and protection. It is their responsibility as male members of the family, sons, uncles, and fathers to look after the women in difficult times such as old age and widowhood. It is their duty to the household as a male family member.

Moreover, there was a continuous woman-protecting sense that was present in the sampled episodes. For instance, each time Dadisa needed to go out of the house, she was shown accompanied by one or both of her sons. Interestingly enough, no other women from the family (besides Dadisa) were ever shown going out of the house in the sampled episodes. Not even once. If they did attempt to go out they were immediately stopped. In the July 16 episode, when Dadisa's grain storage was set on fire, Jagiya gets ready to run out of the house immediately to follow after Dadisa, Basant and Bhairav, despite his mother telling him not to go. Jagiya comes running down the stairs and Sumitra asks:

Sumitra: Jagiya, where are you going?

Jagiya: I am going to join Dadisa, Father, and Uncle.

Sumitra: No, Jagiya, everyone has gone there; there is no need for you to join them.

Jagiya: No, no, mother, I will also go. (Sumitra cannot stop him and he leaves.)

She does tell him to stop but not firmly enough; rather, it sounded like a request; he ignores her anyway and leaves the house. This ignoring of his own mother hints at the confidence of Jagiya as a male member of the household. He knows that even if he ignores his mother, he will not be in trouble. On the other hand, Sumitra did not seem happy that Jagiya didn't obey her, but she simply sighed as if she was saying to herself "Well, what can you do, he is a boy. . . ."

However, when Anandi tried to go along with Jagiya to see the damage, Sumitra, her mother-in-law and Jagiya's mother, held her hand tightly while Anandi was struggling to free herself, pleading with her mother-in-law to let her go. Anandi wanted to go with her husband, yet she was not allowed to go out and was stopped with force.

She says:

Anandi: I am also going with Jagiya! (Anandi starts running after Jagiya but Sumitra immediately grabs Anandi's arm by the wrist and says)

Sumitra: Anandi, everyone has gone there, right? What are you going to do there? You stay right here. (she says it with great authority).

Sumitra doesn't let go of her. Sumitra asks her to get inside the house immediately. It was clear from Sumitra's remark when she said "What are you going to do there?" that there

is nothing for women to do “out there” in public spaces or outside, because it is the men who are in charge of the outside world and its activities. Women are not supposed to intervene; rather, they are supposed to take care of the household work and chores. Anandi keeps asking questions about the incident and tries to convince Sumitra to let her go; Sumitra gets frustrated and directs her to the task that Anandi as a daughter-in-law should be focusing on, instead of running out of the house.

Sumitra says:

Sumitra says with frustration: Anandi, I don’t know! Why don’t you go to the kitchen and help your aunt-in-law.

Sumitra looks at Gehna, the aunt-in-law, and nods. Gehna nods back in agreement and asks Anandi to come along. Anandi is disappointed to not get any answers, but she takes a clue from her mother-in-law’s response to keep quiet, and follows her instructions to go to the kitchen and help Gehna. Sumitra did not take Anandi’s reaction casually as she did in case of Jagiya; rather, she made sure that her instructions were heard clearly and obeyed promptly, even if she had to involve another member of the family and use physical force to hold Anandi in place.

The above exchange shows the degree of freedom given to a male member as opposed to a female member of the household, and the seriousness of any woman’s attempt to co-opt that freedom. Interestingly enough, such patriarchal values are kept alive actively and unconsciously by female members of the society like Sumitra, despite the fact that it puts them in a subservient position to men. These women do not hesitate to use their authority to control one another, as in this case, where Sumitra uses her

authority and physical force to control her daughter-in-law Anandi. On the other hand, such traditions stay alive when young women like Anandi give in to such practices by accepting them in the name of tradition, respecting elders by not arguing or questioning, and seeing it as the only true and natural way of living life.

This seems to reinforce the above-discussed patriarchal hierarchy of males being the leaders, and women their subordinates. Moreover, it is easier to mold child brides into such a mindset and a way of life that favors patriarchal traditional and values.

In this sense, the above exchange shows that although it was Sumitra, a woman, who stopped Anandi from going out of the house using physical force, it brings up the interesting point that her actions toward Anandi are paternalistic in nature, which is nothing but a form of patriarchy. It again comes back to the idea of “internalized oppression” and the power of patriarchy. It manifests not only in the actions of men, but also in the actions of women toward other women, who knowingly or unknowingly become the gatekeepers of the patriarchal traditions of controlling women and maintaining the public and private spaces for men and women, respectively.

In *BV*, such patriarchal traditions and traditional beliefs seem to have been passed down from one generation to another, through the environment and surroundings they live in and their activities. The younger generation, such as Jagiya’s, who in their tender age unconsciously absorb the behaviors around them that favor men over women and start seeing this as the “truth, ” which sooner or later begins to be reflected in their own actions. The younger generation learns from their surroundings as to what may be the

right way to treat a wife by observing their elders. It is explicit in the way that Jagiya treats his wife as illustrated in the following narrative:

Anandi: Jagiya, I am going to the kitchen. Once I finish my work, you will have to sit with me, because, as per Dadisa's instructions, I have to teach you what you have missed in school.

Jagiya with anger: I can study by myself. Don't try to be a teacher to me. I have finished all the work. See . . . I have more brains than you.

Jagiya is offended by the idea of his wife's teaching him. Anandi recognizes that Jagiya has not done his homework. She questions him:

Anandi: Whose handwriting is this?

Jagiya: Don't mess with my brain by asking so many questions. Now get out of here.

Jagiya's response to Anandi clearly portrays traditional patriarchal attitudes toward women. In this milieu, when men don't have answers, they simply take refuge in trying to dismiss women. This is clear when Jagiya says to Anandi, "Don't mess with my brain by asking so many questions. Now get out of here."

Another example of framing patriarchy in *BV* is the domestication of women. Women in Dadisa's household were mostly shown engaged in household chores such as cooking or serving the male members. Men were never shown engaging in such household activities in any of the sampled episodes. When it comes to either cooking or distributing food, it is always the women of the house who take care of it. In the episode aired July 15, 2009, Anandi and Sumitra were shown working in the kitchen making

sweets for the guests. The girls go to the living room with all the sweet boxes because *taai ji* (elder aunt) has asked them to come. Since the wedding was over, all the guests were leaving. Dadisa asks Gehna to come and help her as she distributes goodbye gifts to the guests that include sweets, clothes, and money.

Yet another example of patriarchy and social hierarchy where men are seen as in charge and women as subservient members of the family comes to light in the episode aired on July 1, 2009. The jeweler had come to the house to show his best collection for Sugna's second wedding. The family was deciding which jewelry to buy. All the women and the jeweler were shown sitting on the floor. However, Basant, the eldest son of the family, was shown sitting on a chair, higher than everyone else. It was understood from the portrayal that everyone had a say in selecting the jewelry. However, social hierarchy and patriarchy was still strongly visible in *BV*'s social settings, where men were portrayed as in charge and women as their followers. Basant's sitting on a high chair and the women on the floor were indications of the same. Such portrayal of gender roles and strong patriarchal traditions of putting men higher than women was undisputed in *BV*, as it was clear from the portrayal that all the women seemed happy; shown as laughing, choosing jewelry for each other with great joy, and viewing it as the normal way of living.

In another episode, aired July 15, 2009, patriarchy seems strong and women's duty to pay respect to men is played up. All the guests from Sugna's wedding had left and all the family members were gathered in the living room. However, the interesting thing to notice was that all the women (including Sugna, Sumitra, Gehna, and Anandi) were

standing, (except Dadisa) and all the male members of the family were shown sitting on the couches. As a matter of fact, in all the sampled episodes, women were only shown either sitting on the floor or standing in the presence of male members of the family. Moreover, women are always shown serving food to the male members and Dadisa first, and standing by to see if they need anything else. Women were never shown eating with the male or elderly family members together. In this regard, *BV* seems to reinforce traditional patriarchal values in its portrayals, where the role of women is to serve the men and the master of the household, and only once they are done can they take turns caring for themselves.

Gender and gender role differences in *BV* are quite visible in the manners in which women behave around men, further giving strength to patriarchal values. However, curiously enough, there was a moment where one could see glimpses of protest against certain patriarchal values in *BV*'s discourse. In the sampled episode from July 30, 2009, Dadisa, her sons Shyam (Sugna's second husband) and Jagiya, were sitting at the dining table eating lunch while women were serving them. One of the traditions portrayed in *BV* was that all the women except Dadisa wait for all the male members to finish eating first, and then they take their turn to eat. However, point to notice here was that they followed the tradition of eating from their husbands' dirty plates once the men were done. Sugna is portrayed as disliking and protesting this tradition. She refuses to follow it through and fetches a new clean plate for herself. Dadisa insists and says:

Dadisa: Oh! Sugna, what are you doing? You should eat from Shyam's plate.

This way the love and respect between you two will grow stronger. Besides, it is this household's long tradition that women eat from their husband's plate.

Sugna ignores Dadisa and continues to serve her food onto a new plate. Dadisa does not like this behavior and yells at Sugna.

Dadisa says:

Dadisa: Aren't you listening? Eat from Shyam's plate!!!

(Sugna gets up without eating, saying)

Sugna: I don't need to follow such rules or gain my husband's love.

(Sugna leaves the dining room in anger.)

The above discourse was interesting for many reasons. First, despite being a traditional woman, how did Sugna find the courage to protest? Second, why did Dadisa not follow through and make sure that Sugna ate from Shyam's plate, and possibly punish her for walking out?

The answer can perhaps be found in two things; first, the social status of Sugna in the family and second, the traditional value of being devoted to her first husband. It may be these reasons that kept Dadisa from losing her temper and punishing Sugna for her actions. To explain it further one must understand that Sugna is the daughter and the granddaughter of the house and *not* a daughter-in-law. This distinction places her in a different, possibly higher social status as opposed to the other women in the house.

Daughters have relatively far more freedom to express their opinions than daughters-in-law. Daughters are expected to be subservient and less-favored than sons.

However, they are always seen as the “insiders” and the actual “blood-related” family members of the household. This fact gives them relatively more authority and freedom to say things which daughters-in-law traditionally may not. On the other hand, a daughter-in-law is seen as an “outsider” who has come to join the family from a different household who is not “blood-related” and who doesn’t have much freedom to question anything. If daughters-in-law do question the status quo, their social status and permission to live in the household could be threatened, among other repercussions.

According to Chawla (2007), women after marriage “were (and are) expected to move into a new family which consisted of men who are all related by blood. Therefore, women were always outsiders because they did not share any biology with their new legal family” (p. 8). In one of the episodes not sampled, Gehna was shown protesting against instructions given by Dadisa to respect and obey her husband Basant and his wishes. Gehna was a daughter-in-law and any disobedience was out of question. As a result, Dadisa declared that Gehna was to go back to her parents’ house, and that she was not welcome to stay in her household anymore. Dadisa decided to throw Gehna out of her house and nobody questioned her decision. Perhaps Gehna was seen as a disobedient, revolting, disrespectful daughter-in-law, and an outsider who did not fit into the traditional “good wife” or “good daughter-in-law” image. Perhaps the others felt she had it coming and deserved it, but no one in the family dared question Dadisa’s decision. However, in the last moment as Gehna was leaving the household, it was discovered that she was pregnant with Basant’s child. This news made Dadisa change her mind. However, it was only until the child was born. Gehna was told that she was allowed to

live in the house until she gave birth, but that after delivery she would not be allowed to continue. She must leave her child and the household for good, as there was no place for such rebellious, untraditional, misbehaving daughters-in-law in Dadisa's household. But, later Gehna and Basant start to develop feelings for each other which lead Gehna to eventually stay because she started behaving as a 'good' daughter-in-law again. This turn in the story explains the difference between two women, one an insider and one an outsider, and the way they were treated differently, and their differing degrees of freedom to say and do things without being punished. Furthermore, with Sugna both a daughter and a widow, the family had a duty to protect her. The above exchange, which seems similar to Sumitra's attempt to stop Anandi from going out, shows that although it was Dadisa, a woman, who sanctioned this punishment of throwing Gehna out of the household for not fulfilling his husband's wishes, her actions toward Gehna and the reasons for them can be clearly seen as being paternalistic in nature, a form of patriarchy.

The second reason why Sugna was allowed to go unpunished by Dadisa was perhaps a complex set of traditional values. The fact that Sugna refused to eat from Shyam's dirty plate was seen as an indication of her being a virtuous and a loyal wife to her first husband, who was not driven by sexual lust or any need of a second male partner or husband. Such traditional values are quite cherished in women of traditional societies and seen as a sign of a virtuous wife. If Sugna followed through with the tradition by eating from Shyam's (her second husband's) plate, it could be seen as if she was happy with her new life and didn't care at all about her late husband. The religious scriptures such as the Laws of Manu "assert women's place in marriage and society as a faithful

wife and the only way for her to go to heaven and join her husband is to stay devoted to him both in life and after his death” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). Such devotion, loyalty and dedication toward her dead husband are clearly embedded in patriarchal expectations from women, and women’s internalized oppression reinforces them further. Sugna’s devotion to her first husband perhaps holds a higher place in Dadisa’s eyes. Even if she is upset by Sugna’s behavior, Dadisa hesitates to some degree when taking disciplinary actions toward Sugna. In a way, Sugna *is* upholding the (patriarchal) tradition.

Dadisa and other household members could conceivably see Sugna’s behavior as a part of her mourning period, during which she still needs time to overcome her loss and start adapting to a new life. Such an understanding can be seen from Shyam’s response to Sugna’s behavior as he was there to witness it. Dadisa felt bad for Shyam and says as Sugna was leaving:

Dadisa: Hey girl! Sugna! Such arrogance is not good.

(Then she talks to herself and wonders by commenting)

Dadisa: Why she is always morose? Shyam had done her a big favor by marrying and saved the family name and honor. She should not disrespect him in such a manner. Sugna should come down and eat from Shyam’s plate.

However, Shyam feels differently and comes as a breath of fresh air in *BV*’s traditional portrayal to provide a welcome contrast. He provides an understanding, modern voice for the new generation. He says to Dadisa:

Shyam: I insist that Sugna should not do anything that displeases her. I am not upset by Sugna’s actions because I understand that she is still not ready for a new

relationship, especially after such a tragic life she had to live for the past year. We must understand her emotional state.

He then requests of Dadisa:

Shyam: Dadisa, please leave Sugna alone for some time. I am sure she will come around. We need to be patient with her.

However, Dadisa's opinion seems to differ from Shyam's. She accepts Shyam's request, but only reluctantly, and says:

Dadisa: Shyam, you will regret your decision one day of giving Sugna so much freedom to do or say whatever she wants or the like. I am warning you.

The above discourse clearly portrays a contrast of understanding between the two generations, where for Dadisa patriarchal traditions hold a bigger place than a woman's emotional state, and the woman's behavior needs to be controlled. In her understanding, Sugna must eat from Shyam's plate because he is her lord now. She must do everything to please him, especially since he saved her and her family's honor by marrying her. In this regard, Dadisa becomes the holder of the patriarchal traditions.

On the other hand, for the younger generation, it is the person who needs to be understood, before judging Sugna and her actions as to why she was behaving in such a manner. One must understand why it was important to give her time and space to come in terms with her new life rather than forcing it on her in the name of tradition or in return of a favor that "saved her" and "saved the family's name and 'honor.'"

In the above exchange *BV* does question old traditions (such as eating the leftovers from the husband's unclean plate,) and portrays modern ideas and the open-

mindfulness of male members such as Shyam. He clearly does not see any point in forcing women to follow a tradition that puts them in a subservient position. Although Sugna's reason for not following this tradition was unusual, other women followed the tradition without question, and their portrayal was nothing but a reinforcement of patriarchal values.

Furthermore, in addition to the above example, *BV* continues to reinforce patriarchal values and traditions in its portrayals, as can be seen in its characters' styling. The following paragraphs will shed light on this concept.

Dadisa's and other women character's styling.

BV's patriarchal canvas was quite apparent in its styling of Dadisa and other female characters. Dadisa wears traditional Rajasthani clothes, a *ghagra* (a long ankle-length skirt) and *choli*, (blouse) with a piece of cloth called *chunari* that goes over the head and serves as a veil or *pallu*. Women in *BV* such as Sumitra, Gehna, and Anandi (daughters-in-law of the family) are always shown wearing *pallu* and hiding their faces in presence of any male in the house or in front of Dadisa, the eldest member of the family. Moreover, all the women in the house are always shown standing and hiding their faces with their *pallu* while the male members and Dadisa are shown sitting down on chairs. (Women sitting down in front of male and elder family members was something never seen in the sampled episodes of *BV*.) Perhaps wearing the *pallu* is a way of showing respect to male family members and community members with higher social status.⁶

⁶ The author, her mother and other female relatives wear the *pallu* in front of their in-laws despite the fact that we live in the capital of India, New Delhi, and not in any village. Personally, if I do not wear *pallu* in front of my in-laws, I feel guilty of being a non-virtuous daughter-in-law. Even though my mother-in-law, husband, and other in-laws never insisted on this practice, I still feel guilty. Perhaps because deep down

As for the men in the sampled episodes, they were also shown wearing traditional Indian dress; the *kurta* (a knee-length tunic) and *dhoti* (traditional cloth worn as loose pants). Although most of the men are shown with their heads uncovered, unlike the women, a few characters (such as Shyam's father and uncle) are shown wearing traditional turbans. With their turbans, they are shown covering their heads, but are never shown covering their faces like women. This shows a degree of freedom for men, as opposed to women, that has been consistently portrayed throughout the drama series. *BV* appears to reinforce these traditional styling practices that support patriarchal values, where women are expected to be under a veil as opposed to men.

Most women in *BV* were shown staying at a distance when male members of the community paid a visit to their household, but Dadisa often remained in the room when men came to the house. She could do this perhaps because she was older than the men who come to visit, and therefore had higher social status in terms of age. The men looked at her as the virtuous eldest woman of the household. Even though Dadisa may be shown to stay in the presence of men and as having a higher social status, she always has the *pallu* on her head. *BV* always seems to reiterate that it is of no matter that Dadisa is the eldest member of the household; in the end she is still a woman, and she has to follow the religious prescriptions that include the wearing of *pallu* all the time, especially in the

inside my heart I have this feeling instilled in me that no matter what, the community members will judge me if I do not conform to the traditional practices. They will not only judge me as a non-virtuous daughter-in-law but they will also talk ill of my in-laws because apparently, they are not controlling me and hence are failing in performing their traditional and religious duties. I feel responsible of letting my in-laws' family down by bringing in ill talk about them. Hence, I feel that even if my-in-laws didn't ask me to cover my head with the *pallu*, I am still obligated to do it, because I do not want the community to judge my in-laws and family based on what I do or not do.

presence of men. Such patriarchal traditions and control over women are often visible in *BV*'s portrayals.

Patriarchal power relationships between various family members, such as Jagiya (Dadisa's grandson) and Anandi (Jagiya's child bride); Dadisa (grandmother-in-law) and Anandi, (granddaughter-in-law) etc., were another way *BV* framed patriarchy.

Power relationships within the family.

In *BV* the power relationships among various family members have been explored in its portrayals. For instance, the power relationship of a husband over his wife is explored in the interaction between Jagiya and his wife Anandi. In previous episodes Jagiya found a new friend, Sunder. The viewer does not know anything about Sunder's background, but they see that Sunder is trying to get as much money from Jagiya as possible. He introduces Jagiya to tempting video games but lets him play for only a few hours. Jagiya wants to play more. Sunder tells him he must buy the video game player. Even though Jagiya gets a very generous amount of pocket money, he does not have enough to buy the player. After some hesitation he steals money from Dadisa. Sunder drags Jagiya into a group of boys that gamble, smoke cigarettes, and cut school, all the while urging Jagiya to bring more money. Jagiya starts to enjoy these activities. He asks Dadisa for more money, giving her various excuses, like that he has to give a party to his friends for Sugna's upcoming wedding. Dadisa typically spoils Jagiya because he is a boy and the heir of the family. But finally she stops giving him money. Jagiya decides he must ask Anandi, his wife, for money. He had avoided doing this because he was afraid that Anandi would find out what he was doing with the money and tell other family

members. Jagiya tries to convince himself that he has the right to take Anandi's money because he is her husband and owns whatever belongs to Anandi:

Jagiya: I will ask Anandi for money. She will not ask many questions, and if she does, I will shut her up.

(Anandi comes and agrees with some hesitation to give money to Jagiya.)

Anandi: Here is the money. Total nine hundred. But why do you need it?

Jagiya: Oh! I have some work! What is it to you? (He leaves in a rush without answering her.)

The depiction of the interaction between Jagiya and Anandi shows the privilege and power of men over women in the family. Men often dismiss the protests of women. Jagiya's comment "*I will shut her up*" and "*What is it to you?*" shows the disrespectful way that a man may treat his wife. Anandi is a daughter-in-law and doesn't have much say in the house. Dadisa's preference toward a son (or in this case the grandson) over the child bride (here Anandi) further reinforces patriarchal values such as the "devaluing of the girl child" and "preference for sons" or grandsons in this case. Jagiya seems to be at ease with his attitude, as if there was nothing wrong in treating one's wife in such manner. Such confidence indicates how these values, and the common understanding of what is considered right and acceptable for men, are nurtured. First, perhaps by everyday displays of such values by the older generation, such as Dadisa's actions toward other women; and second, by the younger generation, who subconsciously internalize such values from their surroundings and follow them by incorporating these same values in their day-to-day attitudes and actions.

BV shows such understanding in its other episodes. The following discourse clearly portrays the privileges enjoyed by a boy child in an upper-caste family as opposed to a female member of the family. Dadisa spoils Jagiya. She covers up his mistakes and bullies Anandi to do Jagiya's homework.

Dadisa: Anandi, you put your studies aside and teach all the lessons to your husband.

Anandi: But, Dadisa, until I study the lessons myself, how can I teach them to Jagiya. . . .(She accidentally uses her husband's name which is traditionally forbidden. She stops to rephrase and says). . .how will I teach him?

Dadisa: (With anger) . . . Do as I tell you to do! . . . don't use your brain . . . if Jagiya gets a low grade, remember one thing. I will pull your ears in punishment. Make sure Jagiya studies well and gets good marks as he will take over the family business, not you.

Anandi nods her head in agreement and leaves, looking down at the floor in submission. But when Anandi leaves, Dadisa says:

Dadisa: What must I do? [to keep Jagiya away from trouble] I have to do everything for this boy.

The above conversation is another instance that exemplifies the notion of devaluing a girl child, a woman, and a daughter-in-law without any particular reason, and protecting and preferring a male member despite his shortcomings. Moreover, when Dadisa says to Anandi "*Make sure Jagiya studies well and gets good marks as he will take over the family business, not you,*" this further shows how Dadisa fails to see any reason for

investing in a girl child's education. It is only because of Dadisa's younger son Bhairav that Anandi's education was still being pursued, but Dadisa doesn't seem to like the idea and uses any occasion she can find to make Anandi's life difficult, and to express her views about Anandi's education as being unnecessary or a waste of time and resources. On the other hand, Dadisa's command to Anandi to help her husband Jagiya further sheds light on Dadisa's resolution with the situation. In other words, if Dadisa cannot prevent Anandi's education, then she seeks to use Anandi's educational gain and knowledge for the benefit of her grandson's good and not Anandi's. Whatever skills a woman or a wife may possess, the benefit of such skill must go to the husband; it must be used for the husband's good and not for her. If she doesn't, then it might mean that she is self-centered and does not care about her husband, which may mean that she is not a virtuous wife who is loyal to her husband. Perhaps this is why Anandi seems to accept the arrangement that Dadisa has laid out for her.

Sumitra, Jagiya's mother, sees how Dadisa treats Anandi, but because she is also a daughter-in-law, does not protest. Thus Jagiya often disregards his studies and has no fear of getting scolded by his father Bhairav. Jagiya knows that Dadisa will come to his rescue, one way or the other.

The portrayals discussed above clearly show the general traditional patriarchal canvas of *BV* that allowed me to conclude that *BV* has presented patriarchy in keeping with traditional Hindu values for the most part. However, there were glimpses of modern ideas, showing disinterest, flexibility, and doubt about continuing with the traditions in Sugna and Shyam's characters in some of the text above.

Honor.

Another theme that strongly emerged in the sampled *BV* episodes was family honor. *BV* seems to explain family “honor” more in the sense of some “dishonor” of the family which needs to be kept secret. *BV*’s discourses indulge more in discussing “dishonor” to address family honor than the topic of “honor” itself. In other words, the family honor is threatened when dishonor is brought upon the family, for instance, by Sugna’s pregnancy. *BV*’s portrayals seemed to be more concerned with the fact that if the knowledge of any dishonorable activity such as Sugna’s pregnancy gets out of the house, then the threat of losing the family’s honor or bringing dishonor becomes real and unbearable. As long as no one knows and the knowledge of dishonorable conduct can be kept from the outsiders, the family’s honor will remain safe. It is imperative that the issue is solved within the family and any word about it should not and cannot get out of the family at any cost.

Hence, protecting the “knowledge” of Sugna’s pregnancy or Sugna’s dishonorable conduct becomes even more critical for Dadisa to protect the family’s honor. *BV* portrayed the theme by showing that perhaps controlling oneself from indulging in any dishonorable conduct is a way of protecting family honor, which was clearly not the case in terms of Sugna’s pregnancy. She failed to control her actions and brought dishonor to the family. The shame of a woman who has a sexual relationship outside the context of a completed marriage spreads to her family, and Dadisa’s reaction when she learns of Sugna’s pregnancy sheds some light on this aspect.

Sugna should not have had a sexual relationship with her husband before the final wedding ritual called *gauna*. Only after *gauna* is the marriage considered final and given full, completed status. It is only after the *gauna* that the bride and the groom are allowed to live together as husband and wife and consummate the marriage. Before that the bride and groom live in their respective parents' houses to avoid any sexual involvement. But Sugna was intimate with Pratap (her first husband) and became pregnant before this final ceremony, without her family's knowledge. This might not have been a problem if Pratap had not died shortly thereafter. As a widow who became pregnant before she was supposed to, Sugna had brought disgrace and dishonor to her family. Shaking with rage, Dadisa pushes and hits Sugna until she falls on the floor.

Dadisa: Kulakshini!!! (A woman with bad character and bad traits)

Badi Jiji (Dadisa's elder sister) enters and stops Dadisa's beating of Sugna and asks "But what has she done?"

Dadisa screams, "What has she done!!! You want to know what she has done?! This girl is about to become a mother!!!

Badi Jiji: Looks at Sugna and at Dadisa with a distrusting, confused, and shocked expression.

The above discourse explicitly shows how scared and horrified Dadisa becomes when she learns that Sugna had failed to manage her religiously prescribed and traditionally accepted duty of controlling her sexual urges before the *gauna* ceremony. She has created an unwanted "knowledge of her dishonorable conduct" for outsiders to find. This supposedly undeniable reality "exists," and its mere existence threatens the family honor

if word gets out. Hence, this information should be protected at any cost and no one outside the family can know about it. Later, in another scene when Dadisa learns that Shyam (Sugna's future groom and an outsider at the time) knows of her pregnancy, Dadisa becomes furious and says to Sugna:

Dadisa: How did that boy (Shyam) come to know that you are pregnant? The topic we are so afraid to bring up on our lips even within the four walls of this house, how come an outsider knows?

Sugna shakes in fear and looks scared, unable to say anything. When Sugna does not reply, Dadisa slaps her. Both Dadisa and Sugna are depicted as accepting the shame of Sugna's pregnancy as common sense and natural. Dadisa was most concerned that Sugna's pregnancy might become known outside the family. She fears the shame and humiliation that will come to the family, and that the family honor will be gone forever, if Shyam gives away the secret. The "honor" of her family will turn into "dishonor."

Dadisa is afraid that her family members will never be able to face the community with honor and will be shamed for life. Sugna's pregnancy also reflects poorly on Dadisa's character for her failure to keep the women in the household under control, as she is expected to keep the family honor intact as the female head of the family. It seems that she is not only blaming Sugna for the girl's uncontrolled sexual behaviors but she is also angry and upset with her own failure to control the women of the house. If she had been monitoring the women's movements more closely, Sugna couldn't have slipped out of the house unnoticed. The honor of the house is in danger, but it is Dadisa's inability to control her women that may have indirectly led to the dishonor of the family.

On the other hand, if we look at the discourse from Sugna's point of view and its portrayal, *BV* seems to depict that Sugna silently accepts Dadisa's anger without any protest. It was perhaps because she seems to accept the judgment of society. She seems to believe that even though she was married to Pratap, she should not have had a sexual relationship with him prior to her *gauna* ceremony. She should have waited. As she failed to control her thoughts, it is only natural for Dadisa, her family, and the community to treat her the way Dadisa did. Sugna's reaction, her silence, her crying, and expressions confirm her belief that it is she who is to be blamed for the shame and dishonor of the family. Such self-shaming and guilt are directly connected to the concept of honor, but can also be understood as manifestations of patriarchal values and traditions, where women and their sexuality needed to be controlled by men.

However, it was interesting to notice that in the episodes focused on Sugna's pregnancy, there was not a single statement that considers Pratap's responsibility for Sugna's pregnancy. If we look at the situation, Pratap was equally involved and responsible for what happened. If Sugna couldn't control her sexual needs, then Pratap was equally unable to control his. I conclude that *BV* supports the traditional patriarchal norms that blame only the woman for illicit sexual activity, rather than blaming the man or both parties.

The portrayals of Dadisa, Sugna, and Pratap in relation to Sugna's pregnancy reveal that *BV* is still embedded within traditional discursive structures that reinforce patriarchal traditions to some extent. It appears that the burden of carrying and protecting the family's honor (*izzat*) often seems to be placed on women's shoulders, because of this

they may feel obligated to protect that honor, and therefore may avoid reporting domestic violence incidents (such as in Sugna's case when Dadisa slaps, pushes, hits, and beats her) (Choudhary, 2013).

Authors report that sometimes women such as Sugna may "believe that oppressive patriarchal discourses are part of their culture and faith and will therefore refrain from questioning them" (Shankar et al., 2013, p. 259). Perhaps they see it as a normal way of life. Mulally (2009) refers to this condition as "internalized oppression." Such oppression appears to be introduced into the life of a woman right from her childhood. The girl child internalizes the above-discussed patriarchal traditions and may start viewing them as a normal way of life, and she may perhaps fail to see even the possibility of any alternative view of her existence.

Another example of how honor is represented more by portraying it as dishonor is revealed in the sampled episode that aired on July 16, 2009. In this episode, Shyam's family, including his extended family, learns about Sugna's pregnancy and sees it as a dishonor and disrespect to their family. They call off the wedding between Shyam and Sugna. However, Shyam marries Sugna despite his parents' disapproval. Shyam sees it as honoring the word that he has given to Dadisa's family: that he will marry Sugna and take care of her unborn child. An honorable and true man always keeps his word. In this sense, Shyam kept his honor; however, he brought dishonor to his family by marrying Sugna.

Shyam's parents blame Dadisa and her family for dishonoring and disrespecting them by going through with the wedding without their blessings, and stealing their son

from them by trickery. It is interesting to notice that, in fact, it was their son Shyam who persuaded Sugna to marry him and disobeyed his family. This is clear in the following example from the episode aired July 2, 2009.

Sugna says with anger: Why, Shyam, why? Why do you want to pity me and do such a big favor for me? In my heart, in my life, no one can take my Pratap's place. And this unborn child of mine, this child will always remind you of the truth. Then why . . . why do you want to marry me?

Shyam: Because I love you, Sugna . . . this is why.

Sugna is still upset: In exchange for love, every human being wants to get love in return, and that, I cannot give you, Shyam.

Shyam: And I am not asking for it, either. It is true and I don't have any such expectations, either, that one day you will also love me. I do not make deals and do not offer to sell my affection in exchange of anything in return. I can spend my whole life just by taking care of you and your child and that too with great happiness, without any complaints. Sugna, only for once, give me a chance and place your trust in me, I promise you, we can live a very happy life together . . . all three of us.

It is clear from the above discourse that Sugna was not interested in marrying Shyam because she was clearly dedicated to her first husband Pratap and their unborn child. It was Shyam who persuaded Sugna to marry him for the sake of her unborn child. But Shyam's family members were convinced that their son was innocent. Shyam's parents seem to completely overlook the idea, and refuse to believe, that Shyam could be capable

of such a bold step. They do not blame their son; rather, they blame Dadisa and her family for emotionally trapping their son and forcing him to get on with the wedding.

Such a portrayal perhaps indicates a subtle underlying belief that it is and always has to be the bride's family's or the "outsider's" fault, as their son belongs to the family, an "insider" who can never be disloyal to the household. His behavior was not sensible, unless Dadisa's family tricked him.

Such an understanding and belief is clearly reflected in *BV*'s July 9, 2009 episode. Dadisa and her sons go to Shyam's father's house to talk over their differences. Dadisa addresses the family and says that no one can control his or her fate; whatever has happened has happened, and we cannot do anything about it now, so let's put it behind us and move on.

In response, Shyam's mother says to Dadisa:

Shyam's mother: Do not try to blame it on fate; it was your well-thought-out plan that you have put together to trap my son. Don't we know very well how you set the trap, to have our son cornered and fall into it? First you entrapped him, and then you separated our son from us. It was not very nice of you people to separate someone's son from their parents. You have committed a very big sin.

Shyam's mother in the above dialogue seems to be quite certain and assumes that it is indeed Dadisa and her family's fault, and that her son is innocent. Shyam's mother seems to believe that Shyam doesn't know what he is doing, despite the fact that he is educated, a college graduate, and over 18 years old. Shyam's mother Radha insists that Dadisa and her family has committed a great "sin" by separating from them their only son; their only

hope in life; the one who would have taken care of them in their old age; the one on whom they could have depended for care; the one who would have taken over the household as head of the family; the one who would have provided the heir for their lineage to continue. Dadisa has broken their family; which is believed to be the focal point of a traditional Hindu society and it cannot go unpunished. What could be more dishonorable and disrespectful than that? They cannot bear the thought and must take revenge.

As a result, in later episodes, Madan Singh, Shyam's father sets Dadisa's grain storage on fire. Shyam tries to reason with his father and other family members.

He says to his mother, father, uncle, and aunt:

Shyam: I can't even do this to my enemy. You are the ones who have given me birth and raised me. You have given me such values with which I can tell the difference between right and wrong. It amazes me, that the very same people who have given me this ability . . . why, they themselves fail to understand their own mistakes. I am pleading with folded hands to all of you to get rid of this bitterness in your heart. Father, this feud, this feeling of hatred, and the desire for revenge don't let a human being remain a human being.

Despite his father's actions, one can see that Shyam was still trying to maintain the proper respect toward his parents and other elderly members of his family. He cares about them and wants to calm the situation. It was very hard for Shyam when his parents failed to understand anything he was trying to say. In response to Shyam's plea, his father shuts him up and says:

Madan Singh: Oh you!!! A wise man! (sarcastically) It has been hours that you have been preaching at us. (pushes Shyam very hard with force) You are feeling sorry to see Bhairon Singh and his family in difficult times but you are not worried about your parents and their honor. (pause) First, she is a widow, and on top of it, she is pregnant. God knows whose sin she is nurturing in her womb.

The above dialogue shows how Shyam's parents see the wedding between their son and Sugna as disrespectful and dishonoring to their family. Madan Singh, his wife, and his extended family witness this exchange between the son and father. Madan Singh as a father physically pushes his son Shyam, who does not react because Madan Singh is his father and a father has the right to physically threaten his children, however old they may be, as a father's children always remain his children. Shyam did not want to dishonor his father by taking away his rights over Shyam, or by stopping him. He keeps quiet to save his father's honor, and to prevent any embarrassment to him in front of other family members, as result of his son's retaliation. Kay (2012) asserts that honor has been a focus of many scholarly studies where it is seen as "a social reputation or measure of esteem, respect or prestige" (p. 79; see also Brandes, 1987; Mandelbaum, 1988). In this sense one can understand why Madan Singh was so upset when his and his family's honor, respect, prestige, reputation, and esteem were challenged by Shyam's wedding to Sugna.

Madan Singh, on the other hand, openly, in front of other family members, passes judgments on Sugna's character without any actual proof. He explicitly attacks Sugna's honor when he says that "God knows whose sin she is nurturing in her womb." By stating

this, he was suggesting that it cannot be said if the child belongs to Pratap (Sugna's first husband) or to some other man in the community. He seems to be suggesting that Sugna is a characterless woman and there is no way they can allow a characterless woman in their house and bring somebody else's dishonor to their family to compromise their family's honor. Such a reaction from Shyam's father, Madan Singh, suggests the traditional mindset of Hindu society. In this sense *BV* seems to portray traditional values that are attached to the concept of honor. This is discussed as the family's *dishonor* that can be brought about by mere association with an unsavory person who fails to follow societal and cultural norms and traditional values as they are prescribed for them, and that person's family, who failed to control them.

However, the concept of honor and dishonor as portrayed in *BV* seems to be far from simple and is more complicated than it seems on the surface. As one tries to unfold the above discourse, new layers of the concept start to unravel. In the following example, as the above conversation goes on, Shyam responds to his father's serious accusations about Sugna's character and virtue.

He says:

Shyam: (screams in anger) . . . enough . . . stop it, father . . . enough. You do not have any right to talk so low about Sugna. And whether you accept it or not, she is my wife and a daughter-in-law of this house. And I will not listen to even a single word against her, from anyone's mouth, even from you.

From the above response, it can be seen that Shyam could not bear the thought of someone dishonoring his wife, even if by his own father. But the question arises: how did

he decide to confront his father, when traditionally he was supposed to not only respect but also obey his parents and elderly members of the family? He did not confront his father earlier when he pushed Shyam physically, but now he did when his father dishonored Sugna. The answer perhaps lies in the underlying fact that now Shyam is Sugna's husband and, traditionally, a wife is supposed to be under the protection of her husband. It is now her husband Shyam's responsibility and duty to protect his wife's honor in the society, even if it means to defend her honor or confront her dishonor in front of his own family.

Sugna is now his responsibility and if he fails to protect her or her honor, he might not be seen as a respectable and capable husband, especially in his own eyes. In this sense it is not just Sugna's honor that is threatened by Madan Singh but its Shyam's own honor, as her husband is perforce also at risk. He will not be able to respect himself if he is not able to protect his wife and her honor in the society or within his own family.

If we examine the situation even more closely, we can see that the situation was getting more complicated by the second. Shyam needed to protect first Sugna's honor, second, his own honor as a husband, and third, as much as possible, his parents' honor by not disrespecting them or by not arguing and saying things that they may not like.

To the above comment, Shyam's father responds and says:

Madan Singh: Are you trying to show off and scare your father? (again pushes Shyam with force) For that characterless woman you are talking to your father in such high voice!!!(Madan Singh slaps Shyam very hard on his cheek and immediately when he tries to slap him again, Shyam grabs his hand)

The above exchange demonstrates how *BV* attempts to showcase more than one perspective of the single concept of “honor,” and how complicated and difficult it can be to handle. According to Kay (2012), “justification for moral judgments referenced damage to group identity, family image, Hindu identity and cultural preservation,” (p. 79). One can clearly see Shyam’s struggle to keep a balance between traditional values and the somewhat modern thinking of his generation. I say somewhat because he is not completely detached from traditions and is still struggling to make a convincing case to his parents for a very modern idea. Despite Shyam's struggles, his father still seems to question his manners. He questions why Shyam is putting Sugna’s honor before his parents’ honor.

Moreover, Shyam was trying to keep to traditional values by not retaliating disrespectfully against his father, as he gripped his father’s hand avoid being slapped again but, did not hit back to maintain his father’s respect.

However, it seemed Madan Singh had pushed him too far this time.

Shyam says to his father:

Shyam: Enough!!! (With immense anger) I have not committed any sin, (by marrying Sugna) even then I have gone through enough, listened to everything, and kept quiet. Now onwards, if anyone dares to say anything disrespectful about Sugna, I will not remain quiet any longer. Shyam leaves)

In Shyam’s response I can see the frustration. He wants to live happily with his family but cannot, because, in the eyes of his family, he has brought “dishonor” to them by marrying Sugna. He wants to respect his family but finds it difficult because his family

feels “dishonored” by Shyam’s actions as he defends Sugna. And the family won’t allow him to bring Sugna in the house. He wants to protect Sugna and her honor but cannot without disobeying his family, and this hurts him. He wants to keep his honor by being a good husband and a son-in-law who keeps his word, but pays a price by being disowned by his own family in the name of family honor, or rather, dishonor. His decision to marry and support a pregnant widow and her unborn child out of love cost him his family’s respect, affection, and inheritance. His decision to go for a self-arranged, love marriage made his parents unhappy in the beginning, but they agreed to accept the love marriage and arranged it for him. It was already too much to ask from them but they could not bear the thought of marrying their son to Sugna when they learned about her pregnancy. Shyam’s parents wanted to carry out a traditional Hindu “arranged marriage” for Shyam. That dream was taken away from them, and now they are upset beyond reason.

The above discourse brings my attention to an unexpected outcome, driven by the concept of honor that seems to be hidden and wrapped under the patriarchal norms as rather a positive force. It was the patriarchal value that “a man must protect his wife” that gave Shyam the strength or the traditional base to stand up to his parents and save Sugna’s honor. Additionally, it was his father’s honor that kept Shyam from retaliating, thereby maintaining his father’s honor. In this sense, it appears that *BV* understands the strengths of traditional values that can be used to provide support for women and justify similar actions that help *BV* to not offend its viewers, while at the same time portraying support for women. On the other hand, a quite different perception of the same concept of the “honor” and “dishonor” of his family convinced Madan Singh to justify his actions

that lead him to set fire to Dadisa's grain storage and convinced him to accuse Sugna as a characterless woman. Each character is convinced that they are doing the right thing in the name of honor or, more accurately, the dishonor that has been brought upon their family, which they cannot compromise or swallow without reacting.

With such portrayal and framing of the concept of honor or rather dishonor, *BV* appears to highlight the inner struggles of its characters – those that long to keep up with the old traditions, family honor, duties to the household, and arranged marriages – such as Shyam's parents. On the other hand, the newer generation longs to choose their life partner based on love as opposed to arranged marriages, like Shyam. *BV* seems to be trying to maintain a neutral position to some extent.

BV seems to restrain its portrayals from pointing blame at one or the other character; rather it seems that *BV* tries to show the inner thought process of both the older and newer generations, and the clashes between them; not to point fingers, but to present a situation for the audience to think about. *BV* doesn't seem to tell or direct its audience on what to think. *BV* seems to try to just present the facts of the situation in the story and leaves the responsibility of deciding what to make of it on the audience.

In a separate example, the theme of honor goes beyond the family and includes the honor of the village. In the episode aired on July 17, 2009, Shyam, after learning that his father Madan Singh set Dadisa's grain-storage on fire, brings the local police to Dadisa's house and urges Basant and Bhairav to come with him to his father's arrest. In response Bhairav says to Shyam

Bhairav: Why did you bring the police, Shyam?

Dadisa: You should have asked us before doing anything. What was the need to call the police?

The above response from both Dadisa and Bhairav express their surprise at Shyam's action. Both are displeased with Shyam, but he defends his action in the name of moral duty to report a crime, even if it was his father who committed it. But Bhairon disagrees. He is upset but he is composed and says to Shyam:

Bhairon: Whatever it is, Shyam, there was no need for you to involve the police in this matter. You know very well that this is a matter of our village, our house.

We would have resolved it among ourselves by talking amongst ourselves. In the above dialogue, Bhairav is very clear that there was no place for police (the representatives of state governance or state law) even if there was a crime committed, the evidence obvious, and the culprit's identity already known. Rather, this is a matter for the village (local governance) to resolve and no outsider may be allowed to interfere. Besides, Madan Singh is now Sugna's father-in-law, and his arrest would again bring dishonor to Shyam's family. Bhairav, as Sugna's father, will always be in debt to Shyam and his family. It is Bhairav and his family's duty to protect their honor for their daughter Sugna's sake. Shyam's father is already upset with Dadisa and her family – they must not do anything else to further complicate the situation. However, Shyam still insists and announces that he will testify against his father. Bhairav reminds Shyam and says:

Bhairon: Shyam, what are you talking about? Madan Singh is your father. You will testify against him?

There was controlled anger, surprise, and distrust in Bhairav's voice as if he could not believe his ears – that a son was going to stand against his father! It was completely against tradition and utterly immoral, in light of the obligatory filial piety toward elders. No son may do that to his own father, destroying his honor. The moral duty of a son toward his father comes first. A son must protect his father's and his family's honor at any cost.

Everyone was shocked to hear what Shyam had just said. Dadisa looked at Shyam unbelievably and then turned to the police officer and said:

Dadisa to police officer: Inspector sir, please, you can go. It is the young blood.

He brought you here without thinking the situation through. We neither want to file any report, nor do we want to bring the law into the midst of our personal and village matters. You can go and thank you for taking the trouble to come here.

Dadisa's response, along with Bhairav's, clearly suggests that the role of state law does not carry weight in local matters. Although the police officer could try to enforce the law, he soon realized the power of local governance, which could bring trouble for him, as Dadisa's and Madan Singh's family are the most powerful and richest families in the village. He cautiously says:

Police officer: Whatever you wish, Maajisa. But I would like to give you a suggestion. It would be better for both the families to sit down and talk it over, instead of covering this incident up.

Basant does not like the idea, but the police officer further says to him:

Police officer: Mr. Basant, whatever feud that is been going on for years between you and Madan Singh's family and whatever has happened now is not hidden from the villagers. You both are counted as the most influential families of Jaitisar village. The entire village might lose its peace because of the tension between your families. So we must think about it.

Basant again does not like the idea, but Bhairav and Dadisa agree. Dadisa makes Basant come along for the negotiation talk. The officer says:

Police officer: So it is decided, we must go to Madan Singh's house at once, because we must not delay this matter anymore.

Everyone but Shyam leaves, but Bhairav asks him to go with them. They reach Madan Singh's house and the police officer calls to him. Madan Singh comes and asks what the matter is.

Police officer says: Madan Singh, sir, see, whatever is happening is not right, and it must not happen again, and this is why I want both of your families to sit down and resolve this matter peacefully. See, this is not the time to blame each other, but to see how we can make it right.

Dadisa tries to reason with Madan Singh, but he doesn't listen. Basant gets angry but the police officer intervenes again and says

Police officer: Basant sir, please calm yourself down. We have to find a solution for this problem. This is why I want both the families to sign an informal peace treaty, according to which neither of you will bring harm to anyone.

After some convincing, Madan Singh and Dadisa signed the treaty and the matter was resolved without any legal enforcement. It was an informal treaty, a word of honor given by one family to another which is a very traditional way of resolving issues.

From the above exchange it can be understood that both families were concerned with the honor of their families and did not want to involve the law in official manner. However, the police officer offered himself as a facilitator instead of the state's legal authority. In this sense *BV* appears to attempt to bridge the gap between local governance and state law, which seems to be an issue in traditional societies and a significant factor in promoting child marriages. *BV*, by such portrayals, is trying to find a balance where both systems can work together to address local problems and issues.

Women's rights: the struggles, negotiations, and advocacy.

Another theme that repeatedly emerged in *BV*'s sampled episodes was the theme of women's rights. *BV* seems to sometimes bring up sometime subtle suggestions, and sometimes direct debates between the traditional beliefs and the idea of women's rights. For instance, the portrayal of Dadisa's distress when she strips from Sugna her colors, jewelry, and the other symbols of being a married woman highlights *BV*'s attempt to showcase the internal struggles of a traditional woman. On one hand, it does portray Dadisa's power to carry out the traditions with an authority no one can question, but, on the other hand, she feels powerless inside her heart.

The emotional distress of Dadisa, a widow, seems to undermine the traditions. Dadisa was clearly not enjoying what she was doing to Sugna in the above scene because she loved her dearly. These interactions show that Dadisa is mainly controlled by

traditions, despite her power as head of the household and her high status. She only has the power to strip away all the symbols of happiness, and impose the restrictions that come with being a widow on Sugna. Interestingly enough, this power makes her powerless too. She is not a ruthless woman, rather she is crying while taking away Sugna's jewelry. This depicts the pain in her heart and raises unspoken, silent questions: Why do I have to do this to my own granddaughter? Why do women have to go through this?

One can clearly see through her changing expressions the love, helplessness, and societal pressures that Dadisa feels in the above scene. But she knows that if she doesn't follow the religious rules, community members will misjudge her and her family. Despite the pain and inner contradictions, Dadisa does not challenge tradition.

In this interaction *BV* appears to respect traditional values, but the emotional distress of Dadisa and Sugna undermines the validation of tradition. It throws light on *BV*'s subtle attempts to question and challenge traditions related to widowhood.

Widow remarriage.

If a widow who remarries looks happy, society may interpret her happiness as a desire for sexual satisfaction. It is believed, according to Hindu scriptures, that women are not able to control their sexual desires. This is why a widow must never express a desire to remarry. She will be judged not only by her own family, but also by society. She may be considered shameless and without virtue. Perhaps, this is why most widows seem to live quietly without any fun in their lives, even though sometimes they might long for it. Sugna is portrayed following these traditional ideas. She agrees to remarry only for the

sake of her unborn child. She is thinking about the future of her unborn child, who won't have to live without a father, a caretaker, and a protector if she can remarry. Hence, in this regard, Sugna seems to uphold traditional values and the image of a virtuous wife.

However, while showing Sugna's traditional image, *BV* introduces the idea of widow remarriage without directly attacking the traditions. *BV* never shows Sugna desiring remarriage. *BV* rather places the responsibility of initiating the idea of widow remarriage or social change on the shoulders of the family members. This idea of the family having a responsibility to think about Sugna and her unborn child's future resonates well with traditional values, making the idea of widow remarriage less threatening to viewers.

Sumitra, Sugna's mother, otherwise passive and an ideal Hindu daughter-in-law, challenges the taboo on widow remarriage. When Sumitra brings Sugna to the ceremony in which she will marry Shyam, she tells her:

Shyam: Whatever is going through in your heart, I understand it very well. But my dear, it is better to see and accept the truth. It is not good to turn your back to God's will. God made you face the pain, and now it is God again who brought you back to the door of happiness. The way you accepted the pain by bowing your head, make a bond with this happiness also. Very few people get a chance to start their life again. Trust your mother. Shyam is a very good boy. Do you trust your mother and father Sugna? My dear . . . you do trust your mother and father? Then do not hesitate and go through the marriage.

Sugna nods her head in agreement while crying. Sugna's situation in the above dialogue showcases the dilemma of a traditional daughter who must obey her parents' commands, and the guilt of a wife who wants to remain loyal and dedicated to her first husband. It seems as if she is betraying her first husband by marrying Shyam and is not a good wife. On the other hand, from Sumitra's point of view, the above dialogue seems to reinforce traditional values on one hand and on the other it seems to present a subtle challenge to the tradition but in a non-threatening way. It identifies a negotiating space between tradition and modern values where one doesn't necessarily have to create uproar to achieve a desired goal. For instance, even as Sumitra urges Sugna to accept the possibility of a new life with Shyam, she tells her that the gods determine her fate. In this sense, *BV* seems to have used religion and God to support the argument for widow remarriage, to convince Sugna and Sumitra that it is the right thing to do. Although widow remarriage is traditionally viewed to be not popular and a taboo, the argument that God's will is ultimate is used to defend widow remarriage in the above conversation when Sumitra says that, "God made you face the pain, and now it is God again who brought you back to the door of happiness. The way you accepted the pain by bowing your head, make a bond with this happiness also." Although Sumitra is urging Sugna to accept the marriage without any complaints by "*bowing her head*"; it still showcases women's rights by portraying support for widow remarriage.

Sumitra also urges Sugna to accept the tradition that parents decide who their child will marry. Although Sumitra is following and reinforcing the tradition by creating pressure on Sugna to accept her parents' choice to marry Shyam when she says "Trust

your mother. Shyam is a very good boy. Do you trust your mother and father Sugna? My dear . . . you do trust your mother and father? Then do not hesitate and go through the marriage,” she is also supporting women’s rights again by gaining support from traditions that provide her the necessary power over her children to take the desired step. In other words, while Sumitra supports a bold and modern step to have her daughter remarry, she asks her daughter to accept her parents’ decision and carry on with tradition too. This allows Sugna to be a virtuous daughter who does not argue with elders of the family. In one sense the dialogue reinforces traditional values, while in the other it tells Sumitra to reject the tradition that forbids a widow to remarry and support modern ideas. This portrayal again shows how *BV* is trying to find a balance and negotiate spaces between traditional and modern values, without threatening one or the other. Moreover, *BV* presents yet another non-confrontational way of negotiating; that is, through silence.

Negotiating through silence.

In *BV*’s portrayals, the strategy of negotiating through non-confrontational ways is highlighted. Bhairav (Dadisa’s younger son) does not always approve of what Dadisa says but he does not respond to comments that he does not agree with. He keeps quiet, but his body language conveys a different message. He takes deep breaths of disappointment, lowering his head and looking away in disapproval. *BV* appears to approve of Bhairav’s silence, rather than confronting Dadisa every time he disagrees with her, suggesting that it is better to focus where he can make a difference, such as education equality for Jagiya and Anandi, as shown in the following exchange:

Dadisa: Bhairon, (nickname for Bhairav) what are you thinking about so deeply?

Bhairav: Maasaa (mother), I was thinking that because of the recent events in the house in the past few days, we are not able to pay due attention to the kids (Anandi and Jagiya). Jagiya's exams are approaching, and his focus is more on computer games than his studies.

Dadisa brushes off his concern.

Dadisa: Oh! He will study later. What is the big deal? Right now it is time for him to play and enjoy his childhood. His father has enough money for him. It is not as if he has to study hard to become an officer of some sort.

Bhairav turns to Basant, his elder brother, without responding to Dadisa's comment.

Basant: Yes brother! One thing or another will keep happening in the house. We should not ignore kids in any situation. If education is weak at the beginning stage, then later it will be very difficult to keep up.

Bhairav: You are absolutely correct, Brother. This is why I am concerned. If he (Jagiya) doesn't start learning now, then how will he understand lessons later? From now on, I myself will take the responsibility for both Jagiya and Anandi's education.

When Anandi tells on Jagiya, saying that he doesn't pay any attention in class and plays video games all the time, Dadisa gets angry and shouts at Anandi.

Dadisa: Shut up you chinchidi (an animal who makes too much noise). Whenever I see you talking, you speak ill of your husband. How many times have I told you that a wife should never try to pretend that she is better than her husband?

(No one says anything to contradict her.)

However, from their expressions and body language, it is clear that they do not agree with what Dadisa has said. They simply sigh and look at each other and graciously ignore her. *BV* almost never shows a confrontation between the younger generation and Dadisa. The younger generation is shown negotiating, discussing, and re-evaluating situations in silence, rather than directly challenging Dadisa, who believes in traditional values and wants to force them as much as she can. In these exchanges *BV* seems to advocate for change, but it does so by depicting spaces for negotiation through silence.

In the above discourse, both brothers agreed that they had to be more active in making sure that both Jagiya and Anandi are keeping up with their educational goals. They do so despite Dadisa's disagreement; to her, being strict with Jagiya and supporting Anandi's education will make Anandi "better than her husband."

It is clear that both sons ignore Dadisa and go on with their decision. In this regard *BV* seems to be keeping with the traditional values of not arguing with elders of the family. However, they also use the patriarchal traditional values of men's decision-making power to provide education not only to Jagiya, the male member of the family, but to the child bride Anandi. In this sense, once again *BV* seems to use traditions as its support to showcase women's rights and promote the continuing education of child brides like Anandi.

Negotiating through portrayal of community support for change.

The idea of widow remarriage is portrayed as a positive step in *BV*. Dadisa's willingness to challenge the tradition forbidding widow remarriage is applauded by one of the women who speak up at the preparations for Sugna's wedding.

She says to Dadisa:

Bhavri Bhojai: Shall I say one thing Maaji sa (Dadisa). You are marrying off Sugna again; it is only a woman like you who can dare this much as you have connections in the village. You are doing a good deed similar to washing oneself in the river Ganges.

When the woman says, "You are doing a good deed similar to bathing in the Ganges," *BV* once again invokes the power of religion in challenging a tradition that make its subject suffer. For a devoted Hindu, bathing in the Ganges is a way to clean all the sins in his or her life, becoming clean, pure, and sinless once again. Comparing Sugna's remarriage to bathing in Ganges implies it is an action of great purity. In this way *BV* shows that religion can be used to challenge and rethink traditions. The woman's comments also suggest the importance of community support in challenging traditions. Even though the comment was made after Dadisa had already taken the decision to remarry Sugna, it strengthens acceptance of her decision. However, resistance to change is not new and it often comes from a group whose power is challenged.

Negotiating through portrayal of current mindset toward women, male authority and resistance to change.

BV in its portrayals also highlights the challenges and hurdles in terms of male authority and their resistance to change. Male members are reluctant to let go of their authority that can be lived through keeping the traditions alive. If they let go of traditions then there goes their authority too. The episode that shows the wedding of Sugna and Shyam begins with traditional greetings that illustrate the respect owed to male authority. When Shyam's family arrives for the wedding, Sugna's mother, Sumitra, welcomes the groom and his family. Her husband, Bhairav, first greets Madan, Shyam's father. Madan's elder brother, the groom's Uncle protests:

He says:

Tauji: What if Madan is the father of the groom? First, the elders will be welcomed and then the younger generation's turn will come.

Bhairav: Yes!

Everyone nods in agreement including Dadisa. Bhairav instructs Sumitra to welcome Shyam's uncle (the elder brother) and his wife first. This interaction establishes Shyam's Uncle Ramcharan/Tauji as a figure who represents the power of tradition.

An incident that occurs shortly thereafter also shows importance of traditional gestures of respect, social status and power that comes with age and being a male. Shyam's uncle, who is addressed as Tauji (Father's elder brother) by Shyam, asks Madan where the *mandap* (wedding pavilion) is. Madan Singh tells him that there will be a court

marriage instead of a traditional wedding, following Shyam's wishes. Tauji objects that the wedding can't happen without traditional rituals.

Madan Singh explains:

Madan: Shyam and Bhairav decided on a court marriage as Shyam wanted. It is better for Sugna (as Sugna is a widow and still grieving for her deceased husband). If things are kept simple, it would be better for Sugna.

Tauji: Madan Singh you should slap Shyam and make him understand that marriage isn't a game and can't take place by imprinting fingertips on paper. The *pheras* (wedding vow circles) and mantra (chants) must take place.

Tauji threatens to leave. Madan is obliged to follow his older brother's wishes because of respect owed to him and his higher social status. It would not be socially acceptable for him to let his older brother leave the wedding.

But the insistence of Shyam's uncle on a traditional wedding leads to the crisis that is at the center of the episode analyzed here. Madan approaches Dadisa and Basant and asks to speak to them alone. He tells Dadisa that his brother insists that all the rituals be performed in the traditional way with a *mandap* (wedding altar) and a priest. Dadisa and Basant, along with Bhairav, who joins them, try to reason with Madan Singh. Madan Singh says that they should convince Sugna that the traditional rituals should be performed. Dadisa responds that in "Sugna's condition" she cannot perform the *pheras*. Madan Singh is puzzled because he is unaware of the fact that Sugna is pregnant with her first husband's child. Shyam had not told his parents. On the other hand Dadisa was told by Shyam that his family knows the truth about Sugna's pregnancy. When Dadisa says to

Madan Singh that it would be a *paap* (sin) for Sugna to take *phas*, Madan Singh asks why.

Dadisa replies:

Dadisa: Don't you know a pregnant girl can't take *phas*. If Sugna has to take the wedding vow circles, the child in her womb will also be taking the circles with her and will be bound by the wedding vows. If the child happens to be a girl then she will be married to Shyam. This is why a traditional wedding cannot take place.

When Shyam's family learns of Sugna's pregnancy, they accuse Dadisa of hiding the truth. Shyam's father calls off the wedding and demands that Shyam leave with them, but he refuses and insists on marrying Sugna. Both Shyam's family and Dadisa believe their honor has been compromised.

Dadisa is angry with Shyam for not telling the truth to his family and that they accuse her of deceit. She announces that she will not marry Sugna to Shyam because of such insult. Shyam pleads with Dadisa to change her mind but she refuses because honor is everything for Dadisa:

She says:

Dadisa: There is no way I will allow you to marry Sugna. Not after all this. You and your family have dishonored us, disrespected us, and you still think I will allow it.

Up till this point BV appears to conform to the traditions of Indian Hindu society.

However, the following exchange facilitates critical thinking and provides a space for the

audience to step back and re-evaluate the idea of “honor.” Shyam is aggravated after listening to Dadisa’s response and says:

Shyam: Dadisa, the biggest problem is that everyone is stuck on protecting their respect, ego, and honor; forgetting about relationships. No one is bothered about what the heart feels, and only care about what people say. I am the one who is to marry Sugna, who is pregnant with someone else’s child. While I have no problem with this, I had to lie to my parents for the same reasons of respect, ego, and honor.

Shyam then resumes calmly: Dadisa, can you forget about your honor and think about Sugna’s happiness for now?

Everyone in the community seems to be convinced by Shyam’s words and his plea to think about his feelings and Sugna’s happiness rather than family honor. The *sarpanch* (village chief) approaches Dadisa and asks her to listen to Shyam and think about Sugna’s happiness. Basant also asks her to agree for Sugna’s sake. Madhav, the village teacher, adds his voice to theirs and suggests there is a way to preserve family honor and consider Sugna’s happiness.

He says:

Madhav: Dadisa, now that everyone knows about Sugna’s pregnancy, only this wedding can restore family honor. You must allow it to happen.

The younger generation led by Shyam take the position that the heart is more important than traditions requiring honor be held above all else. This support from community members convinces Dadisa to agree to the wedding. Dadisa’s slow transition from being

a highly traditional Hindu woman to being more open to newer ideas such as widow remarriage and women's rights, is shown in a very sensitive way that the audience, of both older and younger generations, can relate to. Shyam's stance helps to make an appeal to the younger generation to question traditions.

Negotiating through the portrayal of the younger generation's support for women's rights, inclusion and equality.

BV in its portrayals openly calls for women's rights, widow inclusion, and equality by invoking humanitarian thinking in its community members. *BV* does it through its young characters, but with respect for the older generation. In one of the episodes Sumitra performs the rituals welcoming the groom (Shyam) while Dadisa stays in the background despite being the head of the household, because she is a widow. Her inauspicious shadow must not touch the guests or the groom. Scholars state that "widows are traditionally not allowed to attend social functions and events like marriages and baby naming ceremonies because they are considered polluting . . . and inauspicious" (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). This is why the honor of welcoming the groom and his family right at the front door fell to the eldest daughter-in-law of the house, Sumitra, who was next in line after Dadisa. This describes the idea that a person can have different social status at different occasions. At certain occasions, one's particular social status may place a person in a powerful position; on other occasions, it may place them at a very powerless position.

For instance, as an elderly member of the family and the mother of Bhairav and Basant, Dadisa is the head of the family and a proud mother of two sons who is highly

respected. Both sons obey her and she can scold them whenever she wants with her power, and the sons will never question her, whether she is right or wrong. Her word carries weight in the family. In this sense she is right at the top as one of the leaders of the family. On the other hand, her social status as a widow places her at the bottom of the social hierarchy at the wedding. A woman who is a widow must not take the lead in any auspicious occasion. Her shadow may bring bad omens to the members of the community or family. She must stay as far away as possible.

Such traditions, beliefs, and practices are addressed by “discussing” rather than “questioning” in *BV*’s portrayals. When Sumitra does the rituals to invite Shyam, the groom, to enter the house, he objects.

He says:

Shyam: One minute, Kaakisa (Sumitra). First of all, call Dadisa. I will not enter without her blessings.

Everyone looks at him with surprise.

Dadisa responds: Oh no Son! Don’t be stubborn about this!

Shyam insists: Dadisa, today is the day for me to be stubborn

Dadisa: Oh Son! Try to understand. In this auspicious deed there is no place for a widow. I will give you my blessings later. Now, you come inside.

But Shyam resists her appeal to tradition.

Shyam: No Dadisa! I will not listen to your argument.

Dadisa starts to get angry: Oh! In front of the entire community . . . no . . . you . . .

Dadisa's hesitation clearly exemplifies the "internalized oppression" of women. Dadisa is advocating for her own discrimination because she is convinced in her own mind that widows must stay away from auspicious rituals, and if they don't, they may bring harm (in this case) to the groom. Such thought terrifies Dadisa and she gives in to the tradition by not participating or taking the lead in the ritual of welcoming the groom. She feels embarrassed, hesitant, nervous, and unconfident as she looks around at the community members, as if she wonders if they will approve. It seems that she wants to become invisible as she starts to shrink into her own little space in a corner while she says "Oh! In front of the entire community . . . no . . . you. . . ." Shyam realizes Dadisa's hesitation, uncertainty, and embarrassment. He understands that Dadisa is afraid of the judgments the community may pass on her.

Shyam interrupts and asks her: Why are you afraid of the community now, Dadisa? I am breaking ancient traditions by doing this wedding!

Shyam brings Dadisa's attention to the question of what traditions is she trying to protect, when one of the major traditions has already been broken by Shyam's decision to marry a widow? In light of that, Shyam feels that violating the traditions preventing a widow from welcoming the groom seems an extremely small matter. After addressing Dadisa, Shyam turns to the guests and makes an appeal.

He says:

Shyam addresses the guests: I just have one request to all of you, that in this wedding please do not follow any tradition that takes away the right of a human

being to enjoy happiness. Dadisa, without your blessings, I will not put a single foot forward. Now you think about it, I am telling you.

Shyam's uncle, mother, and father are shocked to hear what their son has to say. They don't seem to be happy about what Shyam has done. It is an inappropriate request, against the traditions, and unacceptable. Their expressions convey very well that they are highly upset and do not want another tradition broken by their own son. It seems that they want to say something to Shyam, but are hesitant to make a scene in front of the community. Moreover, they seem to find it difficult to point blame at their own son in front of everyone. They are puzzled as to what can be done. Before they could think of anything, Bhairon intervenes. Bhairon (Dadisa's younger son) also insists that Dadisa should come forward and give her blessing. He sees logic in Shyam's request that he put to the community members, that "in this wedding, please do not follow any tradition that takes away the right of a human being to enjoy happiness" and so do the community members. Dadisa shakes her head in disagreement and everyone starts talking. Then one of the guests, the village chief, says;

Surpanch (village chief): Maaji sa (Dadisa) Listen to what the boy is saying. He is right.

From the above response, the community members' support for Shyam's request is evident. However, the important point to notice here is *who* extended that support. It is the village chief, a male member of society, and an opinion leader of the community. Does it make any difference if comes from someone else? Since he is the village chief, people value and follow his opinions.

By making an opinion leader who is also a well-respected male member of a patriarchal society come forward, *BV* provides immeasurable support for Shyam's request. It makes way for other community members who are not so influential to find courage and support Shyam. They need courage, which the village chief provided by embracing Shyam's request. Their expressions show that if the village chief approves of it, they will not be scrutinize the reasons for supporting Shyam. On the other hand, when a new idea is supported by an opinion leader; there may be fewer chances for someone from the community to question or contradict it, especially in a traditional patriarchal society. This may be because these opinion leaders are generally highly respected and valued. *BV* provides a pointer to similar community members, and perhaps sends a message – maybe not intentionally – that if opinion leaders are willing to take the lead, then it can be a step forward toward achieving social change in a community, for causes such as widow inclusion, equality, and others. It seems to sow the seeds of a discussion and then leaves it to the audience to decide what to make of it.

Furthermore, *BV*, by portraying Shyam's character making this humanitarian request where the focus is put on the "right to happiness," instead of tradition itself, drives any direct blame away from the traditions and humanizes the issue of widow inclusion. It does so without really demonizing the tradition. It rather seems to provide an opportunity to re-evaluate old traditions with a new focus and perspective. It raises and then seeks to answer this question: Is that what these traditions originally hoped to achieve – preventing a person from being happy? All of a sudden community members in the episode start discussing, and it appears as if they never thought about it from this

particular angle. It appears in the scene as if the community members are awakened and have realized something which they didn't before. It was perhaps because it made sense for everyone to be happy in an occasion like this, and keeping people like Dadisa from being happy didn't seem right to them.

When the village chief and Bhairav both supporting Shyam, and no one else raising any question, Dadisa looks at everyone disbelievingly.⁷ She appears to be overwhelmed but comes forward, though hesitantly, to give her blessing to the groom. It is important that Dadisa concedes in the end and gives her blessing. She is the figure who most strongly represents the power of tradition in *BV*, so the fact that she is willing to change is a strong message.

Women who are in a similar situation to Dadisa's and who suffer the pain of living the life of a widow can identify with her. They might see Dadisa receiving support for challenging traditions that exclude widows. Shyam does not explicitly say that some traditions are bad. He simply asks community members not to observe traditions that do not allow a person to experience happiness. The challenge to tradition that Shyam raises may appeal to the younger generation on whose shoulders the responsibility of the future rests. His appeal seems to present a critical view of tradition that they may relate to.

Shyam's willingness to challenge tradition, and Dadisa's acceptance of his challenge are recognized and applauded by the village chief and teacher who represent progressive thoughts:

Village chief: Bhaisa, (brother) your nephew is very intelligent. At such a young age, his thoughts are full of wisdom.

⁷ The researcher has never seen a widow perform any auspicious rituals.

Teacher: Shyam has shown courage, but the step that Dadisa's family has taken is praiseworthy. If we can find people like them in every village, then no daughter-in-law or daughter will remain helpless or without support.

Moreover, there were other instances where *BV* attempted to introduce progressive thoughts in the drama series by challenging traditional stereotypes.

Negotiating through challenging stereotypes: the evolution of Dadisa's relationship with her daughters-in-law.

The traditional relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in Hindu families is normally full of tension, stress, friction, power, and control. The depiction of Dadisa in *BV* also challenges this stereotype. Anandi, the youngest daughter-in-law, has to show respect for and obey her mother-in-law Sumitra, and grandmother-in-law Dadisa. Sumitra has to show respect to and obey her mother-in-law Dadisa.

In the beginning Dadisa's relationship with her daughters-in-law was traditional as shown when Dadisa tells Anandi to bring water and snacks for the guests and directs her to be responsible for housekeeping. But Dadisa evolves from a very strict, orthodox mother-in-law to a much more likable and understanding one. As one of India's leading newspapers,

The Pioneer (2008) observed:

Dadisa was initially portrayed as a strong, orthodox woman, who supported child marriage. For her, the *bahu*'s (daughter-in-law) job was to, 'clean, cook, and take care of the family members. She never allowed her *bahu* to leave the home or interact with other women in the village. As for educating her daughter-in-law,

that was strictly a no-no. However, Dadisa has now metamorphosed for the good of all family members. She supports both her daughters-in-law, giving them freedom and liberty. She [still] makes sure that everything is under control and constantly taunts them but, in a healthy way. In the process, viewers who once hated Dadisa, have begun to love her altered avatar. (p. 1)

Dadisa's evolved character brings a breath of fresh air to India's prime time television. For example, when family members are celebrating Sugna's wedding by playing drums and dancing, Dadisa is shown sitting on a swing keeping an eye on the event. Anandi gets up to join the dancing group where Jagiya is also dancing but looks at Dadisa, stops, and sits back down. One of the women, Bhavri Bhojaai notices Basant coming down the stairs and requests:

Bhavri Bhojaai: Brother Basant, could you please take Dadisa outside the house just for a while because all the daughters-in-law want to dance. They are all afraid of Maasaa and are sitting quietly.

Basant goes to Dadisa and says:

Basant: Maa saa (mother) please come outside. I have to discuss something with you.

Dadisa reluctantly gets up and goes with him. Bhavri Bhojaai is happy. Everyone starts dancing with their husbands. At this moment, Dadisa reenters the house and sees everyone dancing. She puts her hand on her waist and watches with a serious face. Anandi's smile vanishes. She stops dancing and looks at Dadisa in fear. Gehna stops singing. Dadisa looks at all of them as if she is mad at them.

She says:

Dadisa: May God be gracious. My daughters-in-law started singing and dancing by sending me outside the house.

No one says anything. But then Dadisa says:

Dadisa: It's my granddaughter's wedding. The first right to dance goes to me. Everyone is relieved that Dadisa is not actually angry. Dadisa takes Basant by his arm and asks him to dance with her. Everyone starts dancing again. This interaction breaks the stereotypical image of a mother-in-law.

The praise that the depiction of Dadisa as a mother-in-law is getting, suggests that there are subtle changes occurring in an Indian society. Perhaps this is an indication of what the audiences want to see. Dadisa's evolution in *BV* from being highly traditional to becoming more open to modern ideas is perhaps one of the most significant messages of the series. Similarly, there were other attempts in *BV* that are not that loud or as visible but brought certain traditional practices and subtle deviations from them to light.

Negotiating through the portrayal of social status, traditional gestures of respect, and subtle deviations.

In traditional Indian society touching the feet of a person is an honored tradition and a gesture of respect. When a woman marries, she touches the feet of everyone who has a higher social status in the family and is senior to her in age. When a girl comes to live with her in-laws' family, she touches the feet of almost all members of the family, but when the husband goes to his in-laws' family he never touches feet of anyone. Because the girl's status is lower than that of her husband, the status of her family is

lower than that of her husband and his family. Even elderly men and women sometimes touch the feet of the husband of their daughter to show respect for the husband's higher social status. Indians explain this tradition by saying that the girl's family shows more care and respect to the husband, because if he or his family are offended, they might express their anger toward the daughter or, in an extreme case, send her back to her parents. The girl's family is always indebted to the husband's family for taking their daughter in marriage. In *BV* when Dadisa welcomes Sumitra's brother and his wife to the house for Sugna's wedding, they both touch Dadisa's feet to show respect, which is seen as perfectly normal in traditional Hindu society.

If we critically analyze this tradition it does foster inequality at many different levels. It subordinates a woman and her family in relation to the man and his family. *BV* addresses such issues in a very subtle way. *BV* exhibits deviations from the traditional practices of the feet touching ritual that is still strong in rural and sometimes urban parts of India. In the July 14, 2009 episode, Shyam comes to Dadisa's house and touches Dadisa's, Bhairav's, Basant's, and Sumitra's feet. None of the characters protests or questions Shyam's action even though he is Sugna's husband and has a higher status than any of them. This action is normalized as showing respect to elders, which makes it acceptable. But it still challenges tradition. *BV* continues its attempts to challenge certain traditional practices by highlighting and using generational differences as a medium to facilitate debates on certain social issues.

Section 4: Summary of the Chapter

This chapter analyzed selected episodes of *BV* to see what assumptions and values were promoted regarding child marriage, gender, and women's rights. The episodes chosen for this study (June 30 2009 - July 30 2009) were taken from the time period when *BV* was criticized in the Indian Parliament. This chapter was divided into four major sections. First, Characters of the drama series; second, Synopsis of the selected episodes; third, Analysis, interpretation and synthesis of the selected *BV* episodes; fourth; Summary of the chapter. In this chapter, the first section introduced the *BV*'s central character Kalyani Devi and her family. The second section provided a synopsis and the plot of the selected episodes to provide context for the analysis. The third section examined the selected *BV* episodes by analyzing the emerging themes in the text of selected *BV* episodes and how *BV* problematizes traditional practices that are related to the practice of child marriage through its portrayal. This section was further subdivided into two subsections that were based on the two research questions and six major themes that emerged in the drama series and its portrayal during the analysis. These two subsections are: Representation of child marriage; and Portrayal of gender roles and women's rights. The six major themes (further subdivided into subthemes) under these two parts were: Plight of a widow; Generational differences on social issues; Negotiating through captions, disclaimers, comments and statements; Patriarchy; Honor; and last but not the least, Women's Rights: The struggles, negotiations, and advocacy. Each theme was discussed individually in the remainder of the chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction

This study explored the role of *Balika Vadhu's (BV)* discourse in demonstrating a mass media strategy that can be helpful in the portrayal of social issues that pose a break with tradition, such as child marriage. This chapter is divided into seven major sections. First, Major themes; second, Discussion of major findings; third, Conclusions; fourth, Lessons learned; fifth, Implications of the study; sixth, Limitations of the study; and seventh, Recommendations for the future study.

The first section, Major themes, provides a brief overview of each theme. The second section provides discussion of major findings and how they answer the research questions of this study. The third section focuses on the conclusion drawn on the basis of major findings of this study. The fourth section presents the lessons learned in terms of mass media strategies or possible ways of portraying a sensitive issue such as child marriage. The fifth section offers possible implications that may be used in future mass media projects dealing with social issues that pose a break with tradition. The sixth section provides an insight to the limitations of this study. The seventh section provides recommendations for future research projects.

It is often seen that media studies are usually focused on analyzing the effects of mass media programs on their audiences. However, it is equally important to analyze how popular television itself addresses or represents social issues, especially the ones that pose a break with a society's traditions. In India child marriage is one such issue. The purpose of this critical discourse analysis study was to explore how the discourse of the

Indian television drama series called *Balika Vadhu* (*BV*) in its selected episodes portrayed child marriage. *BV* was heavily criticized in the Indian Parliament on July 14, 2009, for its treatment of child marriage since child marriage is illegal in India. *BV* was accused of being unconstitutional and glorifying child marriage. The 24 episodes chosen for this study (June 30 2009- July 30 2009) were from around the time when *BV* was criticized in the Indian Parliament.

The overarching question this study attempted to address was: How to portray a social issue such as child marriage (on mass media such as television) that poses a break with tradition, without offending both the law makers (political leaders, government officials etc.) and the people who view it as tradition (the audience). Following are the specific research questions that guided this study:

RQ1: How does *BV* represent/portray child marriage?

RQ2: How does *BV* portray/address (ideological) gender roles and women's rights?

The two questions were satisfied with the findings presented in Chapter 4. The discourse analysis was thematic and normative. The present study mainly conceptualized its theoretical framework based on Fairclough's version of critical discourse analysis. Fairclough's "key concepts for analysis . . . are, 'intertextuality,' and, 'interdiscursivity'" (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 139). In general, "for critical discourse analysts, discourse is a form of social practice that both *constitutes* the social world and is *constituted* by other social practices. As social practice, discourse is in a *dialectical* relationship with other social dimensions" (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 61). In this

sense it may be crucial to have a critical view of how meanings were drawn in the past to make sense of how things are understood in present times. In other words, “it is necessary to draw on earlier productions of meaning in order to be understood, but that some elements may also [be] put together in a new way, bringing about a change in the discursive structures” (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 139). Drawing on this understanding while analyzing *BV*’s text, I focused on the emerging themes in the sampled text that further informed me “*how discourse is shaped by the participants and vice-versa,*” and “*how discourse is shaped by prior discourse of a particular culture and vice-versa*” (Johnstone, 2008) resonating with Fairclough’s concept of *intertextuality* and *interdiscursivity*. In totality, the findings of the discourse analysis were a multifaceted thematic, normative description of the complexities of the various elements that play a role in meaning-making and determining how the world of *BV* functioned.

Major Themes

Six major themes emerged from the critical discourse analysis of the selected *BV* episodes. These six major themes (further subdivided into subthemes) were: Plight of a widow; Generational differences on social issues; Negotiating through captions, disclaimers, comments and statements; Patriarchy; Honor; and Women’s rights: The struggles, negotiations, and advocacy. I will give a brief overview of each theme in the next few paragraphs to describe what the major understanding of these themes is and what these themes mean.

Plight of a widow.

In a Hindu woman's life a husband is seen as the center of all life events, as if a wife's identity is tied to her husband's fortune and fate. It is understood that if a Hindu woman's husband dies, her life may become colorless, helpless, dependent, with no agency of her own, and perhaps no women's rights. Patriarchal traditions may become even more powerful, leaving a widow to be in a rather vulnerable position in the society. Losing one's husband may become a cause for self-guilt for the widow. Some seem to think that it is their fate that brought the misfortune of losing their husbands and by extension their joy and essence of life.

Generational differences on social issues.

BV usually seems to portray both new and older generational characters traditionally for the most part. *BV* invests mainly in its older generation characters as the major holders of traditions, such as Dadisa, Shyam's uncle and parents. However, on the contrary, *BV* also displays disagreements between generations in regard to various social issues, including child marriage, its consequences (such as deschooling of a girl child after marriage, devaluing of a girl child, and widow remarriage, to name a few.)

In *BV*'s portrayals, a sense of empathy toward both older and younger generations can be observed. *BV* seems to reassure both generations through its portrayals that yes, we understand where you are coming from, we understand what and why traditions have certain place in your life and how difficult it can be to change them or sometimes follow them despite the fact whether a person wants to follow them or challenge them. It seems as if *BV* is saying that we understand your struggles and we understand that you want

change and that it is not easy to question traditions and turn them overnight. *BV* does it without pointing fingers at either generation.

Patriarchy.

Another major theme that emerged in *BV*'s portrayal was patriarchy. As child marriage seems to be directly or indirectly related to patriarchal traditions, it was not a surprise to see the theme emerge again and again in *BV*'s portrayals. It was apparent in its character portrayals, their styling, women's mannerisms in the presence of men, gender roles, power relationships within the family; expectations from women toward men; men seen as the head of the family, decision-makers, providing and protecting women; elders entitled to respect and care that gives them power over the young, to name a few. These emerged as subthemes under the major theme of patriarchy in *BV*'s portrayals.

Honor.

Honor in South Asian countries such as India is seen as a dominant cultural concern that appears to be mainly connected to the preservation of purity (virginity) and sexuality of women. Honor could also likely be seen as personal honor and honor toward others in terms of individual responsibility for self and others as a male, female, husband, wife, daughter, and son among others in a family, group, community, or village. If one fails to perform his or her role and responsibility as per the person's social identity, religious prescriptions, and cultural traditions, dishonor may be brought to the individual, family, group, community, or village. Such failure may threaten one's honor and respect among family members, friends, community, and village, which appears to be a taboo for

collective societies such as India. The theme of honor surfaced consistently in *BV*'s portrayals.

Women's rights: The struggles, negotiations, and advocacy.

Women's rights emerged as a major theme in *BV*'s portrayals in the selected episodes. The theme cuts across various other themes and subthemes, sometimes in an explicit way and sometimes in a subtle way. *BV* seems to challenge traditional practices that appear to promote child marriage such as patriarchy, honor, widowhood, and gender roles, among others. *BV*'s portrayals show that they sometimes do it in a humanitarian way by asking direct questions to the community members, sometimes by silencing its characters in the presence of elderly members of the family, sometimes by ignoring them, and sometimes by taking firm actions. Sometimes *BV* uses religious beliefs as well as traditions as a base for questioning the very traditions or for defending women's rights. *BV* also uses disclaimers, captions, comments, and questions to negotiate for women's rights.

Discussion of Major Findings

There were four major findings in response to the two research questions. These findings suggest the following: first, *BV* represented child marriage and ideological gender roles quite traditionally to the most extent; second, while *BV*'s canvas was majorly traditional, *BV* did challenge the practice of child marriage in its portrayals. *BV*'s protagonists were always shown as either a male or an elderly member of a family, group or a society. They were the ones who were given the responsibility of challenging a tradition or supporting women's rights. The fourth finding was that in *BV*'s portrayals it

is evident that traditional governance is more important than state governance. The following paragraphs feature elaborations of these findings.

Finding 1.

The major object of this research was to understand how *BV* portrayed child marriage, gender roles and women's rights. The first finding of this study provides partial answers to this query. This finding shows that *BV* represented child marriage and ideological gender roles quite traditionally for the most part. It will also be discussed later how *BV*, along with reinforcing traditional norms, problematizes them too. Moreover, there was an overlap between the portrayals of child marriage and gender roles in terms of the major themes of patriarchy, plight of a widow, and honor that cuts across both the issue of child marriage and gender roles.

According to Dasgupta et al. (2012), "The glorification, mystification, and romanticizing of value systems of the past from child brides to self-effacement of women amply prove that the media can be biased or can be used as a consolidating tool for empowering patriarchal norms" (p. 14). I agree with this statement to some extent. *BV* did reinforce traditional norms that are believed to be the major factors that promote child marriage and women's subservience, to the most extent. Scholars report a number of different conditions that can lead to the practice of child marriage and its social promotion. Scholars, including Svanemyr et al., 2015; Jain & Kurz, 2007; UNFPA, 2013, reiterate that the "factors that contribute to child marriage traditions and gender-discriminatory norms rooted in patriarchal values and ideologies, [and] the lack of educational and economic alternatives to child marriage . . ." (p. 2) support this.

BV's portrayal of patriarchy, a major theme and a contributing factor for child marriage is quite traditional. In *BV*, the struggles and sacrifices of a child bride and consequences of child marriage were depicted through traditional, discriminating gender roles and expectations. In terms of gender in the Indian context, Rao et al., (2015) assert that "gender seems to be one of the most dominant variables that influence human development from conception to death, particularly in Indian society" (p. 212). Patriarchy is believed to impose restriction and control over almost every aspect of women's lives, including marriage decisions. It is believed that the family "is a crucial site for the development of gender identities, and male elders closely control life within and outside the family" (Ghosh, 2011, p. 205). Scholars assert that patriarchal traditions "put emphasis on child marriages particular [sic] of females even without their consent," (Butt, & Naveed, 2015, p. 166). In *BV*, Anandi, Sugna, and Gehna were all subjected to child marriage. Dadisa was instrumental in keeping the tradition of child marriage in case of Sugna as well as Jagiya. Sugna's child marriage made Bhairav uncomfortable, but he let it happen. Basant was okay with it. In fact, Basant demanded a beautiful child bride for his second marriage and Gehna was never asked if she was okay with it. Rather, she was told after the marriage was fixed that she was getting married and her family didn't see any need for her consent. Similarly, Anandi was playing with her friends when she was pulled away to be taken to her marriage ceremony. Jagiya was in the school when he was asked to come home and get ready for his wedding. Scholars assert that, "formal authority [decision-making power] was always centered on the oldest male" including matters of marriage (Chawla, 2007, p. 8). Also, in *BV*, Anandi's and Gehna's fathers

were shown as in charge and their mothers were shown standing quietly and following their instructions. Moreover, scholars assert that, “Collective identity is valued, and individualism is equated with self-centeredness.” (Choudhary 2001, p. 378). In this regard, a collective decision taken by the family, but mainly taken by the male members of the house, would be regarded as more important than a girl’s individual consent. *BV* portrayed such an understanding in its sampled episodes and reinforced child marriage and gender roles traditionally.

Moreover, Johnson & Johnson (2001) & Johnson (1997) have suggested that:

Among other factors, the sociostructural parameters of the ideology of patriarchy serve to constrain and control the thoughts, movements, and lives of women. It is arguable that societies that appear to be heavily patriarchal – male-dominated, male-identified, male-centered – are the ones in which women’s lives are the harshest. (p. 1051)

In *BV* one can see similar portrayals described in the above quote. For instance, in one of the scenes when Anandi wanted to go after Jagiya to the grain storage after the fire, Sumitra stopped her, but she couldn’t stop Jagiya. She did not try hard to stop Jagiya but didn’t hesitate to use physical force in Anandi’s case. Dadisa’s sons are always shown taking the lead in decision-making process of the household as per tradition. All the women in selected *BV* episodes are shown as stay-at-home housewives and are rarely shown going out of the house. If they do, they are always shown accompanied by a male member. For instance, Dadisa’s movement in and out of the house is always accompanied by her sons, which can be seen as male responsibility to protect women as

described in the Hindu scriptures. According to the scripture, “A father ought to protect a woman while she is a maiden, the husband when she is married and sons when the husband is no more. A woman ought never to remain independent” (Manusmrithi, V, 147). *BV* follows these religious sanctions.

Moreover, *BV*'s portrayal display women's subservient role in keeping with traditions. According to Ghosh (2011), “women in all social classes are groomed in a patriarchal and patrilocal society, in one way or the other, for marriage and motherhood,” (p. 207). In *BV*, one can see this need of getting young boys and girls such as Anandi, Sugna, Gehna, and Jagiya, married at a tender age. Moreover, Dadisa and Basant's desire for Gehna to become a mother and provide them with an heir, especially a son, as soon as possible reinforces the concept of motherhood as being a major goal or purpose of their lives as well as “preference for sons over daughters.” Furthermore, Dadisa's opposition to Anandi's education clearly showed how she saw it as a waste of time and money because according to Dadisa, a daughter-in-law's place is in the house and not in school or in public space. It becomes clear when, in one of the scenes, Dadisa says to Anandi that “it is Jagiya who will take care of the family business, not you.” Dadisa knows that Anandi cannot unlearn the knowledge she has already gained from education. So Dadisa instructs Anandi to use her knowledge and education to help Jagiya and not herself because her duty lies in the domesticated life and house chores. Writers inform that in general, “once a [girl] child is married, her schooling is usually terminated because her domestic obligations to her husband and his family become the priority” (Burns, 2014, p. 156). Dadisa's character conforms to these attributes. In this regard, one can say that such

patriarchal religious traditions were reinforced in *BV*'s portrayals that "celebrate girls as young wives and mothers, not as the girls they are. This appropriation is a key component of patriarchal power and girls' disempowerment" (Stith, 2015, p. 6) especially of the child brides. Additionally, it reinforces "the patriarchal devaluing of girl children . . . that leads religious and family systems in many parts of the globe to devalue girl children through the practice of child marriage" (Stith, 2015, p. 17). Dadisa was always shown devaluing girl children such as Anandi over Jagiya despite his shortcomings.

Furthermore, Vogl (2013) states, that relocation or "home-leaving is tantamount to marriage for South Asian women," (p. 1019). Anandi, Sugna and Gehna are classic examples of such marriage. They are shown living in their husband's house away from their parents. Khalid & Naveed (2015), inform that in child marriage, "A girl suffers shocks and stresses as she leaves her family and is sent to a new family in shape of her in-laws where she has to undertake responsibility of domestic works" (p. 171). Anandi was consistently distressed by Dadisa's strict behavior toward her and she was often seen sad, being hurt and crying in isolation. Although, her mother-in-law Sumitra and aunt-in-law were both sympathetic and understanding to her, they never confronted Dadisa. In fact, they both suggested to Anandi that she must not feel bad and forget about it because Dadisa is an elderly member of the family and elderly members often say these things and are allowed to say such things. Anandi was reminded by both Sumitra and Sugna that despite all the harsh words, Anandi must not forget that Dadisa loves her even though she never shows it.

Filial piety toward the elderly is traditionally expected from the younger members of the family and *BV* reinforces it. Khalid & Naveed (2015) further reiterate that, “In the traditionalist society, these circumstances are taken as fate of the girl and she is supposed to adjust herself” to it (p. 171). Such portrayals are quite evident in *BV* as Anandi, Gehna, and Sumitra are shown subjected to the roles of a traditional married woman, always engaged in domestic works, serving their husbands and their families without complaint. They do not question male authority or an elder because of filial piety which is expected of them and live under their control and patriarchal traditions. They are always seen standing in the presence of male and elderly members to show respect. Moreover, Dadisa is consistently shown tormenting Anandi because she is still a child and a bride who needs to be taught the traditional ways of being a virtuous daughter-in-law who must be loyal to her husband, and show respect by not taking his name. She must learn and always be engaged in household chores. All the daughters-in-law are constantly shown either working in the kitchen, serving male or the elderly members of the family or listening quietly without contributing or interrupting while standing in the corners with their *pallus* hiding their faces. Dadisa was seen reinforcing the tradition of women’s eating from the same dirty plates after their husbands were done eating. All of the examples discussed above strikes a chord with the doctrines of religious Hindu scripture such as “Laws of Manu.”

According to which:

Wives who bear children, secure many blessings, who are worthy of worship and bless homes are as goddesses of fortune who reside in the houses of men. Woman

is the source of children, of the nurture of those born and of the care of men.

Offspring, the performance of religious rites, faithful service, highest conjugal happiness and heavenly bliss for the ancestors and oneself, depend on one's wife alone. She who controlling her thoughts, speech, and acts violates not her duty toward her lord [husband], dwells with him in heaven, and in this world is called by the virtuous a faithful wife. (Manusmrithi, IX. 26-29)

The theme of patriarchy sheds light on how the issue of child marriage was portrayed. It reinforced the challenging consequences of a child bride to take on all the housework and stay indoors in the private space, reinforcing favor for deschooling and devaluing of a child bride, not allowing any agency to her. She is never to sit, speak, or eat in front of a male member of the house, community, group or village. Therefore, I would conclude that theme of patriarchy in *BV* portrays all its women characters in the image of a virtuous faithful wife as explained in the above verse from the Hindu scripture and reinforces patriarchy and traditional gender roles.

The second major theme that sheds light on the portrayal of child marriage and its consequences in *BV* was the plight of a widow. According to Chaudhuri (2009), “child marriage also leaves numbers of young girls as widows,” (p. 11). In *BV*, the struggles and sacrifices of a child widow were depicted quite melodramatically, traditionally, and with emphasis in following certain traditional rituals. Writers state that, “widows have to dissociate from the material world. The [religious] texts and traditions require them to wear white sarees . . . , not wear any jewelry or makeup, and break or remove their bangles, which are signs of marriage” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). In *BV*, such rituals and

traditions were followed and portrayed in great details when the family learns about Pratap's death. Right after the news arrives, Dadisa starts to remove all the signifiers of a married woman such as bangles, jewelry, the vermillion in Sugna's hair parting, her mangalsutra, etc. Sugna was forced to wear a white saree, stay out in isolation away from all the festivities of life and eat tasteless food without oil, butter and sweets. Mastey (2009) states that "Widowhood in India is often described as a definitive and tragic moment in a woman's life – one in which her identity is stripped away with the death of her husband" (p. 191). Sugna's portrayal confirms this statement. Sugna was shown as a lifeless woman, always sad, gloomy, and thinking of her late husband. In *BV*, the contrast between her life as a widow and how happy and cheerful she was with her first husband Pratap was emphasized a lot. It almost seems that *BV* is justifying Sugna as a devoted, virtuous, and a loyal wife to her first husband. Such portrayal seems to affirm the prescription of Hindu scriptures such as Laws of Manu which states that, "Him to whom her father may give her, or her brother with the father's permission, she shall obey as long as he lives, and when he is dead, she must not insult (his memory)," (1969, p. 149) and stay loyal to him. Tradition and society "avoided the issue of remarriage by instilling in their widows a sense of self-sacrifice and virtue that led them to avoid the situation themselves, thus further glorifying the widow" (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). Sugna follows such self-sacrifice and virtue by refusing to marry Shyam and stay loyal to her deceased husband. Sugna was portrayed blaming her fate for her husband's death which again reinforces the traditional belief of women's being responsible for the longevity of their husbands' life through fasting and good karma. According to authors, a widow's

“inauspiciousness is also linked to the fact that she outlives her husband. She is thus cursed and referred to as a “husband eater” because she caused the death of her husband before her own” Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). However, when it came to the male widower such as Basant, no such longing for his deceased wife was portrayed. In fact, Basant was encouraged, unlike Sugna, to get married as soon as possible. Basant agreed and expressed the qualities that he would like to have in his future bride such as her being beautiful and that, most importantly, she must be young. He married Gehna, and Basant was more than twice her age. Moreover, *BV* reinforced the idea that a woman’s life is nothing after her husband dies as all the characters were sad that now her life has become colorless and no one can erase the blackness of her fate.

The language in which blessings were given was highly traditional and explicitly demonstrated the idea of women’s fate tied to a man’s well-being. Sugna was not allowed to feed her brother, a male member and the only heir at the time because she was considered an inauspicious widow. Such restrictions are often imposed on women by women. In this regard, women like Dadisa reinforce patriarchy in the name of paternalism. Based on above discussion, I conclude that Sugna’s character as a child widow was portrayed in accord with the Hindu traditions. Additionally, *BV* did portray struggles and consequences of child marriage in terms of a child widow and her plight by reinforcing traditions.

Another theme that emerged and answered the question of how child marriage and gender roles in *BV* were portrayed was honor, as discussed below. According to Okonofua (2013), “child marriage is not just a religious or cultural practice but is driven

largely by . . . a misconception of the need to “protect” the girl's sexuality” (p. 9).

Scholars assert that, “family honour codes reflect self-contained moral systems in which a premium is placed on principles surrounding the protection of the family unit and the social order” (Kay, 2012, p. 81; see also, Abu-Lughod, 1986; Bourdieu, 1966; Pitt-Rivers, 1966). Scholars say that “collective honour is embedded in . . . authority, loyalty and purity” (Haidt, 2008). In *BV*'s portrayal of child marriage, it was evident that the question of purity of family members threatens a family's honor. Sugna's character, her pregnancy, and her interaction with Dadisa are clear examples of the above observations.

Kay (2012), states that, “family honour is often upheld through acts of premarital sexual abstinence and decisions about suitable marriage partners” (p. 82). According to the religious scriptures, “fathers are called upon to give their daughters in marriage before they attain puberty because of fears regarding their uncontrolled sexuality, leading Manu [from laws of Manu] to declare the marriageable age for girls to be 8-10 years old.” In *BV*'s portrayals such religious beliefs were observed as both Anandi and Sugna were married before they attained puberty. According to Karlekar (1998), “Control over her [girl's] sexuality and its safe transference into the hands of her husband is of primary importance,” (1745). In Sugna's case this was attempted but didn't happen because Sugna's husband died before the *gauna* ceremony, leaving her pregnant with his child. The family honor was threatened and Dadisa was furious. As stated in the *Narad Smriti*, an ancient religious Hindu scripture, “It is through independence that women go to ruin, though born in a noble family. A woman is unfit to enjoy independence,” (Narad Smrti, XIII. 30-31). This concept was reinforced in *BV*. Dadisa's reaction to Sugna's pregnancy

depicts this religious view. She blames Sugna for misusing her freedom and family's trust to secretly meet her deceased husband and become pregnant. Scholars assert that, "The belief that men's honor rests in the behavior and public image of their women is still prevalent in India" (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009). Writers affirm that "Adherence to traditions like premarital sexual abstinence and decisions about who to marry may be seen by some to symbolize group identity and thus may be considered to have (collective) moral significance" (Kay, 2012, p. 82). This observation comes to life when Dadisa discovers Sugna's pregnancy and blames Sugna for ruining the family's honor by tarnishing her own image and by extension the family's image and honor. The only way to keep the family's honor was to keep this knowledge within the family and within the four walls of the house. *BV* portrays Sugna's tarnished image and the consequences largely in accordance with the traditions.

Besides Sugna's character, Shyam's character and his understanding of honor was also in accordance with the traditions. However, his honor was driven more from the patriarchal traditions and filial piety. For him, respecting elders such as his parents, his uncle, aunts, and other elderly members in the extended family, community and the village is a requirement of being a good son and a community member. On the other hand his honor as a husband had roots in patriarchy as he was responsible for protecting his wife and her honor. He cannot let anyone disrespect her. If he is unable to protect her honor, he is not considered manly enough. His understanding of honor comes from the understanding of being a man of his word, another patriarchal tradition. He gave his word to marry Sugna and he kept it to keep his honor. On the other hand Shyam's father's

understanding of honor was driven from the unwanted social association with disrespectful and inauspicious members of the society such as Sugna. His feeling of dishonor also came from disobedience from his son, who refused to honor his father's wishes to not to marry Sugna. The father feels defeated and hurt because his son dishonored him. Shyam's actions brought dishonor to Madan Singh's family and he retaliated by burning Dadisa's grain storage. Kay (2012) asserts that honor is seen as "a social reputation or measure of esteem, respect or prestige" (p. 79; see also Brandes, 1987; Mandelbaum, 1988). In *BV*'s portrayals of Shyam, Sugna, Dadisa, and Madan Singh, the claims of the above quote are evident. In this regard, *BV* does portray honor in a traditional way that also elevates the harshness of the consequences of child marriage in terms of a child widow who threatened the family's honor by being pregnant before the consummation of her marriage. She brought dishonor because she was not able to control her sexuality, and this ruined her family's honor. Such concepts were heavily reinforced in *BV*'s portrayals. In conclusion, based on the above discussion of the three themes, I would affirm that *BV* reinforced and portrayed child marriage and ideological gender roles in keeping with traditions and Hindu religious sanctions.

Finding 2.

The second finding of this study also addresses the questions of how *BV* portrayed child marriage, gender roles, and women's rights. The first finding provided the partial answer that concluded that *BV* portrays child marriage and gender roles traditionally. This finding provides the remaining part of the answer. The second finding explains that while *BV*'s canvas was majorly traditional as explained above; *BV* managed to challenge

the practice of child marriage and advocate for women's rights to some extent in its portrayals. It was done first, by problematizing the life of a child bride, and a child widow; second, by focusing on the major theme of generational differences on social issues; third, by advocating for women's rights.

BV problematizes the life of a child bride and a child widow by providing two sides of a coin. To show the good side, *BV* shows the bad side first. On one hand, *BV* shows the contemporary mindset and the attitudes toward women in a traditional Hindu society through older generations and their longing to uphold the traditions. While doing so, *BV* focuses on the negative effects of child marriage on the life of a child bride, child widows, and women in general. In other words *BV* uses melodramatic, emotional, and tormenting depictions of child brides' lives such as Anandi's and Gehna's; and child widows' lives such as Sugna's. All of them are shown suffering through Dadisa's strict regime in the name of tradition. *BV* does it by highlighting the adjustments they make such as staying indoors, not speaking much, listening quietly, always engaged in domestic chores, and being dependent on men. Their sacrifices – for instance Sugna's colorful life as a married woman, lost after her husband's death, and her subsequent secluded, colorless, and joyless life; their acceptance of internalized oppression as truth and as a normal way of life as it is understood to be lived in a traditional Hindu society. On the other hand, *BV* shows the good side. By doing so, *BV* humanizes the issue of child marriage; *BV* does it by bringing the struggles of a child bride, consequences of child marriage such as widowhood, a plight of a child widow, pressure to reproduce a male heir, oppression of child brides, and women through patriarchy and paternalism to the

forefront. Such a portrayal makes the consequences of child marriage such as “the renunciation of childhood and that of emotional well-being; less personal freedom; reproductive health growth and educational opportunities” (Khalid & Naveed, 2015, p. 170) quite a visual spectacle that displays a range of emotions. In this sense, *BV* did attempt to challenge patriarchy in a quite subtle and nonconfrontational way. *BV* appears to encourage its audience to perhaps reevaluate these practices just by creating this visual spectacle, by making the sufferings of child brides, child widows, and women perceptible and raising a question sometimes in silence in its audience’s minds as to why such young girls have to live through such a life? Sometimes *BV* challenges such practices by posing direct questions, statements, disclaimers, or comments in the beginning, middle and end of the episodes. For instance, by posing a question such as, “*Are we not responsible for this child bride’s situation?*” or when Sugna’s second marriage created a rift between Dadisa and Shyam’s families that created many hurdles in Sugna’s second wedding, unlike Basant’s wedding; the following comments and questions were posed among others:

- (1) A man who is a widower with children does not face any difficulty remarrying; however, a young woman widow faces many difficulties and goes through many challenges when she remarries. What kind of one-sided thinking is this?
- (2) Through child marriage, we throw the present as well as the future of a girl child into the darkness.
- (3) Child marriage is injustice and cruelty toward innocent children.

Such comments, disclaimers, statements, and questions urge *BV*'s audience to at least think about it.

BV further challenges the issue of child marriage by portraying generational differences among its characters on various social issues. For instance, there was a clear example of generational clash between Dadisa and Bhairav, her younger son, over the issue of child marriage. Bhairav did not agree with Dadisa's decision to marry his daughter Sugna and his son Jagiya while they were still children. He tried to stop Dadisa without being disrespectful, but failed and gave into filial piety. Butt & Naveed (2015), mention that "The notion [is] that a good child does not refuse his/her parents' decision, which is quite common" in South Asian countries such as India (p. 170). However, Bhairav kept pursuing and did succeed in convincing Dadisa to postpone Sugna's *gauna* ceremony until she was old enough to understand what married life entails. According to Dutt (2000), usually, there are three stages in a Hindu child marriage. These are "first, a betrothal or *sagai*; second the actual marriage ceremony or *vivah/shadi*; third, the *gauna* ceremony when the girl leaves her parental house which usually implies consummation of the relationship." In *BV*, these stages were followed; however, the third stage was delayed to protect a child bride through Bhairav's perseverance.

Furthermore, the issue of deschooling of a child bride was challenged in *BV* through portrayals of generational differences on social issues such as education for the girl child. Authors assert that, "In India, the traditional attitude toward the girl child is that of indifference and neglect, an offshoot of prejudices nursed for centuries in our culture," (Sharma, Goel, & Gupta 2003, p. 66). But *BV* challenges such attitudes through

Bhairav and Shyam to some extent if not entirely. Dadisa was against the idea of continuing Anandi's education after marriage. However, Bhairav insisted and continued Anandi's education after the marriage. The clash between two generations was clear as Dadisa always appeared angry whenever Anandi's education was discussed, or on another occasion when the younger Shyam was trying to help Anandi in her lesson. As scholars agree, "child marriage contributes to 'deschooling' for a large number of girls even though there are a fortunate few who could continue their education even after marriage" (Ghosh, 2011, p. 208). And Anandi is depicted as one of the few fortunate ones who are able to continue their education after the marriage (however, with the support of a male family member.) In this regard, *BV* highlights women's rights for education and challenges the consequences of child marriage such as deschooling of the child bride.

Moreover, *BV* challenges the tradition that restricts a widow from remarrying. According to the religious Hindu texts, that "pronounce that a woman who is a widow cannot remarry" (Mastey, 2009, p. 191) and "remarriage of widows continue[s] to be a taboo" (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009) in Indian traditional societies. *BV* challenges such tradition through Sugna's remarriage and portraying support from Dadisa, the community members, opinion leaders, and family members.

BV portrayed its young characters taking the lead to support women's rights such as widow remarriage and widow inclusion. Shyam challenges the age-old tradition of keeping widows out of auspicious celebrations and events as they are considered inauspicious. According to Chaudhuri (2009), "Hindu scriptures such as the Dharmasutras (c. 500–200 BC), especially the Manusmriti (c. 200 AD), [widows are]

considered inauspicious, and therefore excluded from weddings and other social, religious events” (p. 11). However, *BV* portrays its younger generation as challenging these practices. Shyam insisted that Dadisa, as an elderly member of the family, must come forward to bless him; otherwise, he will not proceed with the wedding. He pleads to the community members to not observe any tradition that keeps a person from enjoying the happiness of life. *BV* also portrays community members’ support for widow inclusion. Moreover, in one of the episodes Shyam questioned Dadisa as to why she was refusing to go forward with Sugna’s wedding. He questioned Dadisa’s judgment that put traditions before Sugna’s happiness. He pleads with Dadisa by arguing about how long people will keep sacrificing women’s lives in the name of their honor and personal ego. He requests Dadisa to put Sugna’s happiness and future first by putting her ego and honor on the side for once. In this regard, *BV* did support women’s rights in terms of widow remarriage, widow inclusion, girl child education, and a plea to put aside personal egos and honor to re-evaluate oppressing traditions through disclaimers, comments, statements, and questions that may trigger a new thought process in audiences’ minds.

Finding 3.

The third finding of this study is that *BV*’s protagonists are always shown as either a male or an elderly member of a family, group, or a society either to challenge a tradition or support women’s rights. For instance, in *BV*’s portrayals, when it came to challenge traditions such as widow remarriage, it was Shyam, Dadisa, and Bhairav; or to support a modern idea of widow inclusion, widow remarriage, or child bride education, it was the village chief, Dadisa, and Bhairav, respectively. In other words, *BV* uses opinion

leaders of the family, group or community who have power to take a bold step or support it. Perhaps *BV* wants to recognize the power of male or elderly members in keeping with the tradition, but at the same time uses it to its own advantage to challenge traditions by making them leaders of such movements while still recognizing them as decision-makers. In one way it reinforces patriarchy, but it challenges it, too.

On the other hand, *BV*'s portrayals display an empathetic understanding of generational differences without being judgmental. *BV*'s portrayals seem to have a sense of consideration and patience in understanding these generational differences and seek social change by empathizing with them. This is evident in some of the episodes, especially in regard to Sugna's remarriage.

Finding 4.

The fourth finding is that in *BV*'s portrayals it is evident that traditional governance, which supports the practice of child marriage, is more important than state governance, which opposes child marriage. For instance, during the episode when Madan Singh set Dadisa's grain-storage on fire, Shyam, Madan's son, reported his father to the police. However, despite being the victim of the crime, Dadisa and Bhairav both insist that it is a family and their village's matter; there was no need for police official to intervene and that they will solve it among themselves. Such exchange explicitly displays the notion of police officer's being an outsider. On the other hand, despite having the authority to intervene and the evidence, the police officer did not use his authority or follow through the procedure to arrest Madan Singh. It is perhaps "for many of these countries . . . [such as India], social and cultural values hold more weight in the

community than state-enacted law; thus, domestic legislation banning child marriage is weakly enforced," (Burns, 2014, p. 153, also see Raj, McDougal, Silverman & Rusch, 2014; Burns, 2014; Ghosh, 2011; Nasrullah et al., 2014; Stith, 2015). Family and community members still prefer to settle differences among themselves rather than taking them to the courts or to the police. In *BV*'s portrayals the representatives of state governance such as police inspector was shown more as a facilitator in the negotiating process between Dadisa's and Madan Singh's families rather than a figure of law enforcement.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this study derive from the four major findings and the two research study questions that concern the areas of (a) how *BV* represented child marriage; (b) and how *BV* portrayed (ideological) gender roles and women's rights. The present study advances five conclusions.

The first conclusion of this study is that *BV* uses a multi-strategy approach to portray a social issue that poses a break with tradition, such as child marriage, that is by reinforcing as well as questioning or challenging traditions sometimes in a subtle way and sometime directly. However, in both cases *BV* does it without demonizing traditional practices. On one hand, *BV*'s portrayal consistently reinforces traditions such as patriarchy, gender inequality, devaluing of a girl child, child widowhood, rituals and practices, attitudes toward women, etc., to show the current understanding of the practice including the life of a child bride such as Sugna and Anandi.

According to Khattri (2011):

Women of India have always been associated with prefixes shy, covert and someone who is so poised, calm, and dutiful to all the spheres of her life. She is the one who is very aptly quoted as the homemaker who is engaged in multiple activities, such as taking care of the children, looking after their parents and many others, where in her main motive is to just keep everyone happy. (p. 242)

BV upholds and reinforces these traditional images in its portrayals. Additionally, “Gender ‘roles’ [have] been naturalized and presented within ideological discourses that reflect the existing power structure” in *BV* (Ullah & Naseer, 2011, p. 25). Van Dijk (1993) argues that “television programs mirror dominant gender relations and patriarchal values that still remain in post-modern societies.” However, on the other hand, *BV* challenges child marriage by problematizing it, humanizing it, and questioning it in its storylines through cliffhangers, suspense, melodrama, and emotional portrayals of its characters. Examples of this include when Sugna’s first husband dies and the rituals have to be followed to strip her away from all the signifiers of being a married woman, when Shyam decides to marry Sugna, when Shyam’s and Dadisa’s family learn about Sugna’s pregnancy, when Shyam’s father disowns him, etc., I think it is important to first make the case of what the problem is and how the problem exists in our societies. *BV* seems to do that by showing portrayals that are highly imbedded in patriarchal traditions and paternalism, which seem to be the way of living in traditional Indian societies.

Authors assert that “The representation of gender relations actually reflects the social, cultural, political, and economic values of the society” (Dines & Humez, 1994;

Gauntlett, 2002; see also Ullah & Naseer, 2011, p. 26) which further provide a context of the problem at hand and the rationale for possible responses to it. By stating the current practices in its seemingly current form, *BV* appears to rationalize its subtle or clear challenges toward oppressive traditions, such as child marriage, that are imbedded in patriarchal traditions, gender roles, and honor among others. Authors argue that, “through stories, a fictional representation of our social structure and social relations are presented. These fictionalized representations provide a mirror of the world, showing how power is allocated in society and how dominance and submission are idealized (Aaliya and Malik, 2012, p. 5; see also; Gerbner, 1972).

The multi-strategy approach that is to first portray traditions the way they seem to be understood, as well as to challenge traditions by raising humanitarian questions without demonizing them explicitly, seems to be *BV*’s attempt to keep a balance and neutrality on the issue to some extent. In this sense, *BV*’s discourse seems to align with the theoretical assertion that, in general, “for critical discourse analysts, discourse is a form of social practice which both constitutes the social world and *is* constituted by other social practices. As social practice, discourse is in a dialectical relationship with other social dimensions” (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 61).

In other words, the traditional practices in *BV* constituted the life of *BV*’s characters and their world. However, traditions were also constituted by *BV*’s characters as they took a stand to challenge a practice. For instance, Shyam took a stand that widow remarriage was the right thing to do and he would marry Sugna, which was against tradition. Moreover, Shyam and Bhairav took a stand against the tradition of keeping

widows such as Dadisa from attending or participating in any auspicious events and refused to go through the marriage unless Dadisa, a widow, was not only included but also invited to perform the welcoming rituals of the wedding, which was traditionally a taboo.

In this regard, old traditions “constituted” or defining who *BV*’s character were but at the same time *BV*’s characters’ were also ‘constituted’ new interpretations of old traditions by redefining them. There was a continuous contestation or, as Hall (1982) would say the ideological site of struggle could be seen in *BV*’s portrayals. This site of struggle in which “the different categories’ views are fought out, but [the] dominant category successfully monopolizes and projects its view of the world as the best and natural into which they socialize the subordinate” (Ullah & Naseer, 2011, p. 27).

The second conclusion of this study is the strategy to demonstrate an understanding, empathy, and sympathy toward the older, as well as the younger, generation without blaming either of them. In *BV* both the generations mostly care about traditions based on their respective perspectives of their lives, but sometimes their inner struggles of whether to follow or denounce a tradition trouble them for various reasons.

BV recognizes their helplessness. Shyam’s conflict with his family in terms of Sugna is a classic example. It was a conflict between what the heart wants and what tradition sanctions. *BV* portrays perspective of both Shyam, who wants to break off with the tradition, and his family, who wants to keep up the tradition in the name of honor. *BV* showcases their inner struggles, helplessness, and the logic behind supporting or questioning traditions without blaming one or the other.

By doing this, *BV* have succeeded in making a connection and gaining trust of their younger as well as older audiences by showcasing that *BV* understands them and their struggles, without judgment. This approach may have helped *BV* to widen its audience range and maintain popularity. For instance, the inner struggles of Dadisa, Shyam, Madan Singh, Sugna, Anandi, and Gehna seems to be reflections of real men and women who go through such struggles every day.

BV's portrayals are one way of connecting with their own "selves" for both men and women. Danielle Blumenthal (1997) argues that "women [both old and young] meant to get in touch with themselves and achieve this through [watching] soap operas. This self-discovery and emotional truth are dependent on their favourite soap-operas [drama series] characters." Moreover, "It provides for experiences, learning, and pleasure for women in which feminine discourse can be spoken of and appreciated. Soaps also constitute 'affective alliances' based on shared emotional responses" (Aaliya & Malik, 2012, p. 9; Grossberg, 1992). For instance, an example of such an attempt would be when Dadisa was shown sharing her emotional distress and helplessness with the family deity, the Goddess Durga. In this sense empathizing with old as well as younger generation seems a right move in *BV*'s portrayals.

The third conclusion of this study was yet another strategy that emerged in the selected *BV* episodes that seemed to challenge and encourage thinking and reevaluating the issue of child marriage. This strategy was to negotiate revaluation of the traditional practice through its captions, comments, disclaimers, and statements in the beginning, middle, and end of the episodes. Through the display of such text, *BV* in a sense seems to

strategically direct its audience in a certain direction where *BV* originally may have intended to take the conversation or a possible debate on the issue of child marriage. It is another question whether it went that way or not. However, this strategy presents a possibility to achieve such a goal partially if not fully.

The fourth conclusion of this study is the use of opinion leaders, who are generally male or elderly members of a family or community as the decision-makers in *BV*'s portrayals. This strategy in one way recognized the power of male or elderly members in keeping with the traditions but at the same time used it to *BV*'s own advantage in challenging traditions by making them leaders of such movements. According to Rogers (2003), "opinion leadership is defined as 'the degree to which an individual is able informally to influence other individuals' attitudes or overt behavior in a desired way with relative frequency'" (p. 300). These leaders, who are well respected in a society, have power, and are highly looked upon. According to Kim, Chitnis, & Vasanti (2007), "it is important to map the communication network of the social system, identifying key opinion leaders" (p. 345) to bring about social and behavioral change.

Moreover, these leaders are usually a part of *Panchayats* (governance of communities) which are believed to carry more weight in traditional societies than state governance. Scholars assert that, "for many of these countries with a high prevalence of child marriage [such as India], social and cultural values hold more weight in the community than state-enacted law; thus, domestic legislation banning child marriage is weakly enforced," (Burns, 2014, p. 153, also see Raj, McDougal, Silverman & Rusch, 2014; Ghosh, 2011; Nasrullah et al., 2014; Stith, 2015).

In *BV*, although it was mainly male characters who were opinion leaders, (besides Dadisa) who took the lead in terms of constituting or supporting new social traditions or practices such as widow remarriage, widow inclusion, and girl child education, among others; however, the central focus is that the old traditions were challenged. It can be seen as both regressive and progressive by some scholars. According to Ullah & Naseer (2011), “Male uses television texts to reinforce and perpetuate patriarchal cultural norms and thereby maintain males’ dominancy” (p. 27). However, I still see it as a step forward, which by no means is completely free of traditional values such as patriarchy and paternalism which we see often in *BV*’s portrayal. However, the step forward in this regard is that it emerged from the believers and followers of these traditions – the opinion leaders who are portrayed as willing to reinterpret and renegotiate these traditions without the notion of demonizing them or a wish to eradicate them overnight which would be impractical anyway.

Such portrayals make these notions believable, negotiable and achievable. These portrayals further encourage support from opinion leaders of traditional Indian societies, providing them at least the possibility of reevaluating old traditions. Such a strategy is far less threatening to those vehemently for or against any given social practice, and perpetuates hope for various outcomes, rather than defining a single, absolute line of thought. This strategy helps to connect and calm the audience because nothing is shown as certain, the audience and its beliefs are never judged as good or bad; however, the debate is portrayed for the audiences to witness and decide for themselves what the best course of action could be.

BV uses a strategy that helps bridge the gap between local governance and state governance. *BV* does it by portraying the representatives of state governance, such as a police inspector, more as a liaison or a facilitator, and not as a legal authority in its portrayals. In this sense *BV* is trying to find new ways to narrow the gap and build trust between the two systems that generally do not see eye to eye, or to try to find a balance in its portrayals.

The fifth conclusion of this study is the underlying power of traditions and religion that *BV* uses as a launching pad for challenging traditions. *BV* draws upon the religious beliefs and traditions to find basis for their support for women's rights. For instance, when Shyam asked Dadisa, a widow to come forward and welcome him in the house. He requested community members to re-evaluate certain traditions and ask if it is a good deed to take away anyone's right to enjoy happiness. Moreover, the scene in which Sumitra urges Sugna to trust and accept her parents' decision and marry Shyam is a perfect example. Sumitra invokes traditional practices that prescribe children to "obey" and "respect" their parents without questioning.

Children let their parents arrange their marriages and take other decisions of their lives without their consent. However, in this case such tradition became the basis for the support for women's rights such as widow remarriage. Moreover, Sumitra invokes religious beliefs and tells Sugna that God is the ultimate power, and that she must accept what God has sent her way. Sumitra says to Sugna that this time God has given Sugna a chance to remarry so she must accept it without questioning because God knows best and nothing happens without God's will.

In this scene it was clear that religion has provided Sumitra (a traditional ideal woman) to find justification for Sugna's second marriage in religious beliefs and tradition such as respecting parents. Such strategies to use what has already been in existence from centuries to give way for the new ideas and understanding of the same concepts resonates with Fairclough's concept of *intertextuality* and *interdiscursivity* which helps us to explore "how discourse is shaped by the participants and vice versa," and "how discourse is shaped by prior discourse of a particular culture and vice versa" (Johnstone, 2008).

The Lessons Learned

This chapter is the conclusion of this study. This study explored the role of *BV*'s discourse in demonstrating a mass media strategy that can be helpful in the portrayal of social issues that pose a break with tradition such as child marriage. Based on the four findings of the critical discourse analysis and discussion, this study concludes that *BV* used a multi-strategy technique in its portrayals of child marriage, gender roles, and women's rights. *BV* in its portrayals mostly maintained its traditional canvas by reinforcing traditional gender roles and traditions that promote child marriage such as patriarchy, honor, devaluing of a girl child, son preference, and women's subservience, among others, to provide a context of the child marriage problem to make sense of what "constitutes" the world of *BV* based on past discourses, ancient texts, and traditions that still inform the day-to-day life of a traditional Hindu society.

On the other hand, while maintaining its mostly traditional canvas, *BV* challenged certain traditional practices, certain "elements" from the past that promote child marriage and encourage storylines that highlighted women's rights, though without blaming or

demonizing the traditions, religious beliefs, modern ideas, or the older or younger generations. *BV* rather presented both perspective to the audience and leaving the power and decision of what to make of it mainly in the hands of its audience.

BV's use of religious and traditional beliefs as a launching pad and then sometime expanding on it is an example of using existing beliefs to create possible new interpretations of old traditions and perhaps start a new dialogue. In this sense *BV* explored how the world of *BV* was 'constituted' by new discourses, based on the new understandings, interpretations, and revaluations of old discourses featured in *BV* such as widow remarriage, widow inclusion, and education for the girl child, among others. In this regard, Fairclough's "key concepts for analysis . . . [that] are, 'intertextuality,' and, 'interdiscursivity'" (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 139) comes to life in *BV*'s portrayals. *BV* mostly maintained indirect approach toward the issue of child marriage. However, *BV* did use the strategy of captions, comments, questions, and disclaimers to channel and mediate the thought processes of its audience in a more direct sense by giving a direction and suggesting what and how one may think about these issues.

BV also features a strategy of bridging the gap of local governance and state governance by portraying opinion leaders and elders as the bearers of social change, and state representatives such as police officials as facilitators in local issues rather than an authoritative figure. *BV* portrays them as working together as opposed to working against one another.

Implications of the Study

Through this discourse analysis and the findings there are few things that can be done differently while portraying a social issue that pose a break with tradition.

As Ullah & Naseer draws on Gunter & McAleer (1990), they assert that:

Television presents to its larger and attentive audience a certain image of the world, providing a framework for what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in society, and also sends out implicit and explicit messages of what the world is like. In its portrayal of 'normal' life, it reflects many important social roles. (p. 25)

Similarly, it is argued that "through stories, a fictional representation of our social structure and social relations are presented. These fictionalized representations provide a mirror of the world, showing how power is allocated in society and how dominance and submission are idealized (Aaliya and Malik, 2012, p. 5; see also Gerbner, 1972). Such ideas have been used and needs to be understood from a different perspective.

Generally, television programs seem to showcase various issues through polarized portrayals such as good vs. evil; eastern vs. western ideas; traditions vs. modernity; women's subservience vs. women's rights, to name a few. However, there is a need to create a middle space between these polarized ends where there can be a dialogue; a space where different ideas or opposing ideas such as traditions vs. modern values; patriarchy vs. women's rights; deschooling vs. education for a girl child among others may be negotiated to facilitate social change. Instead of having segmented black and white polarized categories and a clear dichotomous structure, it would be beneficial and

resourceful to introduce such grey spaces in the narratives of the mass media programs where there is a continuum and amalgamation of both black and white sides creating the grey area and in that space a debate, a dialogue or negotiations to facilitate social change can take place. Television producers can include such approaches in their narratives without taking sides of one or the other polarized idea which would help balance the portrayals.

In essence, I relate to the assertion that mass media “socially constructed roles can be negotiated, mediated and left fluid instead of something fixed and eternal. Mass media, especially television, have an important role in constructing a secondary discourse about society and power relations” (Ullah & Naseer, 2011, p. 26). *BV* does it by presenting both traditional and modern views, however without demonizing one or the other; without pointing or blaming one or the other; without segmenting them into fixed categories of good or evil. However, *BV* challenges as well as mediates such sensitive issues through creating certain ‘fluid’ spaces in its narratives and discourses that facilitate negotiations between these polarized ideas. For instance, *BV* uses silences to negotiate between generations without confrontation; community support for women’s rights using traditional opinion leaders and elderly women such as Dadisa working together to promote widow remarriage, support from the representatives of state governance and local governance working together to maintain law and order, and transitional change in Dadisa’s attitude toward daughters-in-law among others. In other words, *BV*’s characters in its portrayal cannot be clearly placed in good or bad categories rather they seem to exist in a continuum that stretches between and fluctuates toward one end or the other but

are not fixed or entrapped in one segmented end. They seem to sometimes move from one end to another, and sometimes stay in the middle. It can be said that *BV* in its portrayals ‘negotiates’, ‘mediates’ and leave sensitive issues ‘fluid’ instead of something ‘fixed’ and ‘eternal’.

Drawing on the above idea of creating a gray and fluid space, the findings show that portraying the social issue in its current state including both positives, negatives, and in-between aspects, however if done without demonizing it, blaming it or blaming the people who believe in it can be a good strategy to keep a balance. Furthermore, using, melodrama, emotional storylines, to portray common people especially women’s sufferings, struggles, helplessness, and triumphs are some of the strategies that can be used to portray sensitive social issues. As it is argued that, “engaging narratives centering on a key protagonist, with multiple cliffhangers and denouncements (Singhal et al. 2004, p. 5)” can emotionally engage and connect audiences. Aaliya and Malik (2012) argue that, “soaps portraying interpersonal problems, crisis in the family, balance between career and home, modern yet traditional in beliefs and values have gained immense popularity among the masses” (p. 6).

Moreover, using traditions, religious beliefs, and individual roles as the basis to find support and advocate for social change is another strategy to create these gray and fluid spaces. These spaces dwell not on demonize the modern ideas or the traditions however finds basis in traditional values to support a new idea, bridging the two. Such strategies can be implemented in other mass media projects with a similar purpose as *BV*’s. However, one has to be mindful that using religious beliefs and traditions can be

limiting too. In this sense such resources can be used only as a starting point to introduce an idea and cannot depend on it for further goals of achieving social change which needs to be gradually and sensitively developed by perhaps involving opinion leaders and elders as the supporters of modern ideas But it is a good strategy to use as a launching pad for more open ideas that pose a break with tradition to create middle grounds, fluid, and gray spaces.

Additionally, in order to create negotiating gray or fluid spaces, “Community leaders and civil society organisations [sic] also need to become engaged in advocating against this practice in order to bring about change” (ICRW, 2015, p. 11) in the portrayals of television programs. In particular, the portrayals may include “outreach and sensitization [sic] efforts [that] must be made with religious and Panchayat leaders as they are highly venerated and can play a strong role in preventing child marriage. They know how to communicate effectively with parents and their opinions are held in high regard” (ICRW, 2015, p. 11).

Also, subtle ways of bridging the gap between local governance such as panchayats and state governance by the means of assuming a role of facilitators rather than authority by the state representatives is another strategy that mass media producers’ can implement to create fluid negotiating spaces that can bring two systems closer to some extent which may help address sensitive social issues.

According to Sekhon (2006):

Panchayats have a long history in India, with the earliest evidence from the Rig-Veda texts dating to 1200 BC. Over time, these self-governing *sabhas*, or

councils, evolved into panchayats or councils of five people. These councils, usually controlled by upper-caste men, were responsible for governing village affairs and managing land and taxes. Caste panchayats also existed to monitor social conduct and ethics of caste members as well as their occupational affairs. (p. 105)

It can be observed from the above quote that these self-governing bodies are crucial in the context of rural India where social issues such as child marriages are prevalent and can facilitate in creating negotiating spaces. Such bodies must be included in the portrayals of sensitive social issues which can serve as a liaison or connecting element between the audiences and the television programs to facilitate social change.

Additionally, using captions, disclaimers, comments and statements throughout the episodes provide another strategy. It is a good strategy to directly or indirectly suggest to the target audiences of what to make of the content, how to think about it and what to think of it to some extent. It helps to guide the audiences and steer their thought processes in the direction in which the producers of a mass media program producers may have intended for their audiences to think to some extent again creating a fluid space where nothing is fixed but directed and can be interpreted more than one way.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of the study was the lack of audience's thoughts on *BV* and its portrayal of child marriage, gender roles, and women's rights. What were their reactions, or responses to certain characters, and how did they receive or interpret certain portrayals where *BV* challenges traditions? Did it offend them, or make them think and

re-evaluate the traditions? Adding this element to the present study would have made this project rather large and unwieldy. Furthermore, if this aspect had been included, the study would not have been able to address the objectives fully and fairly.

The second limitation of the study was the perspective of the *BV* producers. It would have been helpful to have interviewed the producers of the show to understand how they responded to the Parliamentary controversy. Initially, I wanted to include that aspect in the present study but could not. Despite making numerous attempts to contact the producers, I was unable to get past even the receptionists. As the gatekeepers for access to the producers, it is usually difficult to get past them because of bureaucracy and producers' busy schedules. Because I was a mere graduate student, I could not attract their attention as a professional might have. Every time I attempted to contact them, I was told that the producers were not available, they were not free, or they were traveling, etc. In the end, I decided to reserve this aspect for future research. It would immensely add to the scholarship and improve our understanding of the political, as well as marketing, challenges, and how mass media professionals such as the producers of *BV* handle political and social challenges.

Recommendations for the Future Research

Future research to study *BV*'s influence on its audience would definitely add to the research and scholarship in terms of developing mass media strategies for portrayal of social issues that pose breaks with tradition. It would provide insight as to how certain characters, storylines, turns, and surprises were received by the audience that may inform the future mass media strategies.

This audience research can be done in many different ways. For instance, a comparative audience research study of men's and women's responses to *BV*'s portrayals can be done through in-depth interviewing. It would provide insight in terms of how men and women responded similarly or differently to the major themes such as patriarchy, honor, and the plight of a widow from this study. A comparative audience research study of an older-generation group and a younger-generation group can be done in terms of their unique response to *BV*'s portrayals of child marriage, gender roles, and women's rights.

There could be a comparative study conducted to examine storylines from current episodes (in 2016), after the time period of this study (July 2009). It would provide a similarity or contrast in storylines and may discern if they are still traditional or have become more modern, whether women are still portrayed in subservient ways or more empowered, whether other issues related to South Asian marriage patterns such as divorce are introduced and discussed, and similar areas of interest.

The second future recommendation would be to interview *BV* producers about their strategies that they may have employed to cope with certain pressures, especially the political pressure they had experienced as a result of the Parliamentary controversy. It would be significant to study, for instance, their thought processes in responding to the controversy; what decisions they had to take because of the pressures from the politicians; what decisions they themselves wanted to take in response to the situation but couldn't, and why; what was the lag time between writing, filming, and broadcasting

episodes; and whether they had enough time to make structural changes to address the opposition from politicians after the Parliamentary controversy.

As Thoman (1986) states, “According to the defenders of television, television is a business and its task is not to create a social conscience in the viewing public, but to deliver an audience to its advertisers” (p. 2). Apparently, it may be difficult to convince advertisers to sponsor a program that involves sensitive social issues or taboo issues that may cause some kind of controversy. In response to the needs of the sponsors, perhaps it is possible that producers generally wind up reinforcing social values, cultural norms, and traditional practices in their programming to avoid any risk, cultural disagreement or controversy from its audiences or other members of society.

Chakrabarti (2014) asserted that “at the heart of commercial television anywhere lies the relentless search for audiences that can be sold to advertisers” (p. 479). In response to this, it would be interesting to investigate other pressures with which *BV*’s producers have to deal, such as those from advertisers, and the need to deliver high ratings. Was there any struggle to maintain balance and juggle between the demands of the politicians and the advertisers if any? If yes then how did they handle it? Who has the power to control *BV*’s content, push a certain agenda, and influence the narratives and portrayals? Since India’s media content regulations are decentralized, what impact have they had on the *BV* producers’ decision-making processes? Were there any politically owned media involved? If yes then what impact did it have on *BV*’s producers’ decision-making process? It would immensely add to the scholarship and enlighten our

understanding of the political as well as marketing challenges and how mass media professionals such as producers of *BV* handle it.

Research Reflections

While doing this research I did not think I would become so close to the topic of child marriage and women's empowerment in general. It almost felt as if I became part of *BV*'s story or, more accurately, I realized that *BV* was making me consciously aware of my own life journey as a woman, which was in some ways similar, but different in others, from those of *BV*'s women characters. Different because I was able to get higher education, I was allowed to marry late; I was allowed not to do housework while growing up because as my parents said, my job was to focus on studies. This understanding made me realize how fortunate I was. At the same time, being privileged also reminded me of women around me with whom I grew up, their lives, their sacrifices, and their sufferings similar to those of women in *BV*. It was similar because I also come from the same state, Rajasthan, in which *BV*'s story was set and all the rituals and traditions are the same in my community. My mother, my grandmothers, my aunts, my female cousins, and my village's girl child friends; they were all child brides.

This realization hit me in the heart when I started watching *BV* episodes. Many narratives hit home, as not only as I saw them around me, I also lived them too. Every time, I was watching and analyzing the storylines of selected episodes of *BV*, I couldn't help going back to my memories and remembering similar experiences, not necessarily with me or my family but women and girls in general in the surroundings in which I was growing up.

For instance, I would see my cousins getting married very young. I used to feel quite jealous at the time because they used to get dressed in nice sparkly clothes, and jewelry and I didn't. When they used to visit their parents and my aunts, they would often engage in discussions of how their mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law were unfair to them. They would tell how they were unfairly treated and heavily overworked and still got yelled at constantly, and how their husbands did not respect them.

As Kandiyoti (1988) argues, "Young women have an interest in circumventing and possibly evading their mother-in law's control" (p. 279). But, the interesting part was, despite the fact that they were frustrated, depressed, and unhappy about their situation; they still believed it was a "normal" way of life. I have heard their mothers tell them that this is how usually it is and what else they were expecting. They must not think too much about it. Now they (the in-laws) are the ones who are responsible for their sons' wives, and the girls must do as they are told, and they do.

Sometimes, the mothers of these child brides were sad to see their daughters in such difficult situations and I heard them say often that, "my heart pains to see her (her daughter) go through this, but what can one do? They are the in-laws. They have the power, not us."

At that time, even I was convinced that it is the normal way of living. Such stories used to scare me. I remember one time when I reached marriageable age; I started feeling the fear of facing similar situations in which a girl suffers through the torments of in-laws. I was watching the television along with my family when, all of a sudden, I started crying. I was inconsolable. My parents and brothers all came running toward me to find

out what happened and why I was crying. I was too shy to tell them the real reason at first, but when they insisted I told them, “Once I get married, I will have to leave this house and you (my family) will forget me and abandon me and if my in-laws turn out to be a bad lot then you will make me stay with them.” In response, my father laughed and said, “Son (yes, he always calls me son) why are you worried? We will never let this happen to you. Don’t you trust your father?” My brother also consoled me and told me that “Nobody is marrying you off until you want to. Besides, you have to finish your studies first, don’t you?” My mother was supportive, too. She told me, “I will not spare anyone who plans to torment you.”

Such experiences informed me of my own inner struggles as a woman who wondered about her married life and in-laws. Moreover, this study also made me reflect upon my mother, who had also been a child bride. She used to tell me stories of how she got married to my father who was also in his teens. My mother told me that my grandfather came to their house to discuss the possibility of his son’s marriage to my mother. A local matchmaker informed about my mother’s eligibility. My mother was never involved in her marriage discussions rather it stayed between her parents and other elders of the family and community members, who helped in locating eligible bachelors. Only my grandfather came because it was not a norm at the time for women to go to see the girl. He came to “see” my mother, but he never saw my mother. “Seeing” a girl then meant seeing the family of the girl. Despite not actually seeing my mother, my grandfather said “Yes” to the wedding. Apparently, the deciding factor for my grandfather was the hospitality displayed by my mother’s parents, their mannerisms, the

taste of the food, and the mannerisms of the male family members who were allowed to come into his presence, unlike the women of the house, including my two aunts and my grandmother. According to my grandfather, all of them were humble and caring, and the food tasted fantastic, which assured him that my mom must have the same skills as her mother (personal communication with my grandfather when I was about 15 years old).

It was a fun topic for us children to discuss how my paternal grandfather decided for my parents to get married. The wedding was arranged and my father was informed. He had no idea how my mother looked, whether she was beautiful or not, light-skinned or dark-skinned, big or small, just like my grandfather.

When my father came to marry my mother, he still couldn't see my mother because she was in veil and her face was totally covered. He learned that she was light-skinned when the ritual of '*kanyadaan*' (giving away of daughter) was performed and my mother's father took her hand and placed it in my father's hand. He didn't see my mother's face until after they were married and reached his house.

Similarly, my mother never saw my father until the night of the wedding. The wedding procession was approaching the house, with my father was on horseback. When they reached the house, my mother managed to sneak to the far end of the house and saw my father for the first time through the crack of the rear door. She was quickly removed from there by the women of the house and told to go to her designated place.

While I was growing up, I used to see my mother always in veil in front of elders and male members of the family, even today. I ask her not to wear the veil, but she tells me that she feels awkward if she doesn't do it. I could relate to that and *BV*'s women

characters because when I got married and went to India to my in-laws' house, I felt awkward if I did not put a veil on. I still do it when we visit. Although my husband never asked me to observe this practice, I always felt guilty because my own mother-in-law always longed for me to observe the tradition, although she never forced it. I felt guilty because of filial piety for elders; if I didn't do it then I felt like I was disrespecting my elders and I was not a "good" daughter-in-law. Although, this is nothing which I already didn't know; the present study helped me recognize its existence as an extension of patriarchy which I participated in religiously. Writers state "The institution of *purdah* [veil], and other similar status markers, further reinforces women's subordination and their economic dependence on men" (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 280). As young teenage girls, my female cousins and I were always told to be quiet, soft-spoken, shy, and diligent in housework.

My family didn't care about the household chores, but they wanted me to have the other qualities. I used to try hard to keep up the above mentioned qualities.

I could relate to Sugna's widowhood and her remarriage through my family's tragedies. When I was a child, I witnessed the death of my eldest uncle, my mother's brother. He was very young and so was his bride. They were married for only three or four years before he died. All my siblings and I loved him very much. I recall the experience to be very difficult and somewhat frightening because it was a spectacle of many rituals that followed his death, just like Sugna's experiences after Pratap's death. I saw the inconsolable crying of all the women, but the men were not crying because men are not supposed to. I saw the question of remarrying my widowed aunt vigorously

argued in my extended family. Interestingly enough it was my grandmother who was most opposed to the idea of letting my aunt live the life of a child widow, as my aunt was still in her teens. My grandmother wanted my aunt to go marry again. I never heard or learned what my aunt thought about marrying again. To my knowledge, she never articulated her opinion, as it was the norm and still is not to speak about one's own marriage. I saw reflections of Dadisa in my grandmother's actions. She politely, with her veil on, confronted the male elders and consulted with my mother, who supported her idea to get my aunt remarried, and finally, she did remarry. However, we lost all contact with her after her remarriage, because my grandmother insisted we leave her alone so that she could get on with her new life. This experience helped me understand the inner struggles of Sugna, as well as Dadisa, in terms of widow remarriage.

As growing children, my siblings and I were always told about the filial piety which we still follow religiously. We all lived together and we still live together, specifically, my parents, my three brothers, their wives and their children, all under one roof, except for me.

My absence from the family home is because I got married and went to live in my husband's house with his extended family, which includes my husband's mother, elder brother, his wife and three children, surrounded by his extended family that lives in the neighboring houses. My father is the head of the family and we all look up to him for all the final decision. But he always asked for our opinions unlike our extended families. All the decisions of our life were made as a family collectively. However, I was lucky because, unlike my cousins, I was brought up just like my brothers for the most part. I

used to feel very fortunate when I used to see my village friends and cousins live a less privileged life than me, with limited freedom to do anything on their own, their educations cut short, and constant confinement to the house, to name a few.

In short, while doing the current research, all these childhood experiences helped me relate to *BV's* story and its characters at so many levels and understand their actions better. Sometimes, I used to put myself in one of the women character's situation and could literally feel how they must have felt in those situations. This understanding really helped me feel what these women must be going through and why they may feel helpless in certain situations. I know first-hand that widows stay away from auspicious occasions, as I have seen many widows do the same in real life, including my grandmother. When I asked why, I was told by many community women who said to me "Are you crazy? A widow never does that!" Then they would laugh. Widows agreed with them, too, and stayed away from the ritual site. The widows themselves laughed at my innocence of not knowing the protocols and norms.

I have seen my grandmother, who was a widow, immersing her life into religious activities because, according to her and many other women, it was the virtuous thing to do for women in general and especially for widows.

Such insights and context helped me make sense of *BV's* world, which was similar to my world in terms of my traditional extended families. This opened my eyes to some of the most obvious advantages I had in my life, which I had not consciously made note of before. The lives of *BV's* characters were different than mine because I had privileges that most of the characters didn't have.

During the initial stages of conducting this research I realized that I still felt guilty if I did not follow the traditions that are imbedded in the relevant patriarchal norms in the presence of my family, extended family, and in-laws, irrespective of whether they wanted me or not. It was because without even realizing, I internalized these oppressive traditions and found myself thinking that this was the natural way of doing things, just like *BV*'s female characters. I was still trying to please my elders by being a dutiful traditional daughter, daughter-in-law, a "virtuous" woman, and a supporter of patriarchal norms. The interesting part was that before doing this research, although I was carrying on with all these traditions, I never realized that in the process I was strengthening the very patriarchal norms that I was oppressed by, simply by practicing these traditions and never questioning them. It was because I saw them as 'natural,' and 'true'. In my mind that was the 'normal' life a Hindu woman lived, despite the fact that I am supposedly an independent, educated woman who is pursuing her PhD. in the United States, and "emancipated." But this study made me ask, was I emancipated in real sense or was I still chained by these patriarchal traditions that could inadvertently affect my life? This study helped me examine my own life, and it made me realize how I still was struggling to cope with strong patriarchal norms and how completely I am surrounded by them. During the study, I realized that the chains of these norms were almost invisible to me, as I couldn't see them clearly affecting my life. However, they were very much present in every moment of my life, and I believed that nothing was wrong, creating the illusion of my apparent freedom and status as an emancipated woman. But during the process of this research these patriarchal chains became visible. I realized that women like me are still

negotiating with the patriarchal norms and the guardians of tradition in our society.

Kandiyoti (1988) calls this concept “patriarchal bargains.” I was not at all aware of such concepts until I conducted this research, which made me realize that this problem very much exists in my life, and that women like me are the unwitting contributors to such bargaining tactics. According to Kandiyoti (1988), to cope with such struggles “women strategize within a set of concrete constraints that reveal and define the blueprint of what . . . [she] will term the patriarchal bargain of any given society” (p. 275).

This study made me aware that I was and still is in the process of continuously defining the blueprints of patriarchal bargain and I unknowingly and frequently “strategize within a set of concrete constraints” in my own life. This study made me realize how I was constantly calculating my actions, speech, movements, and mannerisms, to negotiate for more power in my life. It shocked me that simple things, such as learning dance, were classic examples of me carrying out patriarchal bargaining in my teens. For instance, I had always liked to dance and wanted to take dance classes. Learning dance was not a problem for me because I come from a performer’s family. Dancing carried out by daughters in selective environments, such as in close family spaces, was acceptable at the time I was growing up. I was even privileged enough to perform on stage with my father since I was four years old, and in his office programs where he could supervise me. However, I was never allowed to perform for anyone else. I did not realize until I concluded my research, that, at the time, I felt so privileged to have the ‘freedom and power’ to perform on stage. But I never realized that it was a ‘bargained’ situation, full of restrictions and constraints. As far as my childhood desire to

learn dance, whether or not I could learn dance was not the issue; however, it was a question of what kind of dance I would be learning. Coming from a higher-caste Brahmin Hindu family, my surroundings have taught me what was viewed as good and bad. These apparent norms made me constantly evaluate and calculate before I opened my mouth to seek permission for learning dance in my youth. As I was growing, in my heart, I loved western dance styles and wanted to learn those dance forms. However, each time any western dance programs or routine came on TV, my elders criticized those dances and blamed them for ruining the cultural and traditional dance forms. They thought that Western culture was polluting young minds, and that more and more young boys and girls are falling into this outside trap. My family elders often used to praise me and my siblings for not falling into this Western trap. Such appreciation and praise boosted my morale because I was seen as a 'good' girl, but at the same time, it made me realize that this 'good girl' image could also shatter the moment I asked for a membership in a Western dance class. I was unknowingly looking for ways to bargain with patriarchy that would allow me to learn dance without offending my elders or the boundaries set by patriarchal restrictions and constraints. I was ready to give up my desire to learn Western dance, and decided to begin learning the classical and folk Indian dance forms. The issue of my desire to learn Western dancing never made its way to any of our family conversations because I knew that my choices would be questioned and my 'good girl' image would be destroyed. It was still better to go out in public spaces and learn Indian classical and folk dances, than it was to learn no dance styles at all, which would have been the case if I asked for the Western dance class. I would have been seen as a

disobedient girl. I would have had to face stricter rules so that I would not drift from traditions. However, such decisions, made through patriarchal bargaining, did give me the freedom and power to go out and enjoy public spaces, where women typically have very limited, supervised, or no mobility. It gave me the power to enjoy the things that I wanted to do, particularly dancing. Through this bargain, I did not mind giving up Western style dancing in lieu of learning classical and folk style dancing, as long as I was allowed to dance. This bargain allowed me the power to go out and dance. I am sure many women in India and elsewhere in the world are practicing this concept and strengthening it, but without realizing it. They practice patriarchal bargaining in one way or another to elevate their status and gain power in the society. However, we as women have to realize that this oppressive system uses women to oppress women.

Dadisa's character in *BV*'s portrayals lives up to this assertion because Dadisa was portrayed as living within the constraints of being a woman and a widow. However, she bargained with patriarchy in terms of following and upholding the patriarchal traditions, such as controlling women, devaluing girl children and their education, reinforcing domestication of women, etc. She did it to gain power over her daughters-in-law, and to gain favorable connections with her sons by giving them higher status in the name of traditions and paternalism. As Kandiyoyi (1988) argues that, "Woman's life cycle in the patriarchal extended family is such that the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law" (p. 279). Dadisa's character is an exact representation of the above quote where she believes that her sacrifices, hardship,

deprivations, loyalty to her in-laws, husband, and family during her young age has led her to earn power in her old age that she exercises over her daughters-in-law and young members of the family. She seeks the same sacrifices, obedience, loyalty, sufferings, and hardship from her young daughters-in-law which she suffered in her young age. Now is her time to redeem her sacrifices and her daughters-in-law dare not challenge her.

Although Dadisa's strong support for patriarchal traditions highlights the oppressive system in place, her inner struggles in *BV*'s portrayals presented a unique opportunity for mass media professionals (and me) to explore beyond this drama series. For instance, patriarchy and situations of patriarchal bargaining can be used as tools that can help create various sites of struggle, gray and fluid spaces to facilitate negotiations to bring about social change. Kandiyoti (1988) asserts that, "Patriarchal bargains are not timeless or immutable entities, but are susceptible to historical transformations that open up new areas of struggle and renegotiation of the relations between genders" (p. 275). Dadisa's character in *BV* is a classic example of this concept. She always was an advocate of traditions, but Sugna's pregnancy threatened the family's honor. This situation urged Dadisa to carry out 'historical transformations' to break the tradition and support widow remarriage. Her decision to marry Sugna for the second time 'opened new areas of struggle and renegotiation of the relations between genders' where a widow was not allowed to remarry, as opposed to a widower such as Basant, and great debates were carried out among *BV*'s characters over dismissing old traditions that do not allow widow remarriage in favor of widow remarriage or not.

This realization itself made me aware that the constraints that I suffered through in my childhood and as a young daughter-in-law were delivering their fruits in my own life, but not in a good way. As I was growing older and time was passing by, I was also slowly turning into a traditional, controlling Indian woman in the name of paternalism and patriarchal bargaining, to gain power over younger generations.

For instance, without realizing it, I started observing the practice of checking on the whereabouts of my nieces. I told them not to go anywhere alone, not to stay out after dark, not to speak to anyone outside the family, and what to wear, among other things. I realized that I was slowly beginning to turn into Dadisa. Surely, if I kept up this attitude, in my old age I would become a mirror image of Dadisa, and that idea terrified me. *BV* showed me a reflection of who I was becoming without even realizing it. Knowing what I know now, and realizing through the process of conducting this research, I now make a conscious effort not to become a woman like the controlling Dadisa. I constantly check my own actions and decisions, and consider what consequences they can bring. I now advocate for my nieces. I try to give them as much freedom as they can have in making their own life decisions, supporting their education, and urging their parents to let them finish their education and to not rush into their marriages. My mother-in-law supports the idea of their education but she has already started worrying and getting anxious about my elder niece's marriage, given that she is now 14 years old, which I find quite worrisome.

There was a connection between my personal life experiences and the stories of *BV*. The lives of its characters, their struggles, their bargains with patriarchy, and other challenges were almost a mirror image at any given time of me, my extended family, or

my community. This research project has left me seeking a state of self-realization and self-constructive criticism of my own actions, looking at my surroundings and its events from a new perspective, carrying out a re-evaluation of my life journey and where I to proceed next. This research project and its results, and the personal realizations it has engendered, have encouraged me to make a difference in my own personal life, by making it a personal goal that my nieces, the other women in my community, and those beyond it are given a fair chance at life. I would do whatever it takes for my nieces to achieve their educational goals and delay their marriages until their educations are complete. It is one of my life goals to not let any more child marriages happen, at least in my own surroundings, in the name of patriarchal bargaining and paternalism. I would not mind being seen as the black sheep of the community, if it could help women of my family and my community to better their lives.

In conclusion, I would say that when I turned my gaze away from *BV*'s text and turned it toward myself, the above thoughts were running through my head. This helped me to analyze the text as informed by my own context, that somewhat aligned with *BV*'s traditional canvas, and then to question it. My memories and my childhood village experiences with my friends, my extended family, and my community helped me make sense of what was going on in *BV*'s storylines and my own life.

In essence, "The subject constitutes her identity as the being-with-this-constellation-of-concerns. Thus, through her internal conversation, the subject reflexively attains a strict personal identity by virtue of her unique pattern of commitments" (Archer, 2007, pp. 88). My internal conversations in light of my life experiences helped me relate

to the subject. My mother's and other females, stories of being child brides made it personal for me and helped me feel a sense of commitment to the topic and concerns of these child brides.

As a mass communication scholar, I would want to take up the project of rigorously carrying out research projects on the issue of child marriage and women's empowerment, especially in rural India, to create and share knowledge on the topic. Not much has been researched yet, and our knowledge of the issue of child marriage and factors affecting it is limited. This project has impressed me with the power of mass media as a communication tool to reach out to the humblest of the houses in rural villages through television, to spread awareness about various social issues, the laws that can help fight the social issues, available options, and organizations that offer support. This project gave me a new sense of purpose in my life, to look forward to making a difference. It may be a small thing, but this is how social change and revolutions start.

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Appendix A: Strategies for Analyzing the Data

In order to analyze and interpret the data, I referred to a combination of the seven strategies suggested by Rose (2001, p. 158), and a checklist for discourse analysis based on Fairclough (2003, pp. 191-4), Rose (2001, p. 161) and Tonkiss (1998, pp. 258-60) (Cited in Hay, 2005, p. 180). The researcher has combined the both as follows:

1. Suspend pre-existing categories: examine your text with fresh eyes and ears.
2. Familiarization: absorb yourself in your texts.
3. Coding: identify key themes to reveal how the producer is embedded within particular discursive structures.
 - a. What discourses are drawn upon in the text
 - b. How are discourses textured together
 - c. Is there a mixing of discourses
4. Persuasion: investigate within your texts for effects of “truth.”
 - a. What types of statements are there (fact, predictions, hypothetical, evaluations)
 - b. How are the statements communicated (orally)
5. Incoherence: take notice of inconsistencies within your texts.
6. Active presence of the invisible: look for mechanisms that silence.
 - a. What elements of represented social events are included or excluded
 - b. Which people are represented and how
7. Focus on details.
 - a. What is/are the genre(s) of the text
 - b. Is the text part of a series of texts

- c. Which other texts are included/excluded
- d. Whose voices are included/excluded
- e. Are voices directly reported (quoted), or indirectly reported

8. Focus on social events:

- a. What social event or chain of events is the text a part of
- b. Within what social network is the text a part of
- c. Who is the audience of the text.

Appendix B: Selected *BV* Episodes

The videos of all selected *BV* Episodes from June 29, 2009 to July30 2009 were accessed from: <https://www.youtube.com/>

Appendix C: Written Updates of *BV* Episodes

The additional written updates of all selected *BV* Episodes from June 29, 2009 to July 30 2009 were accessed from: <http://www.desi-tashan.com/>



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