

BORN OF MY HEART

A STUDY OF THE PROCESS OF
UNRELATED ADOPTION IN DELHI



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In memory of Ann Khan and Aruna Kumar

Abstract

This thesis looks into several aspects of the adoption of the unrelated child in Delhi. The adoption practice that I here describe is the domestic practice within India, more specifically in Delhi. From September 2002 to March 2003 and again in February 2004 I conducted fieldwork in an NGO that places abandoned, destitute or orphaned children in adoption.

I have divided this thesis into two parts. The first part discusses the prospective adoptive parents' expectation regarding the child and the act of adoption, as well as the role of the social worker in the adoption process. In the process of unrelated adoption in Delhi, it is in my view fruitful to understand the social worker in relation to Foucault's concept of governmentality and Rose's psy expertise. The social worker attempts to place every child in the NGO's care according to the UN resolution on the Rights of the Child, hence the 'best interest of the child' is her ultimate aim.

However, the social worker must not only relate to international conventions and discourses when placing children in adoption, she must also take into account her own society's social and cultural norms and values. There are several stigmas attached to the practice of adopting an unrelated child, concerned with the child's background as well as the infertility or childlessness of the adoptive parents. Childless marriages are by many considered unfortunate and the wife is seen as inauspicious. It is furthermore understood that her bad luck may be transmitted to others.

The second part looks into the incorporation of the child into the adoptive family. I describe this process in terms of Howell's concept of kinning. In order to describe the process of kinning I relate how the families avoid relating to the child's unknown background by seeing both the act of adoption and their own infertility as predetermined. In order to understand how the process of kinning commences when issues of background and persons' nature are important, I utilise Marriott's concept of substance-code. I find substance-code a good analytical tool in order to investigate kinning and how inter-personal relationships between the adoptive parents and adoptee may begin. Here I do not look into what happens to the individual person, but how the child becomes a part of the childless couple's family.

These examples should encourage an investigation not just of blood as “biogenetic substance” but also of the relationship between substance and code, and the degree to which these domains are clearly distinguished and separate – in other words, there is a need to interrogate closely the combinatory power of substance and code, which according to Schneider, was at the heart of the category of “blood” relative.

(Carsten 2001*b*: 50)

Acknowledgements

The other night when Marius talked about adoption with grandma, he found the idea very sad and it brought tears to his eyes. And he is right, initially adoption is sad; children are left by their biological parents due to various circumstances. However, the child is adopted and given new parents, who desire nothing more than to experience the 'pangs of parenthood', and in most cases the story has a happy ending.

I am grateful to the many couples who shared their experiences of infertility and adoption with me. Without you this thesis would not have been. I am also very much indebted to Mrs Mehta who let me learn about adoption in YCW; this one is for you.

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Mamma, bestemor, bestefar and tante, it is finally done!

Audhild Lindheim Kennedy
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List of Abbreviations

Buudir Barne-, ungdoms- og familiedirektoratet

CARA Central Adoption Resource Agency

CRC The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Guidelines Revised Guidelines of Government of India on Adoption
(Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA) Guidelines)

GWA The Guardian and Wards Act, 1890

JJA The Juvenile Justice Act, 2000

The Judgements Supreme Court Judgements; Lakshmi Kant Pandey vs
Union of India

The Hague Convention The Hague Convention on Co-operation and Pro-
tection of Children in Inter-Country Adoption

HAMA The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956

ICCW Indian Council for Child Welfare

IUI Intrauterine insemination

ICIS Intracytoplasmic sperm injection

IVF In vitro fertilisation

NGO Non-governmental organisation

NOC No-objection certificate

NRI Non-resident Indian

SA Scrutinising Agency

VCA Voluntary Co-ordinating Agency

YCW Yamuna Child Welfare

Glossary

- adharma** non-fulfilment of duty, demerit
- anuloma** hypergami or marriages in which the woman marries a man of higher status
- ashram** a (religious) center aiming at persons' (individual) spiritual development
- auto-rickshaw** a three-wheeled passenger vehicle based on a motor scooter
- avarna** not of the people
- ayah** nanny
- bagh** garden
- bangles** bracelets made of glass
- bhagya** fate, a persons share of luck, chance or fate
- bhakti** devotion
- brahmin** the priestly caste, and the highest of the four varnas
- chai** tea
- chapati** round, flat unleavened bread made of wholemeal (wheat), puffs up when cooked, eaten with most meals
- chappal** rubber sandal, flip-flop or thongs
- chota** small
- chunni** the long scarf or thin shawl worn with the kameez or kurta
- churidar** pants that are tight in the lower leg and bunched up around the lower calves, worn under a kameez or kurta.

dalit the suppressed, untouchables

didi older sister; respected, familiar older woman

dharma code for conduct, rightful duty

dupatta the long scarf or thin shawl worn with the kameez or kurta

dvija the twice born castes, i.e. the three highest ranking varnas

evil eye envy, evil look, magic, perhaps unintended

ganda dirt, dirty, bad, impure

ghee clarified butter

gori fair

in-country adoption unrelated adoption in India

inter-country adoption transnational adoption from India to a Western country

jati caste, community, kind, category, type

kacca water-based food that is thought to be easily contaminated by impure substances

kameez or kurta the shirt worn over the pants, varies in length from ten centimeters above the knee to the ankle. The length of the sleeve varies from wrist-length to sleeveless.

karma a person's action, good as well as bad, in past, present and the future; action, fate, destiny, persons' lot

kismet luck, fortune or misfortune, fate, destiny, (good) force

Krishna a Hindu god

kshatriya the king or warrior caste and second highest varna

kuch nahi nothing

log people

Mahabharata a Hindu Epic

moksha release or revelation

namaste good day

nasheed kismet; luck, fortune or misfortune

nazar the evil eye

pakka food considered to be less influenced by a person's nature, such as ghee (i.e. food fried in ghee), milk products and sweet foods

palna a cradle or to give nurture

pandit priest

pap sin

parata flat, unleavened bread fried in ghee

pratiloma hypogamy, when a woman marries a man of lower status than her self

quism lot or fate of each person

rajput upper caste jati seen as a kshatriya; in the past kings, warriors or soldiers from Rajasthan

rajasgun one of the three gunas, natures or substances; produces activity, passion, selfishness; dominant in the kshatriya

rajasik that which is dominated by rajasgun

ramadan the Muslim month of faste, that ends in a big celebration, or eid

Ramayana Hindu epic

reincarnation rebirth

Rig veda sacred Sanskrit texts

roti unleavened flat bread

salwar wide, loose fitting pants worn under kameez or kurta

samsara cycle of rebirths

Sanskrit an ancient Indian language, still used for sacred texts

sanskritisation the process where low ranking castes imitate the lifestyle of higher ranking castes in order to improve their place in the hierarchy

sari female dress that is made of one piece of cloth

sattvagun one of the three gunas, natures or substances; produces goodness, purity, wisdom; dominant in the Brahmin

sattvik that which is dominated by sattvagun

shudra the lowest of the four varnas, the servant varna, duty to serve the three higher varna

sunder beautiful

smrti that which is remembered; man-written holy or religious texts, also called the fifth veda; Mahabharata is one these texts

tamasgun one of the three gunas, natures or substances; produces laziness, ignorance, darkness; dominant in the Shudra

tamasik that which is dominated by tamasgun

tiffin lunchbox

thora a little

vaishya the third of the varnas, traders, farmers or merchants

varna the four hierarchical castes described in the Vedas

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Foreword

In the beginning of October 2002 more or less everybody in Yamuna Child Welfare (YCW) and the juxtaposed agency (VCA) discussed the destinies of two young girls, Santi and Kalika. One of the social workers, Ms Kalini, confided in me: “What is this but destiny? Kalika arrives in Palna more than six months before Santi, and they are brought here from two different districts.” Ms Mashia, the other social worker, tilted her head in agreement: “This is definitely the work of destiny.”

But before this conversation with Ms Kalini and Ms Mashia, Mrs Mehta, the General Secretary of YCW, assigned me to collecting the details about the girls’ arrival in the institution. Hence I gather information about the arrival of the two girls in Palna from Ms Sarasvati, the *ayahs* (nannies) and I read the transcription in the record book. Afterwards I ask the ayahs and Ms Sarasvati if they believe the girls to be sisters; they all do. Some of the ayahs even pointed out to me that the girls had similar facial features by placing the two girls next to each other saying: “Look! It is the same mouth, the same eyes, the same face.”¹ Below is my ‘report’.

The Reunion of Kalika and Santi

Kalika, about four years old, arrives in Palna² in February 2002. Kalika is brought by the police from East Seelampur Police Station. According to the procedure [upon the arrival of a new child] in Palna, Ms Sarasvati [the matron in Palna], interviews Kalika. In the record of the interview Ms Sarasvati states: “The child says her name is Kalika and that her parents are beggars. She has an older brother and a younger sister. Kalika cannot give

¹Told to me by the ayahs. My translation from Hindi.

²I conducted fieldwork in a Non-Governmental Organisation, NGO, called Yamuna Child Welfare, YCW, Palna is the name of its orphanage.

a clear account of where her family resides.”³

Towards the end of September [later the same year], a girl called Santi arrives in Palna. Santi was brought by the police from New Delhi Railway Station, she had been found wandering around by herself. The doctor examining Santi upon arrival assumes that she is about three years old. However, Santi is in a state that does not enable her to answer Ms Sarasvati’s questions when interviewed, not even telling Ms Sarasvati her name.

[When giving me the assignment Mrs Mehta informed me that] [a] week or so after Santi’s arrival in Palna doctor Dipankar informed YCW about Kalika who keeps telling the ayahs that Santi is her sister. Therefore I ask the ayahs when it was ‘discovered’ that the girls could be sisters. They confirm that when Santi arrived in Palna, Kalika told one of them that the new girl was Santi, her younger sister. Since the ayahs know Kalika as a bright girl, one ayah asked Santi if it is true that she is called Sati and if Kalika is her sister. In response to the questions Santi merely nodded in agreement. Accordingly, doctor Dipankar suggests having a DNA test taken of the two girls in order to establish whether they are really blood relatives.

Destiny in Delhi

Mrs Mehta decides that a DNA test is required in order to establish the true relationship between the two girls. Kalika and Santi are sent to a clinic, a blood sample is taken, and three weeks later Ms Mehta receives the result. The result of the DNA test verifies that the girls are definitely related, probably cousins, maybe sisters, though it is difficult to establish sibling relatedness when the DNA test result cannot be compared with the parents’ DNA. However, due to the test result Mrs Mehta decides that Kalika and Santi should be recorded as sisters, and that they will be adopted as a sibling group.

When the DNA test result came back the ayahs as well as the social workers, officials, volunteers and counsellors connected to and working for YCW cherished destiny. Unambiguously, everybody in Palna felt that Santi and Kalika’s destiny was that they had to be together, abandoned, yet together, in order to be adopted abroad to a much brighter future. I questioned the impact of destiny to some of my acquaintances. I said: “Is it not more like a

³The interview was originally recorded in Hindi but translated to English for me by Ms Sarasvati.

stroke of luck, than actual destiny that brought Kalika and Santi to the same institution?” But none of them agreed with me; it was destiny. They justified destiny following: “After all, Delhi is such a big city. What else can explain why Kalika was still in Palna and not adopted when Santi arrived?” Or, “How come that Santi was brought to Palna, in particular, when there are several agencies in Delhi, both in the neighbourhood of Palna and elsewhere in the city?”

I asked Mrs Mehta if she believed destiny had brought Kalika and Santi together in Palna after they had been lost, she answered, cryptically: “Well, to Indians destiny makes sense.” And I agree destiny definitely made sense to the people working in YCW, or living in Civil Lines or prospective adoptive parents. Ms Mary, the social worker in YCW, told me: “You know some agencies would not go to the lengths that we have gone to, they would not be willing to pay the extra money to have the DNA test conducted, also it is harder to place a sibling group than just one child, but we think that one should not work against destiny. It is God’s will.”

Introduction

In India over the past two to three decades, there has been a significant increase in the number of unrelated adoptions. I was told that in the mid 1980s the long-term goal was to have 15% of all adoption placements conducted nationally (the remaining 85% of adoptions being abroad), but that this figure had since increased to between 50 and 60% at the turn of the century. An acquaintance said: “There has been a change in Indian people’s mindset; they have become more open-minded towards adoption from an adoption agency.”

In this thesis I wish to explore the practice of unrelated adoption in Delhi. In order to do so I wish to present prevailing adoption Acts and guidelines, the role of the social worker in the adoption process, as well as her expert knowledge in the field and intention to conduct adoptions in the ‘best interest of the child’. But I also wish to investigate how unrelated adoption is made possible on the backdrop of the Indian system of castes, hence I will relate to the value of *destiny* and describing the incorporation of the child into his or her new family by applying Marriott’s ethnosociological concept of *substance-code*.

The process of domestic, unrelated adoption is described as it takes place in Yamuna Child Welfare, YCW, an adoption or placement agency in Delhi. When I use the term adoption in this thesis, I refer to the Indian practice when a couple adopt an unrelated child, i.e. of unknown origin and descent, from a placement agency. The couple is in most cases childless, and they have tried but failed to have a biological (natural) child. Many have also gone through several rounds of various fertility treatments. On an average the couple has been married seven to ten years. These couples adopt because “We want to complete our family.”

When my acquaintances in the field of adoption refer to modern urban adoption in Delhi,⁴ they say *in-country adoption*. In in-country adoption the adoptee will grow up in an Indian family and, in most cases, within India.

⁴According to Mrs Bhargava, a new and positive trend seems to be occurring: “Young couples are changing the trend, they go forward to adopt. Ten years ago the couples who adopted were forty plus, today they are close to thirty.”

Inter-country adoption is another local term and refers to the cases where children of Indian origin are adopted by foreign couples, and the adoptee grows up abroad. Inter-country adoption is in the (Western) literature often referred to as transnational adoption (Howell 2003a, 2003b). In this thesis the local terms denoting unrelated and transnational adoption, namely inter-country and in-country adoption, will be applied when my informants utilise these terms. Otherwise I will refer to these two practices as transnational adoption and adoption.

The unknown descent or origin of the adoptee implies that the adoptive parents will receive little if any information about the child prior to his arrival in the orphanage. Hence, the agency will often have no information regarding the child's caste and family background. Still, in India today caste membership is of paramount importance when it comes to a person's identity and social status, thus to adopt from an agency is a challenging project to many childless couples.

Traditionally the adoption practice indicated the adoption of a (male) child from within the family in order to provide a childless couple with a son and heir. Adoption today is conducted according to the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act 1956 (HAMA) and the Guardianship and Wards Act 1890 (GWA). HAMA is a family-oriented adoption law, since it mainly considers the benefit adoption holds for the family, but not for the child. However, a new act Juvenile Justice Act 2000 (JJA) changes this focus. This adoption act is child oriented and is more in tune with Western ideas based on human rights, as these are expressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Hague Convention on Adoption.

Adoption is a Beautiful Way to Start a Family

The social worker is placed in a central, yet ambiguous role in the practice of adoption in Delhi. This ambiguity is due to both her professional training in social work (which is founded within a Western psychological discourse), whereby her expertise is utilised, and the fact that she is Indian. Hence, she must also relate to prevailing social and cultural norms and values.

Social Authority

The position of the social worker may be perceived as ambiguous because of the divide between Indian thought⁵ and Western ideas as expressed in

⁵I say Indian thought, though the three social workers I observed and discussed adoption with were Christian, Muslim and Jain navigating within Hindu-world or reality. However,

psy-science literature (as following Howell 2006, Rose 1999) and international declarations, such as Right of the Child and Hague Convention. These declarations are present in many aspects of the adoption practice in Delhi. Further, they function as a framework of reference which is consulted by professionals in the adoption context, including the social workers, volunteers on the board, counsellors, lawyers, the government and the legislative body. The declarations are basic to the laws on adoption, like various adoption guidelines, acts and judgements. Thus, the Western ideas founded in Rights of the Child and the Hague Convention influence the practise of adoption in Delhi. When my supervisor, Signe Howell, visited YCW during my field study and interviewed the general secretary, Mrs Mehta, Howell asked Mrs Mehta what she thought about the declarations. Mrs Mehta merely answered: “They make you think.”⁶

The social worker’s professional training gives rise to a analytical focus, namely that of *governmentality* and *expert knowledge* (as following Foucault 1991). In this dissertation governmentality or benign control must be understood as the state’s intention to rule in the best interest of the citizen (Foucault 1991; Miller & Rose 1993; Rose 1999). Good control or governing of the citizens ensures the future of the state. Citizens that are well cared for or governed by the state will remain loyal to the state and secure its continuity. I understand expert knowledge or expertise as the social authority that certain agents, such as social workers or counsellors, assert due to their professional training. In turn, that very training has endowed the social worker or counsellor with exclusive truths and authority. I will return to this discussion in chapter four.

An Unknown Background

‘A child with an unknown background’ is the definition of the children in the care of YCW and Palna, and utilised by the social workers and counsellors. The definition denotes a child who is cleared available for adoption from the agency, and whose biological parents are unknown. But it also indicates that a child’s family history commences upon arrival in the institution. Most agencies do not allow themselves or the prospective adoptive parents to speculate about the biological or parental background of the adoptee. Such surmise may lead to presumed ideas about the adoptee’s (low or untouchable, and hence impure) caste identity. In other words, since questions about family

they all seemed to adhere and agree to the same understanding of destiny and adoption, as well as how the process of adoption should be conducted.

⁶Howell refers to this conversation in her recent book, *The Kinning of Foreigners* (2006: 203).

background have caste identity as a frame of reference, the definition ‘a child with an unknown background’ is preferred and applied to the adoptee since it states ignorance in relation to the children’s origin. The issue of caste in adoption will be related in chapter five.

The Last Resort

It is quite common for both social workers and adoptive parents to understand adoption as the ‘last resort’. This assumption has no straightforward origin and is probably best understood in relation to Indian perceptions of persons’ substance, with reference to body, blood, food, property, family life, commensality and persons, which all constitute and influence one’s essence (nature) (Carsten 2001*a*, Howell 2003*b*, Lamb 2002, Marriott 1976, 1990, Lambert 2000*a,b*). By sharing various, though preferably common substance (-codes), normal family interaction takes place, persons develop and reproduce common substance (-codes). Correspondingly, it is not so much a matter of what substance (-codes) is but what substance (-codes) does (Carsten 2001, 2004). In other words, adoption produces kinship by taking part in family life through sharing substance (-codes) and environment (following Lambert (2000*a,b*)). Hence, the adoption agency and the prospective adoptive parents develop their own sets of legitimising strategies and explanatory models in order to establish a social acceptance for adoption. The value of destiny may be seen as one such explanatory model.

Keesing (1975) suggests that kinship ‘is the network of relationships created by genealogical connections and by social ties’ (ibid.: 13). According to Keesing, adoptive relationships may be considered as kinship formed on social ties, since such bonds are “modelled on the ‘natural’ relations of genealogical parenthood” (ibid.: 13). In my view this is not true when it comes to the practise of unrelated adoption in Delhi, as I will show in part II. Keesing’s view of adoptive relationships is linked to the Schneider’s study *American Kinship* where kinship is best understood as a cultural and symbolic system, since it asserts that genealogical kinship constructs the code for conduct or code or a “pattern for how interpersonal relations should proceed” (Schneider 1984: 26).

The incorporation of the child in the family I relate to in terms of Howell’s concept *kinning*. In adoption, *kinning* refers to the efforts the adoptive parents make in order to create bonds on par with biogenetic relatedness with the adopted child. The desired outcome is to incorporate the essence, or what I like to refer to as the nature, of the adoptee into their own family and kin group (Howell 2003, 2006). Howell (2003, 2006) defines *kinning* also as the adoptive parents’ transubstantiation of a child’s essence (nature), which,

at the same time, coincides, with that of the adoptive parents. Hence, the child's essence (nature) must be seen in relation to that which is shared with kin (including social ties) through both nature and nurture. The aspect of incorporating the child in the family is further discussed in chapter seven.

A Positive Image

Certain dictums and value judgements were referred to regularly in the adoption process. The two most important dictums were 'adoption must be conducted in the best interest of the child' and 'disclose the fact of adoption to the child'. The two most important value judgements were 'adoption is in your destiny' and 'born of my heart'. The first dictum is a point of reference when a family is rejected, either due to insufficient monthly income, years of schooling or accommodation (see chapter four for further details). The second dictum is utilised when the social worker counsels the prospective adoptive parents about disclosure and when the social workers discuss specific adoption case amongst themselves. I return to disclosure in chapter three. In other situations, the adoptive parents may apply the value judgements used by the social workers, for example when telling others who are unfamiliar with adoption about their personal experiences. Adoption when presented to 'outsiders' involves manipulating the two value judgments, in order to present a positive image of adoption, so that society might become more accepting of the practice. These efforts are to a great extent due to the fact that Indian society in general is quite unaccepting of unrelated adoption,⁷ 'adoption from outside the family'. Chapters six and seven elaborate on these two value judgements.

It is Destiny

Destiny induces the adoptive parents to perceive the adoption as a predestined act. Owing to the idea of destiny, the act of adoption is given the quality of an inevitable, even divine, incentive. It is my view that, due to this predestined aspect, a new image has developed. This image is that the adoptive parents and the adoptee, to a certain extent, share, *a priori*, common nature, though the child is born by another woman and of different biogenetic substance.

⁷By extension, the outcome of the adoption practice, due to a paradox in Hindu-Indian society which stigmatises both marital infertility and extra-marital fertility, is that the adoption agency constitutes the meeting ground between the 'unwed mother' and the 'barren woman'. Finally, both the adoption agencies and the childless couples view adoption as a last resort. Adoption is the only prospect for the childless couple to live as a 'complete family'.

Consequently, the data I collected on adoption as a predestined act raised several important questions: Why does destiny establish a meaningful image of kinship both to adoptive families in Delhi as well as others? What sorts of strategies are employed?

I think possible answers to these questions are located in the local understanding of nurture, and in the dichotomy of nurture and nature as my informants employed it. This is especially so because these concepts are often applied when the social workers interview the prospective adoptive parents. Nevertheless, if the local conception of nurture is applied, a possible view is that common biogenetic substance, in terms of the Schneiderian concept of kinship is not essential in the construction of family ties. Schneider views the nature of kinship as a cultural system, “as a system of symbols, and not as a ‘description’ at any other level.” (Schneider 1984: 18). In other words, the aspect of predestination, and the exchange of substance (-code) amongst family members are symbols that constitute a cultural system of kinship.

The value of destiny plays a central role in the kinning of an unrelated child in adoption. When prospective adoptive parents and the social worker discuss the situation of childlessness, all parties agree that destiny has led the couple on the path to adoption. Generally, destiny is thought to influence people’s everyday lives in unforeseen ways, as well as helping them to cope with particular life situations that may involve and be laden with tension, ambiguity, contradictions and conflicting feelings. In the course of my field study I came to share the sentiment of one of my acquaintances who once exclaimed: “Without destiny adoption in India would not be possible!” It is my view that adoption in Delhi would have been less successful if it had not been for the value placed upon destiny. After all, destiny explains why a couple is childless and thus has to opt for adoption (however the notion of causality in the Indian context is viewed differently than in the West, see Wadley (1994)). My social worker acquaintances and most of the adoptive parents I interviewed valued destiny as the most important force and the deciding factor in the decision to adopt an unrelated child.

American Kinship

According to Schneider it is essential to recognise that American kinship actually consists of two operative systems: the order of nature and the order of law. The former refers to blood relationship, whereas the latter concerns relatives bound by law or custom alone. These two orders form three different groups of relatives: those who are bound by blood; those who are bound by law, and those who are bound by both law and blood. Thus an argument in *American Kinship* is that it is a system based upon blood as a substance

and that the relationship as *substance* is different from the relationship as *code for conduct*; in other words, the relatives in nature are different from the relatives in law. These two elements may occur in combination or separately, hence the variation in the emphasis people place on their various relatives (Schneider 1984).

Ethnosociological Model

It is my view that in order to discuss kinning in the adoption process in Delhi, the issue of transactions of substances in terms of the concept of *substance-code* raised by the Chicago School (Marriott 1976, 1990) must be accounted for. The ethnosociological model stems from research into the caste systems. This school introduces the non-duality of action and actor and the inseparability of substance and code for conduct (as following Schneider 1984), hence, substance-code (Marriott 1976: 110, 1990) in the “transactional analyses of social relations” (Lambert 2000b:92). Immanent in ethnosociology is that substance and code, actor and action are inseparable categories. In every transaction the persons involved absorb as well as give out “their own coded substances” (Marriott 1976: 111) that reproduce in others and themselves “something of the nature of the persons in whom they have originated.” (ibid.: 111) To be involved in transactions involves the transactions of various substances, particles, natures, qualities, influences, ideas and values between persons. Therefore, adoption may be understood as a transaction of social relation that between parents and children, since parentage itself involves transfers of bodily substance-code (Marriott 1976). Furthermore, the ethnosociological model proposes that Hindu persons must not be understood or studied in terms of the Western bounded individual, but thought to be divisible or *dividual*. The dividual persons are composites of the substance-codes they absorb and give out (Inden 1972). Hence, according to the Chicago School the dividual persons share substance-codes with their families, kin groups, communities (or *jatis*), caste groups and even localities or neighbourhoods (following Lambert (2000a). Thus, in order to adopt an unrelated child, the childless couple must first of all be willing to involve themselves in transactions with a person (child) of unknown substance-codes. They must be willing to engage in transfers of substance-codes between themselves and the child: to absorb and give out of themselves. However, according to Lambert (2000b), the ethnosociological “transactional analyses of social relations ... focused either on exchanges between castes, or on exchanges between kin within castes, kinship itself being seen as subordinate to caste in terms of its significance as a marker of social identity” (Lambert 2000a:92). As Lambert proposes, I too believe that kinship and the making

of kin, i.e. kinning, particularly in relation to adoption, have a far greater significance 'as a marker of social identity' than castes.

Indian Kinship

Schneider's (1984) concepts of code and substance and Marriott's (1976) substance-code are important analytical tools in understanding the process of kinning in adoption. If Indian kinship is perceived as either a social (or juridical where marriage and adoption are examples) or biological relationship, it constructs, in my view, an artificial dichotomy. Actual Indian family relationships present a different image. I observed and interviewed several couples who had adopted a child and who related socially to the child as if they shared the same substance; i.e. the meeting point of the social aspect and the aspect of biology was indistinguishable. Thus, it seems natural to assume that in some ways the Indian perception of kinship is neither biological nor social, but both biological *and* social. It is my claim that this is due to the Hindu perception of the person, and the Hindu person must be seen as formed socially, a product of his society (as following Mauss 1979). I analyse the process of adoption with regard to the non-duality of actor and action and persons' divisibility (Marriott 1976). Like Marriott proposes, I base my argument on the actual behaviour of the social workers and (prospective) adoptive parents.

This essay proceeds from the axiom that the pervasive indigenous assumptions of any society, such as Indian notions of the identity of actor and action and of the divisibility of the person, provide bases on which an anthropologist may construct his models of cultural behaviour in that society. (Marriott 1976: 109)

Thus, the act of adopting may not be understood separately from the actors involved, that is the adoptee and the adoptive parents, which also is evident in the value of destiny. After all, the social workers, counsellor and adoptive parents assume that the act of adoption is predestined.

In sum, by utilising certain dictums and value judgements in adoption, the social workers and the adoptive parents communicate a perception of personhood and kinning that dissolves the separation of kinship into either a social or a biological relationship. An important element in understanding kinning in Delhi is the notion of the person as divisible. The Indian person's substance (-code) is not defined as biogenetic substance as is often the case in the West. Rather, in Hindu thought substance (-code) is an articulation of the transaction of substance (-codes) and the processes that occur both between and within people, and which determine the qualities, capabilities,

and properties of the person. When an old man asked me, “What about the child’s blood?” he was not concerned about the child’s DNA or that the child was not family *per se*. His unease was due to the child’s personal traits, and personal traits are in the Indian context often seen in relation to substance-code. The old man’s statement may also be seen as a manner in which family, caste or community identity is communicated.

A claimed weakness in Marriott’s ethnosociology is that emic ideas are utilised as analytical concepts rather than “a distinct level of data” (Good 2000: 327). Emic terms and ideas must be seen in relation to “the role these ideas play in social practice” (Good 2000: 327). However, Good upholds that “these criticisms should not be understood as denying the importance of actor’s ideas about and explanations of their behaviour” (Good 2000: 327). Dumont (1980) however, claims that “the whole should not be seen by starting from the notion of the ‘element’ (...) but by starting from the notion of the ‘system’ in terms of which certain fixed principles govern the arrangement of fluid and fluctuating ‘elements.’” (Dumont 1980: 34) However, such a view, which emphasises the system, often fails to see the actor. These criticisms of the ethnosociology are fruitful, since they may provide a more complete foundation when conducting a study in India. If I were to consider, in this thesis, the role of the social worker and the value of destiny in unrelated adoption merely on the basis of my field data, the study would show itself to be futile. It is also essential to account for literature on governmentality, expert knowledge, destiny and karma.

Next I intend to introduce my field: Yamuna Child Welfare (YCW), a non-governmental organisation (NGO); the NGO’s orphanage, Palna, and the Volunteer Co-ordinating Agency (VCA), a Supreme Court mandated body set up to promote unrelated adoption in Delhi. I conducted fieldwork over a seven-month period, from September 2002 to March 2003, and from February to March 2004.

Delhi

In the 2001 Census of India 1 027 015 247 people were registered, of whom 13 782 976 lived within the state borders of Delhi. Commonly, Delhi is divided into five main city areas: North Delhi, West Delhi, East Delhi, (Lutyens’) New Delhi and South Delhi. Yamuna Child Welfare is situated in North Delhi, the city’s oldest part, where the astonishing Mogul Red Fort is located. Just a stone’s throw west of the river Yamuna and the Tibetan Market, one finds Civil Lines. The area is named after the British administrators who retreated there in the early 1900s, ‘in the country’. Several bungalows still

remain there, along with beautiful gardens, quiet streets and the old Oberoi Maidens Hotel. The calm and quiet of Civil Lines is in stark contrast to the hustle and bustle in the areas around Jama Masjid, Chandni Chowk and the main bus station at Kashmiri Gate. It can prove quite difficult to navigate to Civil Lines, since the area has few tourist attractions. Few taxis and auto-rickshaws⁸ drive there from the centre of Delhi. There are, however, a couple taxi and auto-rickshaw stands in the neighbourhood that serve the residents of Civil Lines. Therefore, arriving in Civil Lines feels a little like coming to a small, upper-middle-class village on the outskirts of Delhi.

Yamuna Child Welfare (YCW), where I conducted field work, runs, amongst other social services, an adoption programme and an orphanage. In this dissertation I will refer to this NGO as either Yamuna Child Welfare (YCW),⁹ or Palna. Palna is the orphanage closely connected to the adoption programme. *Palna* is a Hindi word meaning ‘cradle’ or ‘to nurture’. The name of Palna literally refers to both meanings: the cradle placed outside the gate and the care given by YCW. YCW and Palna is situated in a fenced compound or garden I call Sunder Bagh.¹⁰

Civil Lines

I could see and hear the heavy traffic on the Ring road (which encircles Delhi) from the balcony of my flat in Raj Narain Marg. However, the area still gives an impression of quietness and some green lushness (which is quite rare outside Lutyens¹¹ Delhi or New Delhi) due to the trees and gardens scattered around the neighbourhood. The impression that Civil Lines is like a village is emphasised since it consists of a relatively limited area with a rather small population. Some of my informants and neighbours recall Civil Lines as an area which was ‘a lot greener and lusher’. My neighbour (the youngest of the below mentioned sisters) told me “Civil Lines was considered to be in the country when I was young.” Another neighbour, associated with YCW, told me: “Civil Lines was a place where everybody was from the same family community.” As mentioned, it was the British colonial administrators who originally settled Civil Lines as their country resort away from the city hustle and bustle of Delhi. According to some of my neighbours, the Kapurs (in this case, a brother and his two sisters, all over sixty-five years old), their great grandfather, who was of a Rajastani or *rajput* background (*kshatriya*), bought

⁸An auto-rickshaw is a three-wheeled passenger vehicle based on a motor scooter.

⁹The name of the NGO is fictitious, however the General Secretary agreed to let me refer to the NGO as Palna, which is one of the names it is known under in Delhi.

¹⁰Sunder Bagh is a pseudonym.

¹¹Sir Edwin Lutyens, 1869–1944, is the English architect who planned New Delhi.

most of Civil Lines and divided it between his three sons. Presently, many of the descendants of these three sons live in Civil Lines, but, sadly, there are only a handful of the beautiful bungalows left. The other bungalows have been demolished and replaced by blocks of flats, because, traditionally, sons have a right to inherit an equal share of their father's (or ancestral) property. Hence, the new blocks of flats have been divided amongst descendants of the rajput great grandfather. It was in one of these blocks of flats that I lived during field study.

Close Ties

The fact that Civil Lines is, in many ways, like a small community has some consequences for YCW. One such consequence is typically manifested in the composition of the YCW board, where many of the members live in Civil Lines and have close relationships outside YCW, either as friends, neighbours or relatives. Another influence by the neighbourhood on YCW is that only five minutes' walk away is another NGO, the Church of Charity.¹² The Church of Charity also runs an orphanage and an adoption agency. There is a strong line of communication between the two NGOs. It is however my impression that, when it comes to the practice of adoption (both domestic and transnational), YCW has a more guiding influence on the Church than the Church has on YCW.

Yamuna Child Welfare

I have named the organisation after the river Yamuna that runs through Delhi, because this river is traditionally seen as an important and auspicious river in North India. My acquaintances believed that important events or things should have auspicious beginnings; maybe this will be one.

Yamuna Child Welfare was established in 1952, after the Partition, as an initiative to provide services for and to care for underprivileged, orphaned and destitute children. It is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and most of its funds are obtained through charity, donations and (low) fees for some services, like the adoption programme, together with some government funding. In the beginning YCW offered only recreational activities for children, but the organisation has grown and expanded over the decades to cover several fields.

YCW is run by a board (with between ten and fifteen members) and a

¹²The name of the NGO is fictitious.

General Secretary,¹³ Mrs Mehta. There is also a committee of about 500 executive members. Everybody on the board works for YCW on a voluntary basis, including the General Secretary. The General Secretary puts in a great effort and she works more or less full-time. Most of the active board members are fairly well educated women, with secure finances, and enough time available. They are mostly housewives with children in school or grown up and have servants who take care of the day-to-day running of the household. These members work less than the General Secretary. YCW is central to the social network in Civil Lines. A couple members of the YCW board are also members of the Voluntary Co-ordinating Agency (VCA), an adoption promoting agency.¹⁴

Mrs Mehta, in addition to her office in YCW, is also the Treasurer in the VCA. The employees in YCW and VCA refer to many of the board members as coming from the elite, while others again claim that the board members belong to the upper middle class. In relation to caste they are hard to place. YCW also has many paid employees taking care of the children; these are the ayahs (nannies), doctors, nurses, physiotherapist and house keepers, as well as the accountants, social worker, secretary, software engineer and cleaners who are in charge of the more practical aspects of running an organisation like YCW.

Sunder Bagh

Yamuna Child Welfare is fenced off by a high brick wall, with broken glass on top to keep intruders out. The entrance is guarded twenty-four hours a day by a watchman, and it consists of a double gate, for the cars, and a door on the left hand side of the gate for the staff and visitors on foot. On entering the grounds of YCW, every visitor has to register himself or herself in the watchman's register, stating their name and purpose of visit. Just outside the visitors' door, immediately to the left, built in the wall, is a small basket or *palna*. When a baby or a child is placed here a bell rings notifying the guard of the arrival of a new child. The present Palna, the orphanage, was constructed in 1994, and is to the right of original Palna. To the right, inside the gate, is the office building of YCW. The YCW's office building is L-shaped, with the main entrance in the middle of the L. Located at the top of the L, the record room is on the left, and on the right are the offices of Ms Mary (the adoption officer) and Tincy (YCW's secretary). Mrs Mehta's office is located at the bottom in the front tip of the L. The area by the main

¹³The name on the door says General Secretary, I have chosen to use this term instead of the more common 'Secretary-General'.

¹⁴What the VCA is and its function will be explained later in this chapter.

entrance and the entrances to Mrs Mehta and Ms Mary's offices is used as a waiting room. Here the wall consists of large windows, overlooking Palna. In the waiting room there are seats for the visitors, who are mostly couples (and their families) who want to register as adoptive parents and prospective adoptive parents waiting to be shown a baby they may adopt.¹⁵ Next to the entrances of these two offices, on the right hand side, is a small reception desk. Behind this desk one finds Manu, Pradeep and sometimes Sarjo. These three men work as servants in YCW. Their work as servants indicates, in effect, that they do odd jobs around the office, like bringing refreshments such as *chai* (tea) and water, photocopying documents, doing the cleaning before the office workers arrive in the morning and so on. Sarjo has also been given a motor scooter, so that he can deliver urgent documents to the local courthouse, the police station or the lawyers. Often the office workers will call on one of the servants to run an errand or two.

Palna: Cradle and Nurture

Palna is a home for 'orphaned, destitute and abandoned children'. Palna received its first abandoned child in 1978 and has since then conducted adoption, both domestic and transnational. The first Palna baby placed in adoption went to Sweden. The adoption practice in YCW started as foreign placements, and in the eighties it had expanded to involve domestic, unrelated adoption. Palna and the adoption programme is the branch of YCW which I chose to focus on in my field study.

Totally, in the period from 1978 to 2002, Palna cared for 3745 children. Of these children 739 have been restored to their biological parents, 1070 have been adopted transnationally and 1102 have been adopted in domestic, unrelated adoption. Palna's records show that the number of children placed in adoptions domestically did not pass 20 until 1984, while in 1991 more than 50 children were placed in unrelated adoption.¹⁶

The Palna building is shaped like a figure eight, with two courtyards where the children can play. In Palna there is a visitors room, where adoptive parents are first shown their baby. Next is the small office that the housekeepers and

¹⁵When the baby is ready to be shown the waiting couple, the couple is taken to the parents room in Palna, so that they will have the privacy they need to become acquainted with the baby, in order to decide if they like the baby and would like to adopt him or her.

¹⁶In October 2002 I attended a conference, the Fourth International Conference on Child Adoption (organised by the Indian Council for Child Welfare). Here it was claimed that though there are 100 000 children in institutions all over India, merely 1600–1700 are adopted annually (nationally) (and transnationally only slightly fewer). See figure in appendix.

the seamstress share; opposite is the nursery, where the toddlers sleep, eat and play. Adjacent to the office is the girl's room, then the boy's room, both furnished with bunk beds. At the back, to the right, is the dining hall and the kitchen. To the left are the doctor's office, the medical room and finally the baby ward. The baby ward is furnished with about thirty cots, in which many of the babies who come to Palna, often as young as only a day old, sleep and spend about three months of their lives before they are adopted by an Indian family. Some of these babies are placed in the basket outside the gate, and others are transferred from a hospital, where the birth mothers have left them. I have already mentioned two ways the children come to Palna, but there are two more. Sometimes the parents may relinquish their child(ren) at the YCW office by signing an official document which declares that the parent(s) give up their legal rights to the child. And some children are found wandering around in one of the train stations or at a bus station (in Palna's case the bus station at Kashmiri Gate) and are brought by the police.

In Palna few children actually stay longer than a year before they are adopted by either Indian or foreign couples. The children in Palna range in age from zero to twelve years. The children aged zero to two years are by and large placed in domestic adoption, unless the child has a dark complexion, suffers from a medical condition, or belongs to a sibling group. Most Indian couples are reluctant to adopt such children.¹⁷ Because of this situation some foreign agencies, after encounters with the Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA), will call their (international) prospective adoptive parents 'India's rubbish dump'. Barbara Yngveson (2004) observes, "the directors of children's homes are dependent on international adoptions for the placement of older, darker, sicker children, 'special needs' children, and low birth-weight babies who have been given into their care." (ibid.: 218)

The majority of the children in the age group two to six years are placed in transnational adoption. Locally, by the agencies VCA and CARA, the adoption of the age group two to six years is termed 'older child adoption'. It is quite a strenuous task for the social workers to place the 'older child' with an Indian family. Some of the Indian families I interviewed explained they were reluctant to adopt an older child: "the older child comes with *luggage*". 'Luggage' is in this sense used as a reference to the older child's past, indicating, firstly, child's previous relationship with the biological family, but also including the institution or orphanage.

During my time with YCW, I did not hear of one child above the age of six that was placed in domestic adoption. The children who are in a

¹⁷The reluctance of Indian adoptive parents to adopt these children will be explained in chapter two.

sibling group, older, with a medical condition or dark complexion are adopted by foreign parents, or occasionally not at all. While working in YCW I experienced one child, aged twelve, placed in adoption with a family from southern Europe. Interestingly, the social worker or the General Secretary will ask the child aged six years or older if he or she would like to be adopted abroad by foreign parents, or remain in the orphanage under sponsorship. This is a practice which YCW has adopted because it acts in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Hague Convention on Adoption, the 'best interest of the child' is justified since the child is consulted whether he or she wants transnational adoption. Thus, the child's opinion is considered when the social worker and the General Secretary make the final decision about the child's future. A small number of children are transferred to government institutions. These children are in most cases mentally challenged, hence extremely difficult to place in adoption even transnationally.

It is thus, in a curious indirect manner, the Indian adoptive parents who decide which children will be placed in adoption in India or transnationally. However, it is the social worker who decides which children any given couple will be shown. In some cases, in order to speed the process up for particular children, i.e. the slightly older children (about two years of age) and children of dark complexion (particularly girls), the social worker may show a couple a child they will reject. The social worker acts in such manner in order to have the required three rejections for the child, so that the child may be placed transnationally much sooner, and thus minimise the time the child spends in institution. Otherwise, such children will have to spend a considerably longer time in the orphanage, since few couples desire a dark, two-year-old girl. Sometimes when the social worker has found a child that will match a given couple well, if the couple has quite high demands she will also show the couple one or two children who will not fit the couple's requirements. Hence, the social worker makes the couple more susceptible and less sceptical to the child she has intended for the couple all along. Nevertheless, the social worker's main task is to determine which couples may be approved and allowed to register as adoptive parents.

The General Secretary

Mrs Mehta is a widow in her fifties and has been working as a volunteer in YCW for about twenty years, of which she has been the General Secretary for the past fifteen. She joined when her children began school. In addition to her volunteer work in YCW and VCA, she is also involved in her late husband's business. Mrs Mehta has two grown children and lives in the neighbourhood of YCW, with her eldest child and his family. One of the streets in Civil

Lines is named after her father-in-law, who was in the Government. Mrs Mehta is quite wealthy. Mrs Mehta is the only woman in YCW who wears beautiful silk saris to work every day; though the other women wear beautiful ‘suits’, i.e. *salwar* or *churidar* under a *kameez* or *kurta*.¹⁸ Many of the other volunteer board members as well as the paid employees commented that Mrs Mehta always wears her saris most beautifully.

The children in Palna adore Mrs Mehta and try to sneak into her office as often as possible, where she gives them a treat or two, chats with them or lets them run small errands for her. Mrs Mehta told me that she preferred this arrangement, since it gave her the opportunity to ask the children questions about their situation in Palna without any of the ayahs eavesdropping on the conversation. In that way, she felt she had some control over the conditions in the orphanage. She elaborated, “When I come to Palna the children are on their best behaviour. In Palna the children will not tell me what is going on. But when they come to my office they tell me what is happening, and if somebody treats them badly. I need to know these things in order to keep control in Palna, and only the children will tell me this; the staff will not.”

I observed that it is quite common for wealthy urban upper middle class women (in Delhi) to do volunteer work in an NGO which is concerned with child welfare. I was told by an acquaintance that many upper middle class women, if they feel that they have too much time on their hands, for example when their children begin school, join an NGO as a volunteer rather than joining the paid work force. Similarly, another of my acquaintances in the neighbourhood, Mrs Shalini Kapur,¹⁹ started her ‘career’ in YCW. In the beginning she came to Palna to read to the children, when her own children were in school. Later, Mrs Shalini Kapur was recruited to the board, before she was made a treasurer of YCW. During my two fieldwork periods she was elected President²⁰ of YCW. In other words, it is possible to join an NGO on a small scale basis and later be signed up for more important positions, when

¹⁸Salwar are the wide, shapeless pants worn under the kameez. Churidar are tight in the leg and bunched up around the lower calves. Kameez is the shirt worn over the salwar. It varies in length from ten centimetres above the knee to the ankle, and the length of the sleeve varies from the wrist to sleeveless. Some women wear the kameez fairly tight fitting to the body, while others wear it quite loose. A long scarf is worn with this suit, called *dupatta* or *chunni*, draped from the shoulders in a u-shape covering the breasts.

¹⁹Mrs Shalini Kapur is married to the nephew of the three old Kapur siblings mentioned above. Presently, Mrs Shalini Kapur is the General Secretary of YCW. Sadly, Mrs Mehta passed away in November 2006. I am greatly indebted to Mrs Mehta: were it not for her insistence that I should learn about unrelated adoption, this dissertation would have taken a much different and, it is my belief, a less exciting turn.

²⁰When I first came to Palna the late Mrs Ann Kahn was President. I am grateful to her for her hospitality and generosity. Sadly, Mrs Ann Kahn passed away in autumn 2003.

these are available, by the more 'settled' board members.

According to Fruzzetti (2003) social or community work in India is a great priority. Further, that social work grew out of Gandhi's ideas, the circumstances around partition and home rule. Fruzzetti's perception is in agreement with my findings in YCW. During my field study, to be precise in October 2002, YCW celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. Mrs Mehta (and others) told me that YCW was funded as a response to the aftermath of the Partition of India, Pakistan and East Pakistan in 1947. The events in the years after the Partition, as also observed by Das (1995), created a need for social services that particularly aimed at helping children, youths and women. According to Fruzzetti (2003) there has been a shift in social work in India, from being a service accommodated by those who are well off financially to the 'opening' of social work as a profession. Like Fruzzetti, I too observed that the volunteers in YCW did not commit themselves because of a religious purpose, and further that they were all women. However, amongst the professional social workers I did observe some men, from NGOs in Mumbai. Fruzzetti's informants raise some concern that voluntary work is diminishing. However, in the case of YCW its organisation revealed no reason for such concerns.

Ms Mary

In many ways Ms Mary became my mentor during my fieldwork in YCW, since she happily shared her vast experience with me. Though both the social workers in VCA, Ms Mashia and Ms Kalini, provided much information and opened many doors, I still regard Ms Mary as my central source of information regarding adoption. Ms Mary is born of parents who emigrated from Southern Europe, and she is Catholic. Even so, it is impossible to question Ms Mary's Indianness. Her Indianness is very much present in her great interest in cricket and the surprise she experienced when an Australian did not know the name of all the team members on the Australian cricket team for the World Cup in 2002 (Ms Mary did of course). Ms Mary's Indianness is also present in her love of Indian food, her distaste for Italian food, and, none the least, it is very much present in her firm belief in destiny: "Karma I do not know about, that is for the Hindus. But destiny and God's will, nobody can question."

In her late thirties, Ms Mary is unmarried and lives with her family in South Delhi. Ms Mary and her siblings are all born in India and hold only an Indian citizenship. Ms Mary is educated, holding an MA degree in social work, and is thus a professional. She has been working for the organisation the past eighteen years.

Since Ms Mary lives in South Delhi, she had to travel by bus for about one hour every day in order to reach YCW. Ms Mary arrives at YCW at

nine or ten o'clock every day, depending on whether she has to go to court first in order to finalise pending adoption cases. She finishes at four, but will leave earlier on the days when she goes on home study visits, as these will last several hours in addition to the travelling time. On these occasions Ms Mary travels in the 'YCW van', a white four-wheel drive with the YCW logo in dark blue print. The van, of course, has a driver.

Social Worker and Adoption Officer

As a social worker, Ms Mary has an enduring and close working relationship with Mrs Mehta. Ms Mary reports to Mrs Mehta on the progress of each adoption case, and they discuss the (recently) registered prospective adoptive parents. The two women work very closely, and share many secrets (of the trade) about what goes on within the organisation and in the field of adoption, particularly in Delhi but also in India in general. Hence, Ms Mary has an important and an exclusive position, as adoption officer, in relation to Mrs Mehta. Ms Mary possesses a lot of authority and is highly respected, but at the same time she is also one of the paid employees like the others working in YCW. In YCW there is a divide between the 'wage-winners', the regular employees, and those who work on a voluntary basis. Ms Mary related to me on a couple of occasions that she, particularly in the beginning, found it difficult to balance her professional relations between the regular employees in YCW and the board of voluntary members.

Ms Mary portrayed the commencement of her career in YCW, before her position within the organisation was established as it is today, as a sort of 'catch 22' situation: on the one hand she had a special position in relation to the other employees, but on the other hand she was not a member of the YCW board. Ms Mary said that in the beginning she experienced this position as a bit trying. She was, after all, inaugurating her career both in YCW and as a social worker. Occasionally she was not taken seriously by either the board or the other employees in YCW. Ms Mary felt she had to prove herself, her people skills and qualifications continuously when she first entered the field of adoption in Delhi. Observing Ms Mary interacting with other professionals and social workers when meeting other placement agencies, relating to CARA, attending the court or an international conference on adoption, as well as interacting both with Indian and foreign adoptive parents, I realised that Ms Mary has been quite successful in navigating her way in the (mine-) field of adoption in Delhi. She is well respected as an adoption officer, partly because of her experience and partly because of her competence in the field.

Establishing New Relations

When new prospective adoptive parents register their applications to Ms Mary on Friday and Saturday mornings, Ms Mary talks to every couple. She told me that during this first conversation she more or less establishes which couples are suitable and can thus register as adoptive parents. I return to the couples' suitability in chapter four. I asked her once what she thought were the most important elements of the first impression given by these childless couples. She replied "the readiness and open-mindedness of the couple to go in for adoption" and cleanliness, whether they presented themselves well.

At this first stage in the adoption process, when a couple seek out an agency, make inquiries about adoption and file their application, many are rejected and not registered. Ms Mary takes pride in rejecting any unsuitable families before the home study visit is carried out, particularly because she does not want to add more suffering to infertile couples. She explains, "They are already suffering and having a hard time because of their childlessness; I do not want to add to their tension by giving them a false hope when I know they will not be suitable."

Acting Out God's Will

When visiting the families in their homes Ms Mary would discuss the notion of destiny and its impact on the couples' lives. During these conversations both Ms Mary and the couple seem to communicate destiny and the divine intervention without problem, though the couples would be Hindus and Ms Mary a Catholic. I observed similar incidents with one of the social workers in VCA, Ms Mashia, a Muslim. She, too, discussed the influence of God and destiny in matters relating to infertility and adoption with prospective adoptive parents. I asked her whether Islam and the notion of destiny were compatible, and she answered: "We Muslims do not believe in karma, palmistry and that Hindu stuff, but destiny is God's path for us humans, and we believe in God and his will." It seems that the value of destiny and God's will are familiar notions, and ways in which the various circumstances in a person's life or fate are deductible. The social workers, whether Hindu, Jain, Christian or Muslim, did not distinguish between the ideas of destiny and God's will. The value of destiny and God's will seemed to establish common grounds for the social workers in counselling childless couples on adoption. In other words, destiny, and to a lesser extent God's will, created a unity and a framework for shared cross-religious experiences.

The Voluntary Co-ordinating Agency (VCA)

It is an association of all licensed adoption agencies in a particular region and is recognised by the Government of India. Such agencies are created in pursuance of the Supreme Court direction. (ICCW, Tamil Nadu 1998)

The Voluntary Co-ordinating Agency (VCA) is a Supreme Court mandated body and a registered non-profit organisation whose aims are the promotion of adoption and the welfare of children in India. Every state involved in adoption, whether within India or transnational, has its own VCA. The Kant Pandey Judgements are the VCA's point of reference, as well as the originator. The VCA is, in a way, a direct result of the transnational adoption practice that was led before the early eighties and the Kant Pandey judgements. However, the pressure to regulate Indian adoption practice was both of national and international character. The VCA in Delhi is located within the YCW compound. The VCA is, like YCW, run by a board, which employs two social workers and several counsellors (in part-time positions) who specialise in counselling the prospective adoptive parents. The counsellors and social workers, like in YCW, meet the couple and help them understand the different aspects of adoption, before taking the couple through the adoption process. However, The VCA makes a last effort to place with Indian families the children the adoption agencies in Delhi have failed to place. "It was to ensure that 'sufficient opportunity' was given to every child to find a home within India." (Ananthalakshmi et al. 2001: 17)

Since the VCA deals with adoption on the regional level, the main function of the VCA is to promote domestic adoption²¹ and to facilitate adoption between the agency and the prospective adoptive couple. The VCA has a list of eligible adoptive parents and of children available for adoption from each Delhi agency and tries to match these parents and children. The VCA also works to standardise the adoption process and the costs involved in adoption. It is, in many ways, an association of all licensed adoption agencies in its particular jurisdiction or state.²² In other words, when an adoption agency is unable to locate a suitable Indian family for a child, its next step is to register the child with the VCA. The VCA thus attempts to locate a suitable family within reasonable time. If VCA is unsuccessful, it will issue a clearance certificate. The clearance certificate is mandatory for the foreign placement of a child (Mehta 1992; Lobo & Vasudeva 2002, and own collected data).

²¹The social workers refer to adoption between states as inter-state adoption.

²²The states which do not have their own VCA use another state's VCA, or do not practise adoption on the state and international level.

VCA Staff

The VCA staff includes a secretary, Parvati, two social workers, Ms Kalini, and Ms Mashia,²³ and one manservant, Praboo, who does odd jobs around the office, like running errands, photocopying documents, cleaning up after lunch, and bringing water and chai for the office workers in VCA. Praboo sits in his chair next to the door by the counsellors' desk, when he is not running errands or outside talking to the gatekeeper, Sunil, and Sarjo from YCW. Like Ms Mary, both the social workers in VCA hold university degrees. Ms Kalini has an MA in child development, while Ms Mashia has an MA in social work. Unlike Ms Mary, who is a Catholic, Ms Kalini is a Jain and Ms Mashia is a Muslim, and both are in their mid-twenties. Ms Kalini is 'born and breed' in Delhi, while Ms Mashia comes from a landholding family in Uttar Pradesh, about two hours drive from Delhi. Parvati has worked in the VCA for a long time, and before she came to VCA she worked in YCW. Ms Kalini commenced working for VCA in January 2002 and resigned in April 2003. Ms Mashia started at VCA in May 2002 and resigned a year later.²⁴ During my second field study I became acquainted with one of the new social workers, Ms Arya, a Hindu girl of brahmin background, who also holds an MA in social work.

Mrs Shah

The General Secretary of the VCA is Mrs Shah. Mrs Shah is originally from Mumbai and Goa, but she moved to Delhi with her husband after marrying. Mrs Shah is also a widow in her mid fifties, and has two grown daughters. Unlike Mrs Mehta, who comes to the YCW office daily, Mrs Shah is present in the VCA office on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. On Friday mornings a regular staff meeting is held. The Friday meeting may include the other volunteer board members and the counsellors working with the VCA and mainly concerns adoption cases in progress or issues regarding the co-ordination of the several adoption agencies in Delhi (there are about twelve licensed agencies in all of Delhi).

²³Ms Mashia, Ms Kalini and Parvati are all pseudonyms.

²⁴On one occasion somebody mentioned to me that the social workers in VCA do not work there for a long time, often because they are young women who marry soon after they join the organisation. Some stop working altogether when they marry, whereas others move to another city or town and take up residence there with their husbands. After resigning, Ms Kalini worked at a university in Delhi collecting research data through personal interviews. She has since left this job and married. For a while Ms Mashia designed jewellery and joined the family business, which exports various goods. However she joined another NGO the autumn of 2004, and is now married.

The Counsellors

There are four counsellors who regularly counsel prospective adoptive parents on the various aspects of the process and unrelated adoption. These couples have either approached VCA directly in order to adopt or are sent by YCW. The counsellors are all women. Mrs Shah does a lot of the counselling, due to her long experience in the field of adoption. Dr (Mrs) Kishore is another counsellor who holds a Ph.D. in psychology and is a member of the VCA board. When not counselling, she works in the psychology department at one of the universities in Delhi. The third counsellor, Mrs Gupta, is also a member of the VCA board. Like Mrs Shah, Mrs Gupta has no official qualifications except her long experience in the adoption field. The fourth counsellor is Mrs Bhargava, who holds a Ph.D. in child development. Mrs Bhargava's dissertation examines prevailing issues in unrelated adoption, with particular focus on disclosure. Mrs Bhargava is also a member of the VCA board. I became familiar with Dr (Mrs) Kishore and Mrs Bhargava. Dr (Mrs) Kishore let me sit in on a few of her counselling sessions. I read the study of Mrs Bhargava, and later she gave me an interview where she talked both about her personal experience as an adoptive mother and about her dissertation. I will refer to this interview later in this thesis.

The Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA)

A Supreme Court directive formed CARA. It was set up in 1990 under the Ministry of Welfare and is stationed in Delhi. The functions of CARA are to monitor and regulate the information about the children currently available for adoption and the adoption procedures of the placement agencies recognised by the Central Government. Further, it issues No Objection Certificates (NOC) for the foreign placement of Indian children, and safeguards the interests of children of Indian origin adopted by foreign parents. "It was to act as a national co-ordinating body for inter-country adoption. It was the apex body which was to monitor and regulate the entire adoption programme." (Ananthalakshmi et al. 2001: 17) Basically, CARA sets and enforces the guidelines for the adoption procedure and the running of the various licensed placement agencies. CARA is also the body that decides which NGOs will receive a licence in order to work within the field of adoption in India and, further, which agencies will have their licences renewed²⁵ (Mehta 1992; Lobo & Vasudeva 2002).

It is possible to detect a certain tension between the placement agencies and the VCA on the one hand, and CARA on the other, in relation to transnational

²⁵The NGOs have to renew their licence every second year.

adoption. I became aware of this tense relationship on two separate occasions. The first was while attending a seminar, organised by the VCA in Delhi. The intention behind the VCA seminar was to create a forum where social workers working in the field of adoption across India might exchange experiences and practice. But the seminar was also an attempt to standardise the approach to and the counselling of prospective adoptive parents. Mr Dev Verman, as a representative of CARA (he is the CARA Secretary), was a guest speaker at the seminar. He opened the seminar by holding a speech about what CARA views as the social workers' most important task, namely to counsel Indian prospective adoptive parents correctly. According to Mr Verman the prospective adoptive parents should be counselled to adopt the female child, the older child and the child with a (slight) medical condition. In his speech Mr Verman urged the social workers to minimise the placement of Indian children in inter-country adoption. He said that the long-term goal of the Indian State is to completely end inter-country adoption, and for all children in the placement agencies to be adopted only by Indian families.

On the other occasion, I accompanied my research supervisor, Prof. Howell, to a meeting with Mr Dev Verman. When we met Mr Verman in his office at CARA, the issue of in-country adoption versus inter-country adoption was again raised. Then Mr Verman said quite casually, without mentioning any particular strategies, that CARA has no concrete intentions to bring down the numbers of children placed in adoption transnationally, merely claiming, "It will happen naturally!"

Methodological Issues

Yamuna Child Welfare and Palna were introduced to me as a possible site for my field study by Torill Hermansen from Adopsjonsforum, and my supervisor Signe Howell. Mrs Mehta accepted my request to come and work in YCW as a volunteer on the condition that I would learn about in-country adoption practice, instead of inter-country as originally intended. Further, I had to stay with them for more than a few weeks, but not longer than six months. These were conditions that I agreed to. Later, Mrs Mehta agreed to let me return and conduct one more month of field study.

Initially, I planned to gather data on the transnational adoption practice in Delhi, but since I agreed to Mrs Mehta's conditions, I changed my focus. Retrospectively I believe that such change of focus helped me collect more data of greater variation and to create a more interesting field study and better understanding of India. Adoption in India is a field little studied in social anthropology.

Familiarising the Field

During the first month of fieldwork I lived in the nurses' quarters at the back of Palna. That was a hard time, listening to the crying infants at nights while missing my own two-year-old son. After that first month, one of the board members found me a suitable flat in the neighbourhood, where I lived during the remaining months. Most of my volunteer work consisted of playing with the children on the playground next to Palna, and doing odd jobs around the office. During the first month I played a lot with the children and picked up some Hindi. I also read the laws and guidelines that YCW has to work by, in order to understand the foundation of the adoption practice and process. There were also piles of various files—adoption cases, home study visit reports and counselling reports—that I was encouraged by Mrs Mehta to read. From these files I attained an understanding of the work of the social workers and counsellors, and, to a certain degree, I gained some insight into both the expectations and anticipations of the prospective adoptive parents. During my seven months of fieldwork I shared many conversations with Ms Mary; she let me take part in her experience by narrating from her well of cases and stories. Hence, through these informal conversations I gathered a lot of discursive data (Bourgois 1995).

Participant Observation

In the beginning it must have seemed that I was just hanging around, though in my view it was necessary to observe the people around me going about their daily chores. Later, I started taking part in some of their chores, discussing issues in unrelated adoption as I learnt more about the practice and process, as well as talking about family, children, life in general, or just becoming friends. I also attended several home studies, about two to three a month, accompanying Ms Mary, Ms Kalini, Ms Mashia and in only one case Ms Arya. The home study is a visit and interview in the home of the prospective adoptive family, in which the social worker counsels the family regarding prevailing issues when adopting.

Sometimes I would attend these visits quite actively by writing down the interview and asking the questions set beforehand. Both the couple and the social worker would quite freely ask me questions, or ask my opinion on some issues, like disclosure, biology and personal qualities. I was also allowed to interview the potential adoptive parents, after the formal interview, if they had no objection. The home study visit introduced me to the prospective adoptive couples and their emotions as well as concerns in relation to unrelated adoption. It is often in this setting that the value of destiny is first introduced

to the childless couples, as it was to me. Ms Mary, Ms Kalini, Ms Mashia and Dr (Mrs) Kishore often let me sit in on their counselling sessions, as a fly on the wall, with couples that considered opting for adoption.

Toward the end of the field study I conducted a few formal interviews. I interviewed Mrs Mehta on her introduction to the field and how it has changed over the years. Further, I interviewed, on separate occasions, two neighbours, both old widows, on the value of destiny and the notion of karma. I also interview an adoptive mother, who I became acquainted with on one of my first home study visits (accompanying Ms Mary), in order to learn about her experience during the first five months. Then I interviewed two adoptive mothers in my neighbourhood, who had adopted from Palna several years earlier. These two adoptive mothers related their experiences beyond the first year. Finally, I interviewed Dr (Mrs) Kishore as a counsellor, and Mrs Bhargava as a researcher in the field of adoption in Delhi, an adoptive mother and a counsellor.

Triangulation

Conducting my fieldwork, I applied the ‘between-method triangulation’ (Denzin 1989: 244), thus combining “dissimilar methods” such as interviews, participant observation, narratives or discursive data and written materials such as reports, Laws, Acts and Judgements “to illuminate the same class of phenomenon” (ibid.: 244). According to Denzin this methodological strategy strengthens the researcher’s data because the different methods often overlap. “The rationale for this strategy is that the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another; and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each while overcoming their unique deficiencies.” (ibid.) To a certain extent I also applied ‘data triangulation’ in relation to the social workers (Denzin 1989: 237). Immanent in data triangulation is the search for different data sources according to the three dimensions of time, space and person. The person, in turn, may be seen in reference to three distinct levels (these are aggregate, interactive and collectivity, see Denzin 1989: 237).

Student and Mother

The social workers would always introduce me to the prospective adoptive parents as a student, doing research on adoption in Delhi. The families seemed quite indifferent to this information. However, I remember that one time, when small-talking with the infertile couple after the home study interview, Ms Mary told the couple that I was actually married and the mother of a two-year-old son. The wife turned to me and said, “Then you understand

why we desire a child!" Thus, when the social workers told the couple that I was both a wife and mother, it seemed to me that I became a person whom the wife could relate their infertility problem to. The wife would relate to me as a mother, not a student, and in such cases it seemed that she would answer my questions in a more relaxed manner. It is my impression that as a mother and wife I became a more tangible person both to my social worker and counsellor acquaintances as well as the prospective adoptive parents, becoming more than just a foreign student. Further, as a mother who missed her child terribly, my acquaintances seemed to assume that I would more easily understand the emotions involved in childlessness and unrelated adoption. In other words, during the field study I moved between the role of a foreign student and of a mother, sometimes occupying both. Briggs (1970) in her article "Kapluna Daughter" narrates how during fieldwork she was assigned native roles by her informants, influenced both by her presentation of herself to her informants and her behaviour. Contrary to Briggs' experience, neither of my roles gave rise to conflicts between my acquaintance and me. Rather, my always carrying a notebook around, asking a lot of questions, and wanting to come on home study visits, attend meetings and counselling sessions, was related to my role as a student. Some days when I was moody or less than cheerful, my acquaintances showed understanding and ascribed my emotions to my yearning for my family. The role as a volunteer that I initially tried to take during my fieldwork was mainly one that I ascribed myself, not one my informants gave me. This may be due to the fact that I do not fit into the category of volunteers working in YCW and other such NGOs in Delhi. In short, the roles I held previously to the field study—who I was at home—were important denominators in establishing my role during fieldwork. The aspects of me as a mother, wife and student, i.e. what Delaney calls the anthropologist's social status (Delaney 1988) were of most primary interest. Delaney stresses that "one's identity and what one brings to 'fieldwork' is as crucial as what one derives from it." (Delaney 1988: 292) Further, it "makes a difference, those among whom they (the anthropologists) live and work are acutely aware of the differences." (ibid.)

Focus

During my fieldwork my focus changed as I went through processes similar to that of the pendulum moving, from understanding what went on around me, to not understanding, to understanding in new manner. The physical proximity between the YCW and VCA offices had a decisive impact on my role and focus, as I soon became familiar with the staff and work routines in both NGOs. Because of the actual closeness between the two NGOs, I quite

naturally spent a considerable amount of time with the social workers and other professionals working in the field of adoption in Delhi. This position in the field provided a great closeness to and a unique experience of the adoption process as the various professionals in these NGOs perceive it, as well as other NGOs working in the field. As a consequence, the time I spent with adoptive and prospective adoptive parents was, to a certain degree, limited and restricted by the placement agency and the social workers. The proximity of YCW and VCA also influenced the role I was fitted into in the compound of Sunder Bagh, particularly in my interaction with (prospective) adoptive parents, but also in the neighbourhood of Civil Lines. In turn, the focus in this dissertation is an extension of my role in the field.

Meeting the Families

Interaction with adoptive families and prospective adoptive parents, to a greater and a lesser degree, occurred either through YCW or VCA. The focus in this thesis is therefore concentrated on the meeting between adoptive parents, prospective adoptive parents, the adoption agency, and the guidelines the adoption agency works by. In this thesis, the attention directed on adoption in Delhi has very much been coloured by the attempts made by the placement agency and the VCA to promote adoption in India. This focus is juxtaposed with the social worker's expertise and the prevailing attitude regarding the requirements of who may adopt and what the 'best interest of the child' is thought to be in this field, on the organisational level as well as the state level.

My Anthropological Project

A couple of weeks into my field study I became acquainted with Ms Kalini and Ms Mashia, who also invited me to partake in a seminar they were organising. A couple of days before attending this seminar, I had accompanied Ms Mary on a home study visit. During the home study Ms Mary, when relating to the couple's infertility, had claimed it was their destiny to adopt, a statement neither party elaborated further. This particular incident bewildered me, puzzled me and nagged at me; the claim that it was destiny at work related an implicit meaning that Ms Mary and the infertile couple understood, but I did not. To work out what destiny was about became my primary anthropological project during fieldwork. According to Hastrup (1992) the anthropological project initially consists of "giving rise to the bewilderment that is attached to persons' unknown cultural possibilities, rather than to

give a final mapping of cultural differences” (Hastrup 1992: 11).²⁶ In order to follow the anthropological project, participation and bodily experiences are essential. Thus one encounters the difference between the material (*stoflige*) and the visible (*synlige*). When reading home study visit reports the value of destiny in adoption had not been introduced to me. Destiny was introduced during counselling sessions and home study visits, and not related in the reports at all.

Ms Kalini and the VCA seminar further amplified my curiosity with regard to the value of destiny in adoption. I had to discover what they knew and I did not. Both the foreword and the ethnographic narratives in chapter six illuminate the value of destiny. However, in late autumn 2003, after writing the first draft of the chapters in this dissertation, I became somewhat apprehensive in relation to my findings about destiny, and in agreement with my supervisor I returned to YCW in order to reveal any discrepancies. However, my initial findings were supported by my informants in interviews, informal conversations and in their comments on the first draft of this dissertation.

Language

Finally, I wish to address the aspect of language. Arriving in Delhi on the first of September 2002, I had no knowledge of Hindi. This had no great implication for the field study, since most my social worker acquaintances were fluent in English. The families I was introduced to were also English speaking. I believe that some of my social worker acquaintances to some extent consciously controlled which of the prospective adoptive parents I should meet. Hence, lower income earning and Hindi-speaking families may have been considered inappropriate for me to meet. The English speaking families would speak mostly English in conversations with the social worker and counsellor, though they would every now and then lapse into Hindi. Still, I did meet some prospective adoptive parents who only spoke Hindi. On such occasions the social worker I accompanied would translate the interview for me. Towards the end of the fieldwork I became quite skilled at deciphering conversations on Hindi concerning adoption, like when childless couples came to YCW in order to inquire about the adoption process. However, some information was probably lost. Like Frøystad (2005) suggests, with regard to the importance of knowing the local language, I was to a certain extent “precluded from overhearing conversations and remarks not specifically intended for [me]. Such statements can prove highly revealing.” (Frøystad 2005: 57) However,

²⁶My translation.

many prospective adoptive families had maids. As part of the adoption process is a visit and interview in the family home, the English-speaking families were highly inclined to speak English, a language few maids had extensive knowledge of, in order to prevent the maid from eavesdropping on the conversation.

Like Frøystad (2005), most of the time I was unable to write down my acquaintances' statements on various topics. I had to rely on my memory or jot down phrases when unnoticed, until I was able to sit down and write in more detail, thus reconstructing the conversation or event in my field diary. "Though these conversational snippets might not be accurate word for word, I believe them to be fairly accurate in terms of meaning, associational shifts, examples and significant local concepts." (ibid.: 59)

Another language-related aspect is the utilisation of destiny. My acquaintances would, when speaking English, always apply destiny, likewise when speaking Hindi. On several occasions I asked my social worker acquaintances what Hindi term they would use instead of destiny. Such inquiry often caused confusion, and they answered that even when speaking Hindi they would apply the English term destiny. A few times some prospective adoptive parents would talk about their destiny in terms of their *kismet*. Ms Kalini and Ms Mashia were the only social workers who referred to *kismet*, on a few occasions. *Nasheed* (Urdu) and *bhagya* (Hindi) I heard referred to only once, and then only instead of *kismet*. According to Mrs Shalini Kapur, both *nasheed* and *kismet* are 'Muslim', not 'Hindu' concepts, as opposed to *bhagya*. *Kismet* may be translated as (good)²⁷ luck, a (good) force that may explain certain events that come about in a person's life. *Kismet* has nothing to do with karma. *Bhagya* was more directly translated as the English destiny.

Ethical Considerations

I have given the NGO and my informants pseudonyms. However, I have not changed the name Palna, a decision approved by Mrs Mehta. Though my informants have been given new names, the people connected to YCW will in many cases be able to recognise persons and events. I can, in such cases, only rely on their discretion. A few of my informants, like Mrs Bhargava, are not given pseudonyms. This is due to her research, which would have made it hard to hide her identity. There is sensitive material in my data, especially in relation to YCW and the neighbourhood. I have chosen to leave this material out, in order not to add to existing tensions, rumours or conflicts. Civil Lines

²⁷I have put 'good' in brackets because a couple of people, when translating *kismet* for me, would refer to the term as meaning good luck. The adoptive families would use *kismet* as an explanatory model which described their childless situation.

is a real district in North Delhi. I have chosen not to hide this information, since there are two NGOs placed in this area. Furthermore, it is my opinion that YCW is an excellently run NGO that has a clear conscience and nothing to hide. Nothing in this dissertation can place the organisation in a bad light. I also want people to know that in Delhi there is a fabulously well-run child welfare organisation, adoption agency and orphanage, particularly because of an incident at the Fourth International Conference on Child Adoption, held in Delhi October 2002. At the conference I met a psychologist and a social worker from Bufdir, the Norwegian State's Family Affairs Department (Barne-, ungdoms- og familiedirektoratet). When they heard that I worked as a volunteer at an orphanage in Delhi they became interested, and asked what it was like. When I had nothing but praise for YCW, they suddenly lost interest.

The chapters

This thesis has seven chapters divided into two parts. The first part is called "Adoption is a Beautiful Way to Start a Family" and consists of four chapters. In chapter one, "Adoption in India: A Historical and Juridical Context", I introduce both the traditional aspect of adoption as well as the present practice and hence the relevant laws or acts, the Kant Pandey Judgements and the CARA guidelines that the adoption agencies are obliged to work along.

Chapter two is called "Great Expectations: The Prospective Adoptive Parents", and examines infertility and the expectations the prospective adoptive parents hold when they first approach YCW in order to adopt. The chapter sheds light onto the social stigmas attached to infertility and adoption in India. The motivation for this chapter is to create a wider understanding for the sometimes unreasonable demands of the prospective adoptive parents in the adoption process. However, chapter two must also be seen as context to the central part destiny plays in unrelated adoption.

In chapter three, "Guardian Angel: The Role of the Social Worker", I introduce the social worker Ms Mary and her role in YCW in a more detailed manner. Here I show how the social worker actually handles the adoptive parents' expectations regarding the child that they wish to adopt, as well as preparing them for adoption. Central here is thus counselling the couples with regard to disclosure and the social stigmas they may face amongst relatives, friends, neighbours and school.

Chapter four, "Applying Governmentality and Expertise, or Safeguarding the 'Best Interest of the Child'" deals with how the social worker may be seen

as exercising governmentality when placing children in of adoption, mostly due to her evaluation of the childless couples' suitability as adoptive parents. The social worker performs governmentality on a lower level than that of the state, since her aim is to provide the best for the children, primarily, and second, for the infertile couples. This is the last chapter in part I.

Part II is called "Divine Adoption", and the fifth chapter is "'A Child with an Unknown Background': Kinship and Caste". Here I present briefly patrilineality, the joint family and theories of the caste system. The chapter forms to an extent a theoretical backdrop upon which I relate the value of destiny and processes of kinning.

Chapter six, "Born by Destiny: A Cultural Elaboration of Adoption" gives an account of the value of destiny in adoption in light of the Hindu mode of karma thought. The chapter discusses how adoption and destiny are intrinsically bound together, and further, whether it is possible to see destiny as a legitimising strategy for the act of adoption for both the adoptive parents and the social workers. Lastly, I intend to show that destiny is not just an abstract concept.

Chapter seven, "Born of My Heart", seeks to describing the process of kinning in adoption in Delhi in terms of Marriott's concept of substance-code. The aim of this chapter is to show that the practice of adoption in Delhi may actually illuminate new aspects in Hindu transactions, and that Marriott's concept of substance-code is a useful analytical tool in doing this, since the focus is on persons acting out kinship relations, not inter-caste relations.

Part I

Adoption is a Beautiful Way to Start a Family

Chapter 1

Adoption in India: A Historical and Juridical Context

In this chapter I present briefly traditional Hindu adoption practice and the legal aspects of the modern, urban practice. Today's practice is primarily an urban phenomenon. Still, it is essential to have some basic knowledge about traditional Hindu adoption. When presenting the traditional practise of adoption in India, I also mention to the god Krishna, since he is commonly referred to by the social worker when counselling prospective adoptive parents. Today's adoption practice in Delhi is regulated by various acts and judgements, here I give an outline of Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act 1956 (HAMA), Guardianship and Wards Act 1890 (GWA), Revised Guidelines to Regulate Matters Relating to Adoption of Indian Children (1994), and the Lakshmi Kant Pandey Judgements (with subsequently some clarifying judgements in September 1986, August, October and November 1991 which aim to further secure the child's best interest and welfare). I refrain from mentioning the Juvenile Justice Act 2000 (JJA) since it was implemented the summer 2003. Though JJA is in between my two periods of field work, most of the data I collected concerns HAMA, the Pandey Judgements and the Guidelines. Finally in this chapter I refer to, in short, adoption malpractice in Delhi.

Children Are Like Gods

When introduced to the field of adoption in Delhi, a quite strong impression is that couples who adopt from an adoption agency act outside traditional Hindu or Indian framework. Still, from ancient times adoption has been a well-known phenomenon in India. Both the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharath*, two great Hindu epics, refer to adoption, and Hindu rulers of princely states

would, in the past, adopt a son if they did not have a male heir.¹ The male child would most commonly be adopted from a distant family member or the close community. In other words, adoption is very much a part of Hindu tradition.

Traditional Adoption

Traditional Hindu adoption has two aspects attached. The first has its roots in a religious compulsion and concerns the ritual as well as the duties of the Hindu person. The other is materially oriented and concerned with having sons. Hence, it relates to inheritance and the transfer of ancestral property from one generation to the next, and the continuity of the family line and name (Mehta 1992). Thus, adoption, traditionally, used to be a matter of having a son in order for the adult man to perform his duty as a good Hindu and for the son to conduct the parent's funeral rite (Parry 1989), as well as providing an heir in order to continue the family name and take care of the ancestral property. In other words, adoption of sons was an act of necessity. According to custom, daughters married into and became part of her husband's family line and moved away from the natal home (still prevalent today, see Dhruvarajan 1989; Jacobsen & Wadley 1999). Sons stayed behind in the natal family or ancestral home, married, reproduced and with his wife took care of ageing parents. "The child adopted was from one's own family, caste and religion." (Ananthalakshmi et al. 2001: 12) Still, in today's practice both the religious and the material aspects of adoption are applicable, although only to a certain extent, and they are emphasised by neither social worker nor placement agency.

Requesting Sameness

To many childless couples the major advantage of adoption from within the family is that it provides the adoptive parents with knowledge about the child's background and blood. Family adoption substantiates an ideal that accentuates sameness. The issue of caste or jati² in adoption is thus inevitable. However, caste is never explicitly mentioned when the social worker interacts with the prospective adoptive parents and their family. The aspect of caste is not communicated openly and may only be detected in the guise of questions regarding the child's origin, or how the child came into the care of the placement agency. The social workers confirmed that the issue of

¹A practice which was abolished due to Lord Dalhousie, Governor-General of India, and his Doctrine of Lapse.

²My acquaintances mostly use the terms caste and jati synonymously.

caste often is the origin when prospective adoptive parents desire a child with fair complexion (even though the prospective adoptive parents themselves might be wheatish or dark). I was told by the social workers that some couples asserted a relation between the fair complexioned person (Indian) and the twice-born castes, which is a common assumption in parts of India (Dhruvarajan 1989: 2).³ The issue of a child's background and complexion in adoption will be further discussed in chapter two. The system of castes will be introduced in chapter five.

The Adopted God

Hindu tradition is emphasised also in today's practise in Delhi. I think this is particularly evident in the manner the social worker introduces Krishna in the counselling of insecure potential adoptive parents on adoption. The social worker presents the cosmogony of the Hindu God as the first adopted Hindu (or more general, Indian) child. In my view it is no coincidence that the story of Krishna is introduced to the parents as the first adoption in Hindu and Indian tradition, particularly, since two of the social workers are not Hindus. During counselling, the social worker does not elaborate on the story; she just mentions Krishna as an adoptee. Krishna is introduced in the counselling when discussing social stigmas attached to adoption outside the family, or how to disclose the fact of adoption to the child. The social workers will just say, quite plainly, that a good way of telling others or the child about the adoption is to mention the story about Krishna. They do not venture any further, but at the same time none of the potential adoptive parents seem to need further clarification. I must admit that during fieldwork the constant reference to Krishna made neither sense nor impression on me. However, it seems that the social worker's frequent reference to Krishna helped creating legitimating strategies regarding the adoption of the unrelated child.

Krishna

According to the myths Krishna is the eighth child of Devaki and son of Vasudeva. He is also the nephew of the evil king Kamsa. Vasudeva is the son of Sura, an important chieftain of the clan of the Yadava, who were descendants of Yadu, son of King Yayati of the Lunar race. The purpose behind the creation of Krishna is to exterminate his evil uncle Kamsa.

Prithivi, mother Earth, is suffering because of the degeneration of men and women; the humans have forgotten the rightful duty (*dharma*). Therefore,

³The twice-born caste refers to the three highest-ranking varnas. The lowest ranking Varna or caste is shudra and is not considered twice-born.

she takes the shape of a cow and seeks help from the gods Indra, Shiva and Brahma. As a result Brahma begs Vishnu to come to the assistance of Prithivi, and Vishnu agrees. Vishnu plucks out two of his hairs, one white and one black, and says:

This, my black hair, shall be incarnate in the eighth child of the wife of Vasudeva, Devaki, and shall kill Kamsa, who is none other than the great demon Kalenemi. The white hair will also be born to Devaki, as her seventh child. Together the two will kill the demons and rid the world of its accumulated evil. (Varma 2001: 8)

On the day of the marriage between Vasudeva and Devaki, Kamsa becomes aware of his impending fate. He tries to kill his sister Devaki, but Vasudeva pleads for her life. Instead Kamsa puts Devaki and Vasudeva in prison under guard and he kills the six first children of Devaki and Vasudeva as they are born. The seventh child seems like a miscarriage, but in reality the embryo is transferred to the womb of Rohini, another wife of Vasudeva. This child is Balarama, but is known as Sankarsana since he was extracted from his mother's womb.

Krishna becomes incarnated in the eighth conception of Devaki. Simultaneously, the goddess Yoganidra enters the womb of Yasoda, the wife of Nanda, a leader of the cowherd settlement at Gokula. The day after Krishna is born, Yasoda gives birth to a girl child, who is the reincarnation of goddess Yoganidra. Under the influence of Yoganidra the prison guards fall into a deep sleep. Vasudeva can therefore pick up his baby son and carry him out of the prison, without anybody noticing. The river Yamuna falls low so that father and son can cross the river safely. Vasudeva reaches Gokula and replaces the baby Krishna with Yoganidra, and takes her back to the prison. Nobody knows of what has just occurred. When Kamsa is informed that Devaki has given birth to another child, he comes to the prison and kills the child. In the meantime Nanda receives the news that his wife has given birth to a son. "Krishna, Lord of Lords, began his incarnate life in the humble abode of the cowherd chief Nanda, in the sylvan surroundings of Gokula." (Varma 2001: 11)

Webs of Meaning

However, even after reading Hindu texts describing the cosmogony of Krishna, the story's relevance in adoption did not become much clearer to me. I experienced quite some frustration in the dissatisfactory answers given to me, by my acquaintances, when I asked what Krishna, as an adoptee, was really

all about. As Geertz (1973) I realised that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.” (Geertz 1973: 5) In other words, I had to sort out the social significance of Krishna as an adopted child in the counselling of prospective adoptive parents myself, based upon my own observations.

The story narrates how Krishna was raised by ‘adoptive’ parents, not his own biological parents. Though, Krishna’s fostering parents did not know that their biological child had been replaced with Krishna, Krishna is still viewed as an adoptee within the field of adoption in Delhi. Krishna’s story is, in my opinion, offered prospective parents or families as an aid in accepting the adoption of a child of unknown parental background, including caste. Thus, the story of Krishna works as the first incentive in order to create acceptance of the sharing of substances (or substance-code as following Marriott 1976) between adoptive parents and adoptee. After all Krishna and his adoptive cowherding family were unrelated. Krishna’s childhood among the low caste herders also reveals that interaction between high and low castes are neither complete nor absolute. It is my belief that the story of Krishna justifies the adoption of an unrelated child, across family and caste; the child may be God.

In my view the most essential aspect to social worker’s frequent reference to Krishna, as the first adoption, is the divine aspect. This aspect serves as an analogy to divinity itself, Krishna incarnated as a child nurtured by fostering parents and the direct divine intervention on humans’ lives. Krishna is a God, and, furthermore, as many Indians often say “in India we treat children like Gods, to us children are like Gods,” thus it is emphasised that all children are bestowed with a divine aspect, including adopted children. Nita Kumar (2002) observed her informants viewing children (sons) similarly; “As an infant he is only semihuman; the other half of him is divine, toylike, princelike: ‘A child is an emperor’ people say.” (ibid.: 341)

The story also stresses the way humans’ lives are constantly under the influence of or manipulated by divine forces, i.e. various Hindu gods. I believe that when Ms Mary, Ms Kalini or Ms Mashia refer to Krishna’s adoption and hint to adoption as ‘Gods will’, the intention is to give adoption (and to a certain extent infertility) an aspect of divinity. Thus, my interpretation is that in adoption the divine property is stressed in a threefold manner: First, the act of adoption is divine due to Krishna being the first adoptee; second, it is common to consider children as godlike; third is the divine intervention on humans’ lives in terms of destiny. I will leave the discussion of the divine aspect in adoption for now, but return to it in chapters six and seven. Below,

I resume the outline of the adoption practice in Delhi.

Transition: From Related to Unrelated Adoption

In India the practise of adoption must be seen in relation to a few adoption scandals in the early eighties. One incident related that small Indian boys were 'placed in adoption' in some Middle-Eastern countries, in order to be used as camel drivers in races. Allegedly, several children were killed during these races whereas others lived under bad conditions. Another incident related that two children died on the aeroplane on their way to adoptive parents in the USA. This scandal mainly focused on the neglect the children experienced during the flight. These events resulted in the Kant Pandey judgements, which ruled that adoption agencies should be committed to, foremost, placing the abandoned and destitute child in domestic adoption, not transnational. Hence, since the eighties the practice of adoption within India has escalated, whereas transnational placements are decreasing in numbers.

Important questions regarding the adoption practise in Delhi are: Why has prospective adoptive parents begun to adopt an unrelated child, from outside the family, with unknown parents and background? In recent years there has been an increase in the numbers of Indian couples approaching a placement agency in order to adopt a child; how has this change come about? In order to answer these questions it is necessary to investigate post-partition changes in the social and economic structure in India, particularly in the urban areas. Changes here have probably invoked a decline in adoption from within the family.

Without Strings Attached

Many times professionals within the field of adoption in Delhi claimed, when I asked what caused Delhi couples to choose adoption, that there had been a change in the general attitude amongst the urban, middle classes. They claimed that more and more couples *choose* to distance themselves from traditional adoption practice and were thus not forced by the circumstances. To elaborate, on home study visits I often observed the social worker asking the prospective adoptive parents if they had considered adopting a child from within the family. A question most commonly met with either of the following replies: "We want to adopt a child who is only ours, so that the child will not grow up with split loyalties," or, "There are no children available in our family." Hence, a plausible explanation, according to the social worker, in

relation to the change that had come about, is that many adoptive parents prefer to adopt a child from an agency because they believe that “the child will come [to them] without strings attached.”

In my opinion, when the couples believe that the child adopted within the family comes ‘with strings attached’ it is due to a notion rooted in the complexities of Hindu gift giving and transactions. During counselling I observed prospective adoptive parents express that to adopt from family members might include long-term consequences for their modern family lifestyle, which they were not willing to risk. As mentioned, some would say that they feared the child would grow up with ‘split loyalties’. I think underlying the couples’ suppositions regarding the child’s ‘split loyalties’ is the notion that children feel, instinctively, more devoted to their biological parents and natal home, and that their actual family bonds belong to the biological and not the adoptive or fostering parents. Often, some potential adoptive parents would, during the home study visit, recall an incident regarding kinship adoption within their own families to illustrate this very aspect of ‘split loyalties’. A study on child adoption conducted by Dr (Mrs) Anathalakshmi et al. (2001) had similar findings amongst the adoptive parents:

Of these 45 adoptive parents who were internally oriented,⁴ 32 adoptive parents had siblings. With a long cultural history of kinship adoptions had they not thought of adoption one of their own kin we asked. The majority of the sibling families had just one or at the most two children. Kinship adoption was not possible in these cases. Among adoptive parents who had siblings with a larger family and with children of adoptable age a few felt that adoption from within their kin would give rise to rivalry and ‘ill will’ within the extended family. “It would make things unpleasant” felt an adoptive parent. They therefore in the interests of the welfare of the larger family preferred to adopt an unrelated child. The rest of the adoptive parents wanted “a child for themselves”. They related instances that they knew or heard of, of couples who had adopted from within their extended families and experienced insecurity. They suffered grief as they had neither ‘relationship’ nor ‘relatedness’ – the child eventually bonding with his/her birth parents. The birth parents had also contributed to the environment by subtly expressing a greater

⁴Anathalakshmi et al define internal motivations in adoptive parents as those who “often require a stimulus for actualisation. Very few adoptive parents had – the strength of mind to take an independent decision to adopt without ensuring acceptance and support from friends and family.” (Anathalakshmi et al. 2001: 59)

claim over the child. Hence the decision to adopt an unrelated child. (Anathalakshmi et al. 2001: 59-60)

Though, whether the reply “There are no children available in our family” or “We want a child that is only ours” was the most common reason given I do not really know statistically. Rather, I believe that the most relevant aspect here is that some couples actually preferred to adopt a child from an agency than within the family.

Another influential factor to why traditional adoption practice may be abandoned in urban areas, I was told, are changes in the family structure. Some social workers would relate the number of ‘children available for adoption within the family’ as a consequence of fast post-partition modernisation, industrialisation and urbanisation. These socioeconomic changes encouraged families to live as a joint family in smaller flats and as nuclear units, instead of in the traditional unit, the joint family on the ancestral property. Therefore, lack of space due to smaller houses, grown up siblings would have only one or two children. The spread of family planning was seen as another impact, caused by information about and readily available contraceptives. Yet, another impact of fewer children born in the families was related to the growth of the middle class and thus the middle class ideal of providing their sons and daughters, alike, with a minimum of education. This is an ideal that is only considered affordable when having one or maximum two children.⁵ Hence, fewer children are born in the urban middle class families.

These circumstances, both ‘no children available’ and ‘split loyalties’ thus force childless and infertile couples to approach adoption agencies if they want ‘to complete the family’ by having children. The adoption practice in today’s urban Delhi concerns mainly the adoption of a child, who is unrelated or with an unknown background and from a placement agency.

India Today: Adoption Acts, Judgements and Guidelines

In her book *Ours by choice* Nilima Mehta says:

⁵I relate this statement in particular to what Ms Mary told me about her own family experience. Her brother had just one son, and the whole extended family (i.e. the unmarried sisters) provided for this son; they all desired a good education and had managed to enrol him in one of the better schools in Delhi. His education was considered costly, yet at the same time it was seen as a great necessity, a duty they had to fulfil. Having another child would then just add to the already existing heavy expenses.

For Generations, adoption has been a familiar custom in India, though in a different way. In the past, a childless couple would ‘adopt’ and bring up a child either of their immediate or distant family. Nonetheless, the practice of adopting an unrelated child is still in its infancy in India. There is no uniform law for adoption; hence it is difficult to lay down universally applicable procedures. (Mehta 1992: 53)

According to Mehta, since there is no consistent adoption law in India, the following questions arise: Who can legally adopt a child? And what is the procedure?

Legal Adoption

In India adoption is legally conducted according to HAMA and in a small degree JJA. In line with HAMA only Indians of Hindu origin (including Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs) can legally adopt a child. Christians, Jews, Muslims and Parsis can only become the legal guardian of a child under GWA; therefore, the fostering of orphaned children by Christians, Muslims and Parsi is mostly discouraged and happens only in rare cases. Following JJA, single parent adoption is permitted; however, only a few agencies, including YCW,⁶ in Delhi consider and register single women and men as adoptive parents.

There are attempts to constitute a uniform and child oriented adoption law in the formal and legislative field of adoption in Delhi. Much of the inspiration, ideals and ideas in this work is taken from the Rights of the Child and the Hague Convention. As mentioned, the traditional way of adopting a child in India concerned adoption from within the family in order to have an heir and thus is considered, socio-culturally, to be family oriented. Although HAMA marks a breach with the traditional Hindu adoption practice, it is still viewed by many adoption professionals in Delhi as mainly family oriented. JJA, the new adoption law, is oriented more towards the best interest of the child and the needs of the child, thus it corresponds better with Rights of the Child and Hague Convention.

Next I briefly introduce the most important legislation in adoption in India: GWA, HAMA, the Supreme Court Judgments, and the Guidelines regulating the adoption procedures. These adoption legislations must be recognised as important data when studying adoption in Delhi, since they reveal present perceptions regarding who are considered as suitable adoptive

⁶YCW also permit trans-national single mother adoption, and while I was conducting my field study two girls, both with a medical condition, were adopted to a Scandinavian country.

parents (Hindus in India are stressed). Further the legislation recognises the most important family values (parent orientation; in marriage it is essential to have children i.e. one son and one daughter), and the practice has initiated controlled social change (it has opened for unrelated adoption, encourages adoption of the girl child, and allow single women to adopt a same sex child).

Guardian and Wards Act 1890 (GWA)

The Guardian and Wards Act, GWA, was passed during the time when the British ruled India. The main concern at the time was to recognise guardians equipped to care for poor orphans. According to the Act a person who cares for an unrelated child has only guardianship status, and this legal relationship ceases to exist when the child turns twenty-one years of age. Hence, the child is only a ward and is not given the full status or the legal rights equal to that of a biological child, rights which are granted in adoptions carried out according to HAMA. In other words a child placed under GWA is not entitled, by right, to the (fostering) family name or to inherit the (fostering) family property.

GWA is quite inadequate, since it does not meet the needs of all of today's adoptive families. This inadequacy is due to the fact that HAMA is only applicable to the Hindu population. The non-Hindus; Parsis, Muslims, Jews and Christians; who, due to infertility, desire adoption may thus only enjoy the formal relationship to that of a guardian and ward. Even so, there was an attempt to provide for a uniform adoption law applicable to the non-Hindu communities, in the form of a Bill, the *Adoption of Children Bill 1972*. However, the bill was dropped because it was met with strong resistance from the Muslim community, the custom among Muslims does not allow for adoption. Since the Muslim community did not approve of the Bill, and it was undesirable to offend Muslim religious inclinations, a new Bill was introduced to the Lok Sabha⁷ in 1980, the *Adoption of Children Bill 1980*. The Bill "contain[s] an express provision that it shall not be applicable to Muslims" (ibid.: 5). Due to much resistance in the various communities,⁸ non-Hindus do still have only the next best option available and that is to take legal guardianship of the child under GWA. If a non-Hindu couple becomes the guardian of a child from a placement agency, the couple is obliged to set up a will which includes the ward as a beneficiary of the guardians' personal property, estate and fortune. If the guardians have no personal fortune or property, only ancestral inheritance, they are required, by the agency, to sell

⁷The Parliament.

⁸Parsis too are strongly opposed to adoption, particularly of a child outside the Parsi community.

off parts of their ancestral inheritance in order to provide financially for their ward in their will.

Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act 1956 (HAMA)

Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act 1956 marks a transition, because the practice of adoption becomes more liberal. One example is that HAMA permits the adoption of an orphaned child outside the family or caste group of unknown origin. Yet, the most interesting aspect of HAMA is its restrictiveness. The Act permits a couple to adopt only one child of each sex, and if the couple have a biological child, they can not adopt a child of the same sex as their biological child. I was told that the underlying aspect of this legislation is a provision which intends to provide for and promote the adoption of the girl child. Ms Mary told me that this intention has proven to be quite successful in Delhi. A third aspect of HAMA is that married men are required to have their wives' consent in order to adopt. Still, a married woman cannot adopt, unless it is proven that the husband is incapable of giving his consent. The Act states:

8. ... Any female Hindu -... (c) who is not married, or if married, whose marriage has been dissolved or whose husband is dead or has completely and finally renounced the world or has ceased to be a Hindu or has been declared by a court of competent jurisdiction to be of unsound mind ... had the capacity to take a son or daughter in adoption. (HAMA 1956)

Lastly, HAMA has also set an age limit; the minimum age difference between adoptive father and daughter, and adoptive mother and son, must exceed twenty-one years.

As related, HAMA is quite reformatory and more secular than the traditional adoption practice in India. Even though, there are some shortcomings inherent in the Act. I would like to mention two, and elaborate on the third. First, the adoptive mother is not a joint petitioner, only a consenting party. The adoptive mother is not considered as her husband's equal in relation to adoption, which affects her legal rights as a mother. Second, HAMA is a religion-specific Act; only Hindus may legally adopt. Third, HAMA does not lay down a legal procedure concerning the child in adoption; the Act merely secures the child's juridical right by giving the adoptee the same status as a natural born child. The problem is that "no procedures have been laid down as mandatory for the selection of appropriate adoptive parents, to eliminate the risk of exploitation of adopted children. There are no statutory provisions to guarantee the well-being of the adopted child under the law." (Damania

1998: 29). In other words, HAMA fails to secure the ‘best interest of the child’. HAMA’s orientation is primarily towards the family. In its present form, the Act makes clear which families may adopt, and then it provides a child by defining which children may be adopted. Hence, as long as the family is Hindu, at least twenty-one years older than the child, and the wife is consenting, the family may adopt. No further requirements are called for, legally, in order to place the orphaned, institutionalised, or destitute child with a family. “The adoption is irrevocable, once effected legally, and does not provide for possible disruption in the adoptive placement.” (ibid.) Thus, if it is later found that the adoptive parents are unsuitable (i.e. of meagre earnings, abusive) the adoption is according to the act legally irreversible. HAMA states: “10. . . . No person shall be capable of being taken in adoption unless the following conditions are fulfilled, namely: . . . (iii) he or she has not already been adopted.”⁹

Twice Adopted

However, there are exceptions. In 2002–03 the General Secretary in YCW handled a case where she attempted to reverse an adoption, on the grounds that it was not in the adopted child’s ‘best interest’ to remain in the care of her adoptive parents. At first, Mrs Metha proved to be unsuccessful in her attempts at the legal level. However, Mrs Metha managed eventually to locate a loophole. The child in question had been relocated to YCW, which, in turn, had been given the custody for the child by the Juvenile Court. The court decided that the child should be placed in YCW due to neglect and abuse; further, it judged that the adoptive mother was obliged to cover the monthly costs of keeping the child in YCW, i.e. accommodation, clothing and food. During the course of the first year when the child was in the care of YCW, Mrs Metha made several attempts to have the child’s adoption reversed, unsuccessfully. Then, helped by the lawyer connected to YCW, Mrs Metha found the loophole; if the child’s adoptive mother agrees to relinquish the child, the adoption act is cancelled, though not reversed. After a couple of attempts, the child was by the end of 2002 relinquished. Eventually, the adoptive mother decided to relinquish the child due to the monthly cost she had to pay YCW. When the child was relinquished, Mrs Metha applied to CARA in order to make the child legally free for adoption. Within a year of the relinquishment, the child was placed in foreign adoption in Southern Europe.

⁹However, this point may also represent a provision in the ‘best interest of the child’, so that once a couple has adopted they are unable to have regrets about the adoption; the Act is final juridically.

Landmark of 1984: The Lakshmi Kant Pandey Judgements¹⁰

In 1982 the advocate Lakshmi Kant Pandey filed a petition, inaugurated by social workers, to the Supreme Court of India “complaining of malpractices indulged in by social organisations and voluntary agencies engaged in the work of offering Indian children in adoption to foreign parents” (Writ Petition No. 1171/1982: 1). Pandey filed this petition due to some incidents that revealed malpractice in the field of adoption. The incidents that triggered this petition concerned the death of children placed in foreign adoption and large sums of money unaccounted for as mentioned before in this chapter. At the time the NGOs mainly placed children in transnational adoption. According to the Pandey petition (and hence the court rulings) these incidents in transnational adoption revealed a great need for state bodies that could regulate the practice of adoption.

In response to the petition the Court issued a notice to the Union of India, the Indian Council of Child Welfare and the Indian Council of Social Welfare to answer the petition and to assist the Court in forming principles and norms with which social organisation and voluntary agencies should comply; “in determining whether a child should be allowed to be adopted by foreign parents and if so, the procedure to be followed for that purpose, with the object of ensuring the welfare of the child (ibid.: 2). In response to the petition by Lakshmi Kant Pandey several social organisations and volunteer agencies filed written submissions that the Court took into consideration. Amongst others, some of the organisations were S.O.S. Children’s Villages of India and the Swedish Barnen Framför Allt Adopter.

The first judgment was delivered in 1984, and it was followed by a series of judgments. The initial situation in the field of adoption had caused the Supreme Court to make legislation in the absence of a uniform adoption law (Ananthlakshmi et al. 2001).

The most astonishing, but also to many agencies and organisations the most infuriating, outcome of the judgment was that it laid down a very clear priority in placing the abandoned, destitute, orphaned and institutionalised child. Social organisations or voluntary agencies should, foremost, ensure that the child was cared for by biological family or relative(s). Thus, NGO’s are obliged to attempt to locate the biological family upon receiving a child in the institution. If the agencies or organisations were unable to locate any biological family member then the child could be placed in adoption, though

¹⁰In a way I follow, in my field study, the responses in the wake of the Kant Pandey Judgements to transnational adoption. In my study Pandey is applied locally, though founded nationally.

within India. Again, if the agencies or organisations were unsuccessful in locating a suitable Indian, adoptive family, then the child might be placed in foreign adoption. Institutional care was considered only as a last resort (Damania 1998; Writ Petition No 1171/1982). The most apparent normative value detected in the judgement is that concerning the 'best interest of the child' and the Hague Convention.

The judgment states:

The adoptive parents would be the next best substitute for the biological parents. The practice of adoption has been prevalent in Hindu Society for centuries and it is recognised by Hindu Law ... It is not merely ancient Hindu Law which recognises the practice of adoption but it has also been legislatively recognised in the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act 1956 ... Now when the parents of a child want to give it away in adoption or the child is abandoned and it is considered necessary in the interest of the child to give it in adoption, *every effort must be made first to find adoptive parents for it within the country*,¹¹ because such adoption would steer clear of any problems of assimilation of the child in the family of the adoptive parents which might arise on account of cultural, racial or linguistic differences in case of adoption of the child by foreign parents. *If it is not possible to find suitable adoptive parents to give the child in adoption to foreign parents rather than allow the child to grow up in an orphanage or an institution where it will have no family life and no love and affection of parents*¹² and quite often, it might have to lead the life of a destitute, half clad, half hungry and suffering from mal-nutrition and illness. (Writ Petition No. 1171/1982: 14, 15).

The message is quite strong: Indian children should, most preferably, be adopted within the country. This message still holds a strong grip on the adoption scene in Delhi. At a seminar organised by the local VCA in September 2002, a representative from CARA instructed his audience, consisting of social workers from all over India, in the following manner:

"As far as we in CARA are concerned, the long term goal is for all Indian children, and that includes the girl-child, the older child, the disabled child and the child with the medical condition, to be adopted in-country. And it is your duty as social workers to ensure that we reach this goal."

¹¹My italics.

¹²My italics.

The judgment laid down the legal procedures for transnational adoption in order to safeguard both the ‘best interest of the child’ and foreign adoptive parents, so that neither party would be prey to malpractice. The Court set detailed instructions regarding the documents required and expenses involved, as well as appointing a body, the Scrutinising Agency (SA). The SA’s main task is to inspect every transnational adoption case, in order to ensure the best interest of the child. This task is conducted by the SA’s social worker who goes through the child’s medical record, the financial status of the adoptive parents, as well as the home study report and other papers. When the agency is convinced that the transnational adoption actually is in the ‘best interest’ of a given child, it sends its report to the Court. Based on this report the Court will pass an order which places the child as the legal ward of the foreign adoptive parents. The foreign parents then must within two years adopt the Indian child according to the adoption law of their mother country.

Also, another Court mandated body was set up in 1990 under the Ministry of Welfare, Government of India, namely the Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA). In addition to licensing recognised social organisations and voluntary agencies which place the orphaned, destitute or abandoned child in adoption, CARA also guard the practice of these same organisations and agencies. CARA maintain close links with Indian Diplomatic Missions abroad. These links are made in order to ensure the ‘best interest’ of Indian children adopted transnationally, for example by securing that the foreign adoptive parents actually adopt the (Indian) child in accordance to the adoption law of the adoptive parents’ country. The Guidelines (see below) state that adoptions, domestic and transnational, must be finalised through CARA.

The Revised Guidelines

In 1995 the Government of India, on recommendations of the Task Force,¹³ issued the Revised Guidelines on Adoption. These guidelines govern Indian adoption today. The Revised Guidelines were issued in order to “provide a sound basis for adoption within the framework of the norms and principles laid down by the Supreme Court.” (Ananthlakshmi et al. 2001: 18) An important principle in the Supreme Court judgments is that “every effort must be made first to see if the child can be rehabilitated by adoption within the country.” (Writ Petition No. 1171/1982: 16) This principle is further elaborated in the Revised Guidelines:

¹³The Task Force is constituted by the Government of India “to facilitate the implementation of the norms, principles and procedures of adoption as envisaged in the Supreme Court judgment” (Ananthlakshmi et al. 2001: 18).

It is ... necessary ... to regulate and monitor all programmes so as to ensure minimum standards in all child welfare activities. Among non-institutional modes, the interest of the child can best be served through adoption in a family. Further, it is also an accepted fact that the child develops best in his or her own cultural and social milieu. Thus, placement of a child through adoption in an indigenous setting would be ideal for his or her growth and development. Inter-country adoption i.e. adoption of Indian children by adoptive parents residing abroad, should be resorted to only if all efforts to place the child with adoptive parents residing in India prove unsuccessful. (Revised Guidelines, Resolution No. 4-1/93-CARA, 1.6)

According to the Revised Guidelines the agencies have to comply with a list which gives an order of priority regarding the placement of Indian children in adoption:

1. Indian families in India.
2. Indian families abroad (NRIs).
3. One parent of Indian origin abroad.
4. Totally foreign.

(Revised Guidelines 4.5.) Apart from standardising a priority to Indian national adoptive parents, the Revised Guidelines also lays down criteria for the adoptive parents' age, income and medical status, as well as the home study visit and follow up visit after placement in domestic adoption. Further, the Revised Guidelines also state the proper procedure upon a child's arrival in an agency, which demands that the agency is obliged to notify local police and the Juvenile Welfare Board. Further, the child is entitled to a medical examination, and the agency must make attempts at tracing the biological parents in order to restore the child. If the agency fails to locate the biological parents, it is, after three months, obliged to apply to the Juvenile Welfare Board for a release order which declares the child legally free for adoption. The agency is also required to put in an application for a birth certificate to the local Magistrate for every child that is declared legally free for adoption. (The guidelines also lead to a tightening of the adoption procedure nationally.) These are the most important aspects of the Revised Guidelines. The professional staff at Palna, follow these guidelines scrupulously. Both Mrs Mehta and Ms Mary place their honour in running 'their' agency according to the set regulations both by CARA and the guidelines.

Above, I have related to the various acts, judgements, regulations and guidelines that rule the field of adoption in Delhi. However, there is also an aspect of malpractice in adoption in Delhi. Due to its illegal feature, malpractice is a phenomenon I only heard of through stories and rumours. Concludingly, I will give a brief outline of this aspect of adoption.

Malpractice

During the conversation with the prospective adoptive parents, the VCA calls Ms Mashia on her mobile phone. Ms Mashia leaves the room in order to answer the phone from the office. I am left behind with the family in the living room. I feel a bit insecure, since I have only been on a couple of home study visits previously. I am not completely comfortable with the situation. Fortunately, the family—the wife, the husband and the husband's mother—ask me questions I know how to answer. They are quite interested in how the children are placed or come into the care of YCW. I understand the agenda behind the question when the husband's mother tells me that they have heard about children being stolen from parents in hospitals. The husband's mother tells me that they do not want a 'stolen child' they want the adoption to be done the correct way and through the proper channels. However, she says that they have heard rumours of newborn babies being sold by the hospital staff to people who want a child and are willing to pay money in order to have a newborn. I guess they worry that somebody may turn up on their doorstep and claim that their adopted child actually is not theirs, but belongs to her, even though they adopt through an agency. Hence, I tell the family what Ms Mary has told me, that it is illegal to adopt a child privately from a hospital. And that in YCW all the children placed in adoption are declared legally free for adoption by the Juvenile Welfare Board. However, as a just-in-case I also tell the family what I overheard Ms Mary telling another family: that if you adopt from a stranger on the street, not only do you run the risk of blackmail, but also having somebody turn up your doorstep attempting to take your child away. Mainly, because the adoption is not formalised by the court. By then Ms Mashia has finished her phone call conversation and the home study visit is resumed.

During field study I was told several times that malpractice still is a problem in the field of adoption in India today. Unfortunately, many childless couples approach the illegal independent adoptions actors, because malpractice can provide them with the child they want. Further, they do not ask questions about your intentions to adopt nor do they push you to confront some unpleasant socio-cultural demands, like the social stigmas attached to married infertility and adoption. Thus, the infertile couple may actually be able to

keep the adoption a secret and be 'given' a child that is newborn and with the preferred sex and complexion. These issues are not questioned nor discussed if you have the money or the drive to adopt illegally.

Though many efforts are made to end malpractice in adoption, little can really be done in the absence of an efficient and uniform adoption law which secures the best interest of the child and the rights of the child. However, both the social workers and the other professionals in the field of adoption work scrupulously to make adoption an equal alternative to biological children within the Indian context, as well as ensuring the 'best interest of the child'.

Chapter 2

Great Expectations: The Prospective Adoptive Parents

Only a few of the couples I met told me that they had adopted out of ideological reasons. One mother said, “We already have our own son, but we wanted to do something good for another child. You know, to give an abandoned child a better start in life.” In an overwhelming number of cases, however the most common reason to adopt is infertility. In the first part of this chapter I outline the social stigmas attached to marital infertility, the woman’s position in such a situation, as well as the influence of the woman’s natal family in her coping with infertility. I was told, several times that a childless or ‘barren’ woman is considered, by society at large, as inauspicious; infertility and inauspiciousness go together. In my view, in coping with her infertility the woman explores her options; should she remain inauspicious, seek infertility treatment and/or adopt an unrelated child. In the second part of this chapter I related the expectations of the adoptive parents with regard to the child, these are mainly the age, complexion, sex and date of birth¹ of the adopted child. I think their expectations may be located on a deeper level, and attempt to reveal these.

The Social Aspect of Barrenness

In India it is an inescapable fact that married life is equal to reproduction. When reproduction fails, married life also fails. Bharadwaj explains this ‘cultural’ fact as ‘the cultural importance of children’ in the Indian society.

¹According to the social workers, prospective adoptive parents request the correct date and time of birth of the child in order for a *pandit* (Hindu priest) to make a horoscope, and thus to establish whether the child and parents are a good and auspicious match.

Furthermore: “The birth of a child—a son in particular—marks the important shift in the man/woman; celibacy/marriage; father/mother axis. The cog in this structure, narrowly defined as *the son*, and as its broadest as *offspring*, connects the physical with the meta-physical.” (2003: 1869) In other words, to feel completeness as a married man and woman, one has to experience parenthood.

In many of the home studies I sat in on often, the childless woman would tell us how her mother had suggested that they go in for adoption, upon seeing her daughter’s social and emotional pain. Unnithan-Kumar has similar observations from her study on rural Hindu and Muslim women in Rajasthan. She says, “Women’s kin are very important people who influence their desires and actions with regard to health as in other matters.” (Unnithan-Kumar 2001: 30)

Female reproduction or female failure to reproduce may be referred to as *the social burden of reproduction* (Unnithan-Kumar 2001: 28). The concept refers to the social stigmas attached to female infertility, hence I think such understanding includes barrenness and inauspiciousness as an intrinsic part of female infertility. Unnithan-Kumar claims it is “generated by social intimacy, anxieties about fertility and social performance, and women’s desire to decrease the mental and physical burden of reproduction on their lives.” (ibid.: 27). Likewise, most of the (potential) adoptive mothers I met could in one way or another relate to at least one situation where they had experienced social pressure in order to reproduce and the following stigmas when failing. Some women reveal that after being unable to conceive a child for years of married life, their ‘barrenness’ is perceived as a great threat to others so that not even close friends and family will invite them to social gatherings where also children are present. In her article Unnithan-Kumar describes the similar infertile experience of one of her informants, a rural Muslim woman called Zahida. Zahida’s mother-in-law and one of her sisters-in-law put Zahida under pressure when she was unable to conceive.

She was unable to conceive after her first child and came under tremendous social pressure as a result. She felt depressed, fearful and anxious, not only about her inability to conceive but also about her status as a wife, which was called into question. She approached all the agents perceived to provide effective cures for infertility, whether spiritual healers or private gynaecologists. As a result of her efforts she had four more children, albeit in difficult circumstances. (Unnithan-Kumar 2001: 38-39).

I believe that much the same applies to the adoptive mothers I met; they are under enormous pressure both from their own families and the society.

However, I believe that their situation (urban, middleclass and infertile) has taken them a step further; they have taken the advice of their gynaecologist or a close relative (often their mother) and approached an adoption agency.

Adoption: Escaping Childlessness

The most important outcome of adoption is that it provides infertile couples with children; as they say, “it is a chance to complete our family.” Having children is an important aspect of Indian family life (Mines and Lamb 2002: Part I, Introduction). If you tell an Indian you are married, his or her first question will not be “Do you have children?”, but “How many children?” Also in urban Delhi, it is commonly taken for granted that you have children if you are married, the reason behind marriage is reproduction of the male line. Therefore, a married couple is often not considered a *real* or *complete* family until they have their own children.²

Reproduction enhances a young woman’s position in her husband’s family, which if she is newly wed is often quite marginal. Jacobson (1999), too, emphasises the importance of children in Indian society. She relates that a woman’s position, within the family, is ensured when producing children. Jacobson suggests, “In giving birth to a child, a woman knows she is contributing, as only she can do, to the wellbeing of her family.” (ibid.: 72) As Bharadwaj points out in his article “Why adoption is not an option in India” both fertility and infertility are socially visible. It is unthinkable that a couple may actually choose to remain childless. The aspect of social visibility of fertility or infertility, are open to social control and management. My intention is to show how such social control and management may lead childless couples to adoption. According to Jacobson (1999), fertility and reproduction are considered the woman’s contribution to the family. In my view, therefore people quite ‘naturally’ blame the woman; she is not fulfilling her duty.

Fertility Paradox

After some time in the field I realised that the Indian perception of fertility contains a paradox that affects both the children in Palna and the adoptive mothers. On the one hand there is a social stigma attached to single

²Also, in the West I think people may question whether a couple is a family or not. For instance, one time, I told a married, middle-aged, childless couple about my project and their responses were unequivocal. The husband exclaimed that he viewed himself and his wife as a family, but the wife did not agree. She said: “We are a couple, not a family; we have no children!”

motherhood, or ‘the unwed mother’. Single motherhood is often the main reason a newborn is left by his or her mother at the hospital or outside the orphanage. On the other hand, female fertility in marriage is glorified and highly valued. It is esteemed an essential aspect of female duty (dharma) to conceive, give birth and bring up children. Correspondingly, female infertility or ‘barrenness’ within marriage is regarded as great misfortune and ill omen, it is inauspicious, and thus, stigmatised. Just like the ‘unwed mother’, the ‘barren wife’ is perceived as a misfit in society at large. In my view, the barren wife seems to be an ‘anomalous’ category³ (Douglas 2004). Douglas states, “The initial recognition of anomaly leads to anxiety and from there to suppression or avoidance.”⁴ (Douglas 2004: 6) A mother depicted, in similar terms, that relatives and friends had stopped inviting her to gatherings and celebrations, avoiding her as much as possible. Neither of the two categories, ‘unwed mother’ and ‘barren wife’, fits the traditional Indian family ideal, thus the property of anomaly. Douglas (2004) describes anomaly as “an element which does not fit a given set or series” (ibid.: 47). In other words, anomaly is a position that does not quite fit a given culture’s classificatory system, (it is betwixt and between) and may be responded to in a positive (confront) or negative (avoidance) manner. The ‘unwed mother’ may be seen as anomalous due to her out of place fertility, whereas the out of place infertility places the ‘barren wife’ in anomalous position. I let the anomalous aspect of ‘barren wives’ rest here.⁵ A little later I will elaborate the inauspicious aspect of the ‘barren’ wife, in order to present the aspect of avoidance further in relation to her. I hope to explain why childless couples choose adoption, though it is a ‘last resort’.

Infertility: Genetic Death and Oblivion

In North India a common perception is to view sons as an extension of the father (Bharadwaj 2003; Kumar 2002). Bharadwaj goes to sacred Hindu texts (*Laws of Manu*, *Upanishads*) and finds “a theme that makes the life of a man permanent through the agency of his son—an open defiance of death.” (Bharadwaj 2003: 1870) Bharadwaj, according to his findings, claims that a man who does not reproduce himself in a son faces a “possibility of a genetic death—complete oblivion.” (ibid.) In my view, Bharadwaj puts too much emphasis on these old sacred texts, hence he ignores present

³Anomaly is an analytical concept that I find fruitful in order to shed light on the avoidance aspect attached to the ‘barren wife’.

⁴According to Douglas (2004), avoidance may also confirm and strengthen the definition to which the anomaly does not conform (ibid.: 49).

⁵My focus is on adoption, not how married women cope with infertility.

practise and thought in Northern India, as well as the major influence of the ethnosociological model has had on research conducted on Indian society the past thirty years. Also, I find Bharadwaj's claim that a man without sons may be seen 'genetically dead' an alien concept in Delhi. None of my acquaintances talked about biology in terms of genetics. Instead they used blood, nature and in a few cases substance. However, the childless couples I met were facing social stigmas due to infertility, particularly the woman. Most of the couples I met, however, were more concerned with adopting an infant in order to feel 'complete', than continuing the family line by a genetic male heir.

Pre-Adoption Infertility Strategies

The Hindu cosmology conceptualises an intimate connection between the body and the progeny. This corporeal connection between married body and its offspring is at once biological and social. It inextricably binds mother (womb), father (sperm) and child (foetus) in an immutable triad. A 'double conceptual bind' unites the biological and the social aspects of reproduction by transmuting symbiosis between the socially visible aspects of reproduction such as kinship relations and the invisible biological aspects of sexual reproduction into a 'taken-for-granted-fact'. (Bharadwaj 2003: 1870).

In Delhi when a couple remains childless after several years of marriage, most couples (middle class couples, due to the costs) will visit an infertility clinic to see a doctor.⁶ Often the woman is treated for the infertility problem; she is thoroughly examined, she might be given a hormone treatment, or intrauterine insemination (IUI)⁷ or in vitro fertilisation (IVF). Most of the women I met had undergone hormone treatment, and several IUIs. Only a minority had gone through with IVF treatments. Some also told about visits to *pandits* or other infertility specialists where treated with prayers, rituals or healing, and some had tried acupuncture. Others again could tell stories about how other members of the family, on their behalf, were seeking help from these infertility specialists.⁸ Both Unnithan-Kumar (2001) (among poor Muslim

⁶YCW and VCA estimate that about 90% of the couples who approached them for adoption have undergone some form of infertility treatment like IVF, IUI (ICSI), hormones, herbs, acupuncture, blessings.

⁷IUI is the terminology my informants used; another name for this kind of treatment is intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI).

⁸I do not intend to venture further along this line of alternative fertility methods; my focus is adoption.

women) and Wadley (1999) (among Hindu women) suggest that the North Indian longing for sons denies women control over both their reproductive abilities and sexuality; thus it forces women into unwanted pregnancies, or in this case infertility treatment. The childless women approaching YCW had in many cases introduced the subject of adoption on an early stage; however the option had been left temporarily due to the husband's unwillingness. Still, upon approaching YCW, many husbands were quite opposed to the idea of adoption, but had been persuaded or encouraged by a doctor, friend, neighbour, wife, other family member(s) or heard of an acquaintance who had adopted.

Since, the reproductive pressure on women can be seen in terms of social constraints, and female duty⁹ (Unnithan-Kumar 2001), these women will in one way or another address their infertility due to social pressure. "The question is not whether women decide, or not, to address their reproductive conditions but what makes them decide to take up certain options rather than others, when these decisions are taken and who or what facilitates the process." (Unnithan-Kumar 2001: 28) When children are absent after several years of marriage, the couple will seek answers to why they do not have a 'complete family'. I think it is quite essential to focus on and investigate 'who or what facilitates the process'.¹⁰

The couples rely on support from close family. The relevance (or irrelevance) of close family's part (or social intimacy following Unnithan-Kumar) in adoption is revealed during the home study. On such visits, the social worker always asks, for instance, if the matter has been discussed with close family and, if so, about their reaction.

Inauspicious¹¹

⁹Others too expressed such notions regarding the female duty. Particularly one of my older, male neighbours was fascinated by how I acted out my duty. "It fascinates me; your duty has driven you to come here and look after orphaned children, even though you have your son and husband in Norway. How come that looking after Indian children is your duty?"

¹⁰Some women resort to adoption in order to save the marriage, as will be shown in the example of the Sharmas in chapter four. In that case the husband feels pressure to take a second wife due to his present wife's infertility (blocked tubes). Jacobson (1999) reports how a man may divorce and remarry if his first wife does not give birth, or that first wives may not object to having a co-wife.

¹¹My acquaintances in YCW, VCA or others involved in adoption in Delhi (with whom I spoke English), would refer to the English word *inauspicious*. Furthermore, the couples who spoke only Hindi understood and used the English term *inauspicious*.

Childless couples are much pitied, and a barren woman is an inauspicious guest at a wedding or a *Chauk* [infant blessing] ceremony. A married woman with no children is considered incomplete, even as an unmarried adult woman would be incomplete. (Jacobson 1999:73)

Jacobson's observations are similar to mine. Many of the prospective adoptive mothers that approached YCW could tell stories about how friends and relatives kept themselves at a distance due to their childlessness and the wife's presumed inauspiciousness.

Ms Kalini first introduced me to this notion that married, childless women are inauspicious. I asked her what it means for a woman to be inauspicious (in India), and she answered:

A woman who cannot produce children is considered inauspicious. Married women have a duty to give birth and bring up children [in particular sons]. It is a part of being a woman. If a woman cannot produce children she is not performing her duty. In our society it is believed that she brings bad luck and must be avoided. She might touch you with the evil eye and cause you harm. She is in other words ill omen. People are particularly careful not to leave their children in the care or company of a barren woman. Children are considered especially vulnerable to the harm inauspicious women are presumed to cause.

Not long after the conversation above, Ms Kalini told me:

Do you remember when we talked about how women who cannot conceive are considered inauspicious in our society? Afterwards, I remembered this woman who came to see us; she told us how she experienced her inauspiciousness. She told me: 'I cannot bear this burden [of inauspiciousness] much longer; you must find me a child. I love children so much, but not even my family and relatives allow me contact with the children in our family. I am not invited to my nephews' and nieces' birthday parties anymore; they [the adults] fear my bad luck, that it will infect them too and cause their children harm. But I love children, I cannot harm children.'

You see, this poor woman's family is afraid that she, because of her inauspiciousness may harm the children. They think she might cast the evil eye on the children when she plays with them. They think she is inauspicious, because only an inauspicious woman is

barren. It is bad luck when a woman does not produce children, doesn't fulfill her duty, and bad luck can be rubbed off to others. The two [barrenness and inauspiciousness] go together.

Inauspicious women bring about bad luck, in general, and are harmful for children in particular. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'inauspicious' as something portending evil, an ill omen or unlucky. In this thesis inauspicious is understood both according to Ms Kalini's definition and the *Shorter Oxford*, though the *Shorter Oxford* definition is included in Ms Kalini's. In the conversation above, Ms Kalini also claims that 'barren' and 'inauspicious' women are considered touched by the evil eye¹² as well as posing a threat to others, i.e. unintentionally casting the evil eye on others. Not only is adoption a way out of childlessness, but also a manner in which stigmas attached to female infertility, barrenness and inauspiciousness are avoided.

Ancestral Sin

Mattison Mines (2002) in his analysis of the Will and Testament of a Madras merchant, Guruviah, (1915) touches the aspect of a person's inauspiciousness when childless. Mines finds signs of inauspiciousness in the Madras merchant's life story, in the fact that Guruviah was childless and that his adopted son, too, died without children. As I observed during my field study, Mines too, observes childlessness as connected to misfortune, as well as having a source in an unseen force.

¹²Unnithan-Kumar (2001) also refers to the evil eye, in her article "Emotions, Agency and Access to Healthcare: Women's Experiences of Reproduction in Jaipur", as *nazar*. A few of my informants also used *nazar*, but *evil eye* was by far the more common term. The evil eye according to Unnithan-Kumar is spells related to envy; my acquaintances too perceived the evil eye in connection with envy. The barren women were touched by the evil eye because of somebody's envy and would themselves cast the eye on other children due to their envy of other's children. The *Shorter OED* defines the evil eye as "a malicious look; such a look superstitiously believed to do material harm; the ability to cast such looks." The Australian *Macquarie Dictionary* defines the evil eye as "the power superstitiously attributed to certain persons of inflicting injury or bad luck by a look." As I understood my informants' notions of the evil eye, it does not necessarily mean literally an evil look, rather it may also be an emotion or feeling like envy as mentioned above. However, noting that, the feeling or emotion may be unintended. Jacobson (1999) writes: "Ever present is the fear of the evil eye, which even a loving parent can cause to fall on his child by admiring him too much. (ibid: 75) Sometimes, when I was talking to my acquaintances and neighbours and they were telling me about a son, daughter, niece, nephew, brother, etc. in a loving manner, I said, "You must be very proud ..." They would always answer: "Proud, no ... just happy for him ..." They stressed to me that being proud was like tempting fate, or asking for trouble.

To be sonless and childless was and is considered a great tragedy in Madras society, and to have an adopted son die prematurely as well indicates causes beyond human control. Perhaps Guruviah's childlessness was a consequence of an ancestral sin or had some other inauspicious source. (Mines 2002: 74)

Mines' informants suggest that childlessness may be seen in terms of karma, a notion I see in terms of my acquaintances reference to destiny. I return to childlessness as destiny in chapter six.

Why Adoption is an Option

Bharadwaj in his article questions whether adoption is "an acceptable alternative to infertility" and furthermore, if it is "a culturally desirable solution" (Bharadwaj 2003: 1867). Bharadwaj argues that to adopt a child openly in India is to publicly reveal infertility and further to commit sacrilege to the image of marriage and the male rebirth in his son.

Protecting the male also safeguards the image of a marriage which could crumble in the face of evasive conception. Adoption in such cases deals a further deathly blow to the entire project of concealment that fuels and propels the misrecognition process. A publicly visible child incorporated with the family unit makes the child/couple vulnerable to social ridicule and stigma that is perceived to be worse than being called infertile. (Bharadwaj 2003: 1876)

According to Bharadwaj's findings adoption would not be possible in Delhi; yet in my experience the numbers of finalised adoptions in Delhi have increased since the Kant Pandey judgements in the early eighties (VCA and Palna records, and oral statements from the other adoption agencies in Delhi). The childless women I met expressed despair in relation to their infertile marriage, and to them it was far worse to be called infertile and inauspicious, than to go in for adoption. I agree with Bharadwaj to the point that it is the wish of the childless couples who approach YCW to keep marital infertility invisible. However, in my view, Bharadwaj does not seriously account for nor credit the impact of social and cultural stigmas associated with female infertility. Rather his study emphasises too strongly male infertility and the male loss of reproducing himself in a son. In my experience, the inauspiciousness that the prospective adoptive mothers have felt and still feel push the couple quite strongly in the direction of adoption, though the option is their last resort. The husband, too, experiences the inauspiciousness attached to his

wife. Further, couples still attempting IVF treatment have other views and hopes than those who have decided on adoption. Bharadwaj's study seems rather incomplete, since he questioned couples going through IVF treatment what they thought about adoption as an option, rather than couples who had already registered their application at an adoption agency.

Wrapping Up Infertility and Inauspiciousness

The social burden of reproduction seen in terms of adoption reveals an essential aspect of the 'barren' women's interests in adoption. Hence, adoption is a decision made after (ten) years of marriage, after trying, then waiting and then eventually failing to conceive. Infertility signifies emotional and physical pain, failed IUI (ICIS) or failed IVF treatment (if affordable), and then often more than once, to these women. They experience friends, relatives and strangers referring to their childlessness, quite openly and publicly, as a 'barren' and inauspicious condition. Though, experiencing the social stigmas attached to marital infertility, many of the women I interviewed admitted that their mothers suggested that the couple opt for adoption. A few approached YCW after being advised by a medical specialist.

The Perfect Child

When middle-class urban Indians approach the adoption agency they have to accept that the child they adopt is of unknown background and unrelated to their family. However, this situation must be viewed in the light of their experience with marital infertility and inauspiciousness, which, as shown, is quite stressful. The social pressure on the couple's reproductive ability must be considered when examining their expectations (sex, age and complexion) regarding the adoptee. The social worker and a professional counsellor counsel the couple on these issues in order to level their expectations and prepare them for the adoptive family life, before the social worker sets out to match a child with a family.

Matching

Finding a suitable family for a child, and a suitable child for a family, is an important aspect of the matching, which is conducted according to complexion,¹³ age and sex. Hence, a fair family is given a fair child, and a dark family

¹³Complexion is described using the scale fair–wheatish–dark. Subcategories also exist, e.g. fair-to-wheatish, wheatish-to-dark etc.

is given a dark child. Features are also considered, thus, a family with more 'tribal' features are given a 'tribal' looking child. However, matching is a debated issue; professionals from CARA, VCA, YCW and other adoption agencies disagree upon the matter. In an interview I had with Mrs Bhargava, she related the paradox of matching and promoting in-country adoption.

Me: "Why is the matching of the children with the family so important?"

Mrs Bhargava: "Actually, some part of it is to do with the agency. I feel that they have to ... and not only in India, if you look at the documents written by Brodinsky and some other people who have worked in the area of adoption. They find that as part of policy they have laid down issues of matching, which I think is so ridiculous, because on one hand you are saying match the child, on the other you are saying tell the child. It is at counter purposes. Either you say forget about it, there is no question about matching: any child, any family, whatever. Then you can promote the fact of telling the child. You cannot promote that the child should look like the family; then you must tell the child. It is contradicting. It is a paradox. So if you feel that it is a stupid thing and should be addressed; to some extent it is important, as visible in my study.¹⁴ I found that physical appearance was the most predominant factor for giving self-esteem. What would happen if a family is very fair and a dark child comes in? I mean, there will be a conflict and it becomes more aggravated. If you look at it from the point of view of the welfare of the child, how does it matter? It really does not matter. But I guess partly the issue is society, and partly the issue is agency; the policy and norms have been created like that. They get a photograph and they match."

Me: "Because people ask, 'How do you select the child?' and they [the agency] say we match it with your complexion, your features."

Mrs Bhargava: "I think you cannot do it. You are giving the wrong message to the family. You are telling the family that you are trying to build a family with these biological genetic characteristics, which are not there. So, again to the family you are giving the wrong message."

Me: "So it is a paradox on several levels?"

¹⁴As mentioned, Mrs Bhargava holds a Ph.D. in child development. She has also published a book based on her research, *Adoption in India* (2005).

Mrs Bhargava: "On several levels."

Me: "So when they say it is about nurture versus nature they contradict themselves?"

Mrs Bhargava: "At a workshop in Bangalore for some social workers, I raised the paradoxes. On one side, you say promote [in-country] adoption; on the other side, you have so many barriers; they [the agencies] say, 'Do not give to this couple, because she is handicapped,' 'Do not give this couple because they lack education.' Here is another paradox. They say [the agencies] 'Do not push your child to be an achiever, do not have so many aspirations, the child might not be able to do very well, it might have learning difficulties'; on the other hand, there is a family that will not push the child to be highly educated, but where the child will be well integrated."

Here Mrs Bhargava recognises the importance of the adoptee not to be more visible than he or she already is as adopted, in relation to the family. Further, she pinpoints an important aspect in the adoption process; namely the role of the social worker and her relation to the adoptive parents. However, she places too much stress on the information that comes from the social worker to the adoptive parents. In my view, it is also important to account for the expectations they put forward to the social worker, which in turn may be seen as an extension of the social and cultural prejudices regarding unrelated adoption. In the interview Mrs Bhargava also mentions disclosure, which I relate to in chapter three, and parents' suitability, which is discussed in chapter four.

Expectations in Unrelated Adoption

Below I give an account of a home study visit at the Singhs'. This family does not represent the typical family or the typical home study. The typical family will try to act subtly about their expectations (regarding the child), whereas the Singhs do so to a very little extent. Even though the family is atypical, I think their tale is just as representative as other families. The Singhs' desires regarding the child are more articulated than other families'. As will be shown, the Singhs are more forward and open about their worries and concerns.

During this home study I acted as an observer and an assistant to Ms Kalini. I played a much less active part than in other home studies. This is partly due to the fact that the conversation was mostly held in Hindi but also due to the strong emotions of Mrs Singh senior and the withdrawn behaviour

of the potential adoptive mother.

Look at his Fair Complexion¹⁵

I am accompanying Ms Kalini on a home study visit. We arrive at the couples' home in Ms Kalini's car, driven by her driver. The home of the prospective adoptive parents, the Singhs, lies in an area in South Delhi named Vasant Vihar. I know of the area; it is supposed to be quite nice, but the block of flats and the compound that the family's flat is situated in looks quite worn down. Mr Mohinder Singh is waiting outside, on the lawn. The car stops and he opens the door to the car. He greets us with a handshake and leads us to the front door of his building. Inside, the hall is quite dark and the only light comes from narrow openings in the wall of the staircase. Mohinder Singh leads us up the stairs to the second floor. The door to their flat is open, and waiting in the doorway stand an old woman, his mother, Mrs Singh; and a middle-aged woman, his wife, Veena Singh. They greet us with a *namaste* [good day] and take us inside. First we are shown the flat. It consists of two kitchens, two bathrooms and three bedrooms placed on both sides along the narrow corridor. Then we are taken to the room closest to the entrance on the left hand side of the corridor [from the entrance and directly opposite the main kitchen]. The room contains a double bed, two wardrobes, a shelf, a coffee table, a couple of arm chairs, a couch, a couple of small tables and a huge TV that dominates one wall [the wall opposite the door]. On the other walls are a calendar, a clock and bright coloured pictures of Hindu gods. The room is quite dark; the two windows [on each side of the TV] have the curtains drawn, and the room is lit by two bulbs hanging from the ceiling. Ms Kalini and I sit down on the couch, and almost instantly a young woman brings us chai, water, biscuits and some *chat* (a deep-fried snack). Unlike Ms Kalini, I sip my tea. As usual it is so sweet that it is almost bitter. Like Ms Kalini, I leave the water. Ms Kalini starts the interview. I sit back and listen to the conversation, which is mainly in Hindi, though the husband turns to me every now and then to explain in English. I follow the conversation between Ms Kalini and the family, I make notes of the whole thing, and whenever I think I miss some of the subtleties of the conversation, I make a mark in my notes.

Mohinder and Veena Singh are a middle-aged couple; he is forty-seven and she is forty-three years old. They have been married for about fourteen years without conceiving a child. Veena Singh works in one of the Ministries in Delhi, while Mohinder Singh is the personal assistant of the principal in one of Delhi's most prestigious private schools. They live as a joint family with the husband's parents,

¹⁵The transcript of the home study visit is taken from my field diary, written down during the visit, and re-written later that evening. A copy of this report can be found in the appendix.

two younger brothers, the brother's wives and sons. Both husband and wife are Punjabi, and they have an arranged marriage. I look over Ms Kalini's shoulder to see which class category she places them, according to her they belong to the middle [middle] classes.

Present at the home study visit are both Mohinder and Veena Singh, as well as his parents, Mr and Mrs Singh, one of his sisters-in-law, Raveena, and one brother's four year old son, Pramod. The sister-in-law and her son both have fair complexions, Mohinder Singh is darker; wheatish to dark [according to Ms Kalini's notes] whereas Veena Singh is wheatish to fair. Both Mr and Mrs Singh are on the darker side complexion-wise. The conversation that takes place between Ms Kalini and the family is mostly dominated by the Mohinder Singh and Mrs Singh, his mother.

During the interview Ms Kalini enquires about their expectations regarding the child they wish to adopt: "A boy or girl?" The Singhs [as a joint family] say that they do not have any preference regarding the child's sex. Then Ms Kalini tells them that she thinks a wheatish child around two years will suit the family. She says: "I have one child in particular in mind for you. If you come to my office one day next week I can show you her file." However, the Singhs say they want a baby. I can tell by the expression on their faces and their serious voices that they disagree strongly with Ms Kalini. It seems the family already has made up their mind on the matter, in particular Mrs Singh. Mrs Singh talks fast and with a serious voice to Ms Kalini, and I catch the word for small, *chota* in Hindi, and the English 'luggage' several times. Mohinder Singh turns to me and explains his mother's position: "My mother tells Ms Kalini that we want a child as young as possible. Our preference is a child below the age of one year. We and particularly my mother desire a child as young as possible because we worry about the child's ability to bond with our family." Mohinder Singh continues: "My mother thinks, and we all agree with her, that a child who is two to three years old will not be able to bond well with a new family." He elaborates: "The child will be too old to bond with us; his or her parents will already have had an influence on the child; he or she will remember what happened to him or her in the past; the child will have too much *luggage*. It will be too difficult to adopt an older child, both for the child to adjust to us and for us to adjust to the child."

However, Ms Kalini tells the family that it is not very probable that the couple will be given a child younger than two or three years old, due to the 'high age' of the couple.¹⁶ She explains to the Singhs that they are considered too old a couple to adopt a baby or a toddler by the guidelines. Still, Mrs Singh protests;

¹⁶The CARA guideline states that the combined age of the adoptive parents should not be more than 90 years or one of the parents should not more than 42 years older than the child.

"No, you must find my son and his wife a young child; promise¹⁷ me that you will try!"

Ms Kalini leaves the issue of the child's age and directs the conversation to its complexion instead. Also the child's complexion is of major concern to the Singhs. And again Mrs Singh talks fast and seriously in Hindi, and the words "fair complexion" are mentioned repeatedly. Then the next thing she does is to call Pramod, her grandson who sits in the juxtaposed bedroom watching Cartoon Network on the television, to come to her. Reluctantly he leaves the TV and comes to his grandmother. Mrs Singh takes hold of him and turns him to Ms Kalini and me, for us to see his complexion clearly. She says: "Look at him, see how fair his skin is; look at his fair complexion! And my other grandson is just as fair. You must find us a baby with the same fair complexion. It is important that the baby match the other children in our family."¹⁸ Again Mohinder Singh explains to me: "My mother thinks it is important that the adopted child is fair complexioned in order to match the other children in our family. We think it is essential that the children match each other, so that nobody can tell the difference [between the biological children of the family and the adopted child]."¹⁹ Ms Kalini, on the other hand, tells the family that they have to be realistic about the adopted child's complexion. Ms Kalini: "When we social workers match a child with a family we make sure that the child's complexion matches the prospective adoptive parents. Whether the child matches his or her cousins is irrelevant in this process. A wheatish child will be a good match for your son and his wife, since it is the complexion in between theirs," Ms Kalini concludes.

The Singhs worry the child will be 'branded' by his or her biological family before they have a chance to influence the child. They worry the child is of 'lower' or 'dirt'-tainted castes (dirt in this context refers to the Hindi word *ganda*).

Neither issues, the age and complexion of the child, are resolved during the home study, and when we leave the family's home the husband's mother grabs hold of Ms Kalini's arm and says for the last time: "You must find a fair baby for my son!"

Luggage: The Ghost of from the Past

When Mrs Singh senior claims that an older child will bring too much luggage, she thinks that the child will bring too many experiences from the past. By

¹⁷This exclamation was said in Hindi but for one word, 'promise'. It was translated to English by Mr Singh.

¹⁸This is said in a mix of Hindi and English; the words look, fair, skin, complexion, grandson and baby are said in English.

¹⁹My deduction of the husband's sentiments.

referring to the term *luggage* she has in mind the period of the child's life before he or she came into the care of the orphanage as well as the time the child has spent in the orphanage. In other words, an adopted child's luggage is the period of his or her life before he or she was adopted by a family. After this home study visit, on our way back to Civil Lines, Ms Kalini and I discussed the metaphor *luggage* that Mrs Singh had used about the adoptee's background. In the case of an adoptee, the less time he or she had spent with natural parents and in the orphanage, the less luggage would he or she carry upon arriving in the new family. Lesser luggage indicates less influence (in some cases seen as contamination) on the adoptee by natural parents and orphanage, hence greater susceptibility to the new adoptive family and a smoother transition to adoptive family life.

Howell (2004, 2006) and Howell & Marre (2006), comparing transnational adoption in Norway and Spain, use the metaphor 'backpack' in describing the adopted child's past. Further, this indicates that the adoptee's past "however brief, has consequences for the child's development in its new circumstances" (Howell 2004: 229). Howell (ibid.) suggests that adoptive parents are interested in and actively try to gather as much information and understanding of their child's past as possible. The adoptive parents aim at reducing "the 'ghost' of the unknown content of the children's 'backpack' that they are understood to carry with them on arrival; backpacks filled with experience and impressions from their life before arriving at their adoptive parents" (Howell & Marre 2006: 310). In the Delhi adoption context, the adoptive parents do not actively seek the content of an adoptee's luggage. Sometimes they may ask about the correct time and date of birth in order to have a horoscope made for the child, in order to establish whether the child will match the family. The Delhi potential adoptive families, like the Norwegian and Spanish ones, have concerns in relation to the adoptee's past (luggage or backpack). However, unlike the Norwegian and Spanish parents who try to reveal its content, the Delhi parents' efforts are placed on minimising the extent of the adoptee's luggage. (These efforts must also be seen in relation to the discussion of nature and nurture in chapter seven).

Complexion and the Most Important Event

In the car on our way home after the home study at the Singhs', Ms Kalini tells me more about the reasons behind the Singhs' desire for a fair child. Ms Kalini: "You must understand, firstly, that the desire for a fair child is connected with the most important event in a person's life, namely the arrangement of his or her marriage." According to Ms Kalini, this is of particular importance if the couple wants to adopt a girl child. She continues: "A girl's complexion

is one of the most determining factors in the settlement of the dowry and the arrangement of the marriage. If a girl has a fair complexion then she is considered beautiful, no matter what her personality and facial features are like, because, in the settlement of a marriage, fair complexion is everything.”

Dhruvarajan (1989) touches upon the same idea, fair complexion is equal to being beautiful. In her study she relates her informants’ description of Leela. “Leela, even though good looking, was not considered beautiful as she did not have very fair skin.” (ibid.: 74) In marriage arrangements Dhruvarajan records that: “Physical beauty—fair skin . . . is considered desirable.” (ibid.: 77) These views are also observed by Frøystad (2005: 100), who states : “Being *gori* [fair] was considered a far more important criterion for beauty than any other.” Whereas a dark girl with beautiful features is perceived as “plain or even ugly” (ibid.: 100). Also Dhruvarajan finds that in the settlement of dowry a girl’s beauty as well as good job and/or education are of great importance. The size of the dowry is reduced when the girl is considered beautiful and to have a good job (Dhruvarajan 1989). In other words, when parents want to marry off a daughter with a complexion darker than fair, they will have to pay a greater dowry. Jacobson observed, “Frequently, a girl is rejected for having too dark a complexion, since fair skin is a highly prized virtue both in village and town.” (Jacobson 1999: 46)

Ms Kalini also told me that a fair complexioned potential son-in-law is by far more attractive in the eyes of the prospective family-in-law than a darker one.²⁰ Hence, the groom’s family might be able to claim higher dowry from the bride’s family. But notions around complexion are also linked to the aspect of a person’s or family’s caste membership.

Complexion: Little Articulated, Deeply Internalised

In her article “Kropp og klasse i Kanpur” (Body and class in Kanpur), Frøystad (2001) suggests that the term *varna* carries connotations of colour.²¹ She discusses the role of the body in the local construction of class in Kanpur. In urban India it is impossible to be certain of anybody’s caste membership unless one knows the person or is introduced to the person with full name. Due to lack of unambiguous caste markers, one cannot determine strangers’ caste membership. However, social differentiation is very much relevant in urban India and is established in caste markers such as complexion, body language, body shape, hairstyle, jewellery, clothes and language. Respectability and

²⁰Frøystad (2005) also suggests such propensity; “even for men fairness was an asset in marriage negotiations” (ibid.: 101).

²¹See chapter five for further information about *varna*.

high status must be actively communicated, in order for others to acknowledge one's social status (Frøystad 2001).

Rather than to consult mental categories concerning all qualities that qualify positions such as 'good'²² or 'low', my high caste acquaintances compared every person they met in accordance to their own visual prototype of each of these categories ... This process was little articulated but deeply internalised, and thus marked people's everyday practice in various ways. (Frøystad 2001: 163)²³

In other words, the upper and lower castes both perceive upper castes persons as fairer than lower castes persons. I believe that my prospective adoptive parents acquaintances operate along the same line as Frøystad's informants. Hence, the adoptive parents perceive complexion to work as a marker in order to establish the adoptive child's caste membership. I believe that this categorisation is articulated both by Mrs Singh senior and Ms Kalini in our conversation afterwards.

Both Ms Mary and Ms Kalini told me on a few occasions that when couples were greatly concerned with complexion, they considered the fair person to be of high caste membership and the dark person to be of low caste membership. Ms Kalini once said: "Here in India we are very much concerned about people's complexion, both our own and others. Indians think that if you are fair, then you are high caste; if you are dark, then you are low caste." Another time, a prospective adoptive father told the social worker Ms Arya about his experiences as a dark complexioned man:

Because I am dark, people at university always used to think that I was either South Indian or had been accepted to university as a scheduled caste.²⁴ Also, as a child people used to comment

²²Frøystad's high caste informants distinguished between three categories of people; low people, good people and big people. Her informants placed themselves as good people. My acquaintances in the VCA and in Palna operated along similar lines, though they would refer to the big people as the 'elite'. Most of my informants belonged to either the 'elite' or 'good' people. 'Low' people were associated with 'dirt' or the Hindi *ganda*. However, the 'low' people would not be referred to as *ganda*; rather that was a way of distinguishing their minds. But I would like to add that the 'elite' was careful to address 'low' people as somebody lacking education and being less fortunate; only a few times did my 'elite' acquaintances associate 'low' people with 'dirt'; however, 'good' people were less careful in such circumstances.

²³My translation.

²⁴Disadvantaged castes which are subject to positive discrimination under the Indian constitution.

on my complexion and call me South Indian. No one ever picked me as a Bengali Brahmin. Because of my experience, I think it is better to adopt a child that is not dark. You may ask, how can you say that, you who are so dark, well, that is why I say it. I am comfortable with my complexion today, but I had a hard time growing up. I think being adopted and dark would just too much for a child to handle.

Since one stigma in adoption is the child's unknown background, caste identity matters. It is seen as a quality inherited and transferred from father to child. When persons share background (or caste) it is assumed they share many qualities (Lambert 2000*a,b*) which are reproduced in inter-action. This applied to adoption advocates prejudices in 'outsiders'. One possible way of escaping such (caste) stigma is to insist on adopting a fair child; after all many in Northern India consider fair complexion equal to high caste (Frøystad 2001). Frøystad argues that her acquaintances position strangers according to complexion, height, body shape clothing and speech. At the backdrop of adoption complexion is the only of these qualities that is applicable. Furthermore, according to Frøystad, those people her acquaintance held to be most inferior looking had dark complexion, those that were on par had fair skin (Frøystad 2001, 2005). In my view, the desire for a fair child must be understood likewise.

Personal bonds and intimacy are constructed through commensality in the Indian context (Lamb 2000, Lambert 2000*a,b*); hence the desire for a fair child may be due to fear. This fear must be seen in relation to an assumption that alien and unknown substances are transacted between the adoptee and family in interaction, hence tainting the family. In my view, this tendency in the society, make Delhi prospective adoptive parents say they do not wish to add more problems and complications to an already strained situation by adopting a dark-skinned child.

Rao (2000) presents data that shows how the Bakkarwal consider interpersonal transactions as potentially risky projects. The Bakkarwal search for similarity in order to minimise risk and to increase predictability (Rao 2000). Similarly, it is possible to view the potential adoptive parents' desire for a fair child as an attempt at minimising risk in the interpersonal transactions that continuously go on between parents and child(ren), even if the parents are darker than fair. After all, they know where they themselves come from, but the child's background is unknown. The social worker's attempt at matching parents and adoptee must be seen in slightly modified terms. Their aim is to secure similarity (in complexion and features) between adoptive parents and

child, and hence maybe sameness in terms of relatedness?²⁵

The Girl Child has Reasons to Feel Wanted

Jacobsen (1999) claims that male offspring in northern India are valued since sons represent economic security and “because they assure the continuation of the family line.” (ibid.: 31) A girl, on the other hand, represents a liability, particularly financially; “her parents must sponsor a costly wedding for her, provide her with a large dowry, and, after every visit to them, send her to her husband’s home with a trunkload of gifts for her in-laws.” (ibid.: 31) Dhruvarajan (1989) notes similarly a preference for sons over daughters amongst her villagers in the Hassan district of Karnataka State. Furthermore, a daughter moves out of her natal home after marriage to her husband’s family, due to the patrilocal residence pattern. After marriage a girl becomes a part of the husband’s family, because of the system of patrilineage, and her bonds to natal kin are further severed. Because of this system daughters are often considered a burden, “they were transients and yet necessitated so much expense” (Dhruvarajan 1989).

About 30 percent want a girl, 5 years ago this was not the case. In Delhi, of 284 children adopted last year, 160 were girls. “Whether it’s Hyderabad or Delhi, it’s always the male child who is swapped for the female. Couples would rather wait 4–5 years for a boy than get a girl in 2 weeks to 3 months. But now the girl child has a reason to feel wanted. At Palna, the centre run by Yamuna Child Welfare²⁶ at least 25–30 percent of the requests are now for girls . . . Mary²⁷ adoption officer at Palna says: “If the younger lot ask for boys, it’s because they already have a girl.” Mostly, professionals and younger couples in nuclear families and foreigners want girls. “For them sex does not matter” says Mary. “Business communities and the lower-middle class still prefer boys ‘to run their businesses’” (Times of India: 25.05.2003)

This quote from a *Times of India* article looks at the introduction of an important change in the adoption pattern in Delhi, which is that more girls than boys are presently being adopted. First of all, this quote states that the sex of the adoptee actually matters, since it is stressed that some actually

²⁵Carsten (1995) understands relatedness as “the indigenous ways of acting out and conceptualising relations between people” (ibid.: 224)

²⁶Pseudonym.

²⁷Pseudonym.

prefer the girl child. It reveals, implicitly, that having boys is considered to be far more important for most people in India. However, the change that has come about is in my view not merely due to a change in prospective adoptive parents' attitudes; there are several factors causing this 'new' trend. Below I investigate several of these factors.

According to the *Times of India* article, there is a preference to adopt the female child. Yet, in my experience, most of the couples who approached YCW and VCA asked at registration to adopt a male child. However, the majority of these would, at the time of adoption, have been counselled on the issue of the child's sex and hence take home a female child. Official figures and statistics also indicate that there has been a noticeable increase in the adoption of the female child in the past ten years, and in more recent years a majority of female children have been adopted. What is the cause of this new request?

I believe that this turn in the adoption pattern in Delhi²⁸ is due to the fact that there are not enough male children available for adoption. One of the first things I discovered when I went through the records at YCW was that the number of boys given in adoption was by far outnumbered by the number of girls. However, I also discovered that there was a considerably longer waiting list of adoptive parents wanting a male child than a female child. When I asked Ms Mary about this occurrence, she told me that most of the couples who came to YCW to register for adoption actually wanted a boy. However, YCW was not able to accommodate this request anymore and had stopped enrolling prospective adoptive parents on the waiting list for boys.²⁹ Ms Mary explains:

Instead we try to counsel the couples who come here to adopt a boy to consider a girl instead. Some keep an open mind to our suggestion and are so desperate to have a child that they decide to go for a girl. Of course, it also helps their decision when they learn that they will be on the top of the list for a boy if they already have adopted a girl. The others go to other placement agencies, to see if these will give them a boy.

Accordingly, the turn in the adoption pattern must be seen in relation to HAMA, since HAMA permits the adoption of only one child of each sex

²⁸In Mumbai there is a preference to adopt the girl child at the time of registration.

²⁹Before 2002, in YCW, most couples who wanted to adopt a male baby had to be on the waiting list for about three years. Though, due to the registration stop for boys in 2002 and 2003, YCW did not register couples who wanted to adopt a male child, unless it was the couple's second adoption.

(see previous chapter). This aspect of the adoption law is intentional and is constituted in order to safeguard the adoption of the female child.

The Adoptive Parents' Community

Whether a couple adopt a boy or girl is also influenced by the adoptive parents' community. However, adoption in Delhi is very much a middle class phenomenon. In YCW and VCA the middle classes are divided into three groups: upper middle class, middle class and lower middle class. Again these three groups of middle classes may be subdivided into categories according to education, place of work and place of birth in addition to social rank.³⁰ After a home study visit to a Brahmin family educated as doctors, I asked the social worker,³¹ Ms Arya, whether the family belonged to the elite or the upper middle class. She responded in the following manner:

No, this family belongs to the middle class, that they are Brahmins and doctors does not place them as the elite. They have neither the connections nor the money of the elite. You see, in Delhi, the elite are those with education, money *and* the 'right' connections. You know, somebody who is a vashiya [varna of the tradesman or farmer] may belong to the elite in Delhi, and a brahmin may be of the lower middle class. In some ways money, family and connections are more important than caste.

According to Ms Mary, social class does in most cases influence the adoptive parents' preference for a boy or a girl. After the visit to the Agarwals' (below) Ms Mary related to her work experience as a social worker in Palna and reasoned in the following manner:

"In my experience, childless couples from the business community will in most cases ask to adopt a male child. This trend is due to inheritance and the continuity of the family business. Also the low-income, lower middle class families prefer to adopt the male child, since boys generally in India are considered to need less supervision (than girls) and do not represent the same expense

³⁰The social workers in YCW and VCA operate along both categories, though to different extents; to one social worker varna is important; to another education and income matter; to the third education is of importance, and to the fourth the standard of accommodation is essential. But since class and caste alone were not important denominators in judging a couple's suitability I do not discuss caste and class here.

³¹Ms Arya, a brahmin, who replaced Ms Mashia in VCA when she resigned in 2003. This conversation is from my return visit in 2004.

as girls. When a family come to me and register themselves as prospective adoptive parents, I can, in most cases, judge by their personal data whether they wish to adopt a boy or a girl.

This tendency for different communities or social classes to have disparate preferences regarding the sex of the child is also illustrated in example below. However, the example also reveals how some prospective adoptive parents decide on the adopted child's sex relying on the social worker's counselling and guidance.

Ms Mary Counsels the Agarwals³²

The YCW van takes Ms Mary and me to the family home of the Agarwals in Western Delhi. The family belongs to the upper middle class and the business community. Originally the family (i.e. the husband's parents due to the system of patrilineality and patrilocality) belonged to Lahore where they ran a family business in trading, though due to the trouble during Partition they were forced to flee to Delhi. We are taken to the living room on the ground floor, and after the formalities are settled Ms Mary asks the prospective adoptive parents, Arun and Geeta Agarwal, whether they would prefer to adopt a boy or a girl. Geeta Agarwal expresses her preference for a girl, reasoning, "I am a little insecure about adopting a son; what kind of a relation will I have with my adopted son? I feel more comfortable with the thought of adopting a girl. I think girls are more affectionate and loving than boys. Personally, I think I would feel more at ease with a girl." However, Ms Mary disagrees: "I think you should go for a boy because of your father-in-law's [negative] attitude³³ to adoption. It will, most likely, be easier for him to accept a boy than a girl." Ms Mary turns to me, in order to explain her reasoning, "You see, he is of the older generation; he is more traditional." Ms Mary turns back to the couple, "A daughter you may have later. First you must let your father-in-law come to terms with the fact of adoption, and I think he will be more lenient in accepting a grandson than a granddaughter." Arun Agarwal and his mother nod in agreement and seem to be of the same mind as Ms Mary.

In some circumstances the membership of a given community has a greater impact on the family's decision-making process regarding the child's sex. In the home study above, though, Geeta Agarwal states her preference for a girl child, Ms Mary argues that the daughter has to wait, that the family

³²The home study is also discussed in chapter five.

³³The father-in-law is against adoption because he thinks bad qualities are transmitted in the biogenetic substance from parents to children. He wishes for his son to have his own biological child. I also relate to Mr Agarwal in chapter seven.

foremost needs a son in order to accept the act of adoption, but also because of the ‘traditional mind’ of Mr Agarwal senior (which also was supported by the husband and his mother). Geeta Agarwal’s feelings are second to the needs of the family. Interestingly, Ms Mary rejects her expert opinion to promote the adoption of the girl child in the case with the Agarwals. I interpret Ms Mary’s change of heart in terms of duty; hence, reproducing the family line is considered more important than Geeta’s own preference. Furthermore, by adopting a boy, Mr Agarwal senior may eventually accept their act of adoption.

The Sin of the Biological Mother and her Child’s Destiny

Bharadwaj (2003) dwells on adoption versus childlessness in his article. He concludes that stigmas attached to infertility are possibly only overshadowed by the stigmas attached to adoption. In my view this is a simplification of the issues involved.

Bharadwaj: What is your objection to adoption?

Sudhir: . . . The biggest problem in adoption over here in India, and it’s going to stay till people mature in their thinking, is [that an] adopted child is a bastard child! It’s the future of the child . . . That is the problem with adoption—the stigma attached to the child. Parents can understand because they are of particular age, they are mature enough to think, they have taken their decision for adoption, but what about the kid?

Rekha: Why should you make a child suffer? Why should we make another human being suffer for us? (Bharadwaj 2003: 1876)

And Bharadwaj explains the response from Sudir and Rekha accordingly:

The idea of a ‘bastard child’ is seen as contamination family formation in the eyes of the community, so that couples fear that, by adopting, they would condemn the child to live a life full of jibes and ridicule . . . To absorb such a child in the folds of a marriage entrenches the stigma further: a bastard child and an infertile marriage. (ibid.: 1876)

Upon reading the interview with Sudir and Rekha in Bharadwaj’s article, I had a mental vision of Ms Mary’s reaction to a similar response: It is Friday or Saturday morning; it is registration hours, there are several couples waiting in the waiting area, abiding patiently. Ms Mary will already have

talked to several couples about the ‘ups and downs of adoption’, provided information about the procedure and given the couples guidance; whether they are ready to adopt or not. If they are ‘emotionally’ ready she counsels them about telling family, friends, and eventually the child about the fact of adoption. Usually, these registration interviews take the better part of Ms Mary’s working day, and she becomes quite tired towards the end of the line of couples. It might be the last couple, and she stands up from her chair and walks out of her small office. She will smile gently and say quietly, ‘such nonsense!’ That will be my cue; I will look at her, from my hidden space in the back of her office, in both a questioning and encouraging manner [or at least that was what I attempted to do], in order for her to elaborate. Often Ms Mary continues,

People are so narrow minded and prejudiced. This couple comes to me and wants to adopt. But it is like they think that because it is adoption, they can just put in an order for the ‘perfect’ child. It is like they think they can shop for a baby. They want to know who the biological parents are, but at the same time they are worried about the parents showing up at the door to claim the child back. They want a fair, newborn, healthy baby, with good features, and some want the correct time and date of birth. They do not understand that we do not have this information available, that it is impossible for us to even try to gather such information. Some times it makes me so angry, I think, ‘What right do you have to come with such demands; look at yourselves, are you fair and beautiful?’ So I try to counsel them, I tell them that it is difficult for us to obtain such information, but that we will give them all available information we have on the child. I tell them that I put a lot of time and effort into matching parents and child so that nobody who does not know can tell that the child is adopted. Sometimes that reassures the couple; they relax their expectation, they become more realistic about the whole idea. Others will not listen; I tell them that they are not ready [emotionally] for adoption yet; that they should go home and think about it for a couple of months, discuss it between themselves and with their families, and then give me a call and I will try and help them . . . But now I am starving, have you eaten? Come, let us have some lunch.

According to Ms Mary a couple who has too many concerns and demands about the child is not ready to adopt yet. However, she is not concerned about the anxiety they show as long as they are open-minded during counselling.

“Obviously a couple will have many questions, concerns and worries about adopting a child. It is the same with couples who are expecting their natural child.” On that account, if counselling with a professional in the field of adoption cannot ease the couple’s mind, then the couple needs more time to think about the adoption, their situation in life and their ‘hopes for the future’.

Thus, when I read Bharadwaj’s article (2003), and his interview with Sudhir and Rekha I found the situation quite noteworthy and very familiar. Firstly, because I recognised the sentiments of Sudhir and Rekha from the times I eavesdropped on Ms Mary’s conversations with couples, at YCW to register for adoption. These childless couples would express exactly the same sentiments: “What right have we to adopt a child, to let it grow up in our family as our natural child, when he (or she) is born by another woman?”³⁴ Secondly, this interview drew my attention because Bharadwaj seemed to give a different response in relation to the adoption of an abandoned child than Ms Mary. When met with such sentiments from prospective adoptive parents, Ms Mary and the other social workers within the compound of Sunder Bagh turned the question around, “What right have you to not adopt a child that needs a family? You need and desire a child, and the child needs and desires a family. Have you never considered it your destiny? To adopt a child?”³⁵

However, I believe Bharadwaj in his study focuses too much on the stigmas attached to infertility and adoption, and does not take into account the couple’s personal experience of being childless. Furthermore, there are other dimensions of Hindu thought that also affect the childless couple’s decision regarding adoption; destiny is one such dimension and it will be elaborated on in chapter six. Bharadwaj claims that the combination of an infertile marriage and the ‘bastard child’ only emphasises the social stigma of the couple or family in question. Further, he claims that many of the children placed in adoption are born out of wedlock, and are thus “invariably looked upon as the product of an illicit sexual union.” (Bharadwaj 2003: 1876) And he continues: “This also links with the wider concerns of adoptive parents on the issue of the ‘quality’ of the invisible background of a child. Today, this anxiety is articulated by questioning the genetic credential of the adopted child.” (ibid.: 1877) Bharadwaj sees such concern in relation to the notion of “the invisible bloodline, clan and caste origins of an adoptee.” (ibid.: 1877)

Also, the social worker and the adoption agency recognise that most prospective adoptive parents believe the mother of their adopted child con-

³⁴Quote from a couple during a counselling session with Ms Mary.

³⁵Quote from Ms Mary during a counselling session with a couple on their first visit to YCW.

ceived the child out of wedlock, and hence it is an illicit child. Furthermore, is common among adoptive parents to believe that given the mother's illicit sexual union there is a greater chance for the child, if a girl, to become pregnant prior to marriage, what Wadley (1990,1994, 2002) gives the name 'eating sins', of close relations. In other words, the social workers seem to discern that individual sin may affect the family, lineage, caste and community, as it is quite commonly believed in Indian thought (ibid). However, the social worker and the agency do not let the notion of 'eating sins' control their work or agenda. It may set the premises of the adoption, though it does not hinder them in attempting placement of children in adoption.

Concluding Remarks

Because of prevailing stigmas with regard to adoption and infertility; prospective adoptive parents have several expectations and demands. These stigmas are addressed by social worker and counsellor in sessions, and the couples are encouraged to seek as much counselling as they need in order to come to terms.

Hence, adoption must be seen as *completing* families. Some couples first make inquiries about adoption after hearing of friends, friend's friends or other relations who have *successfully* adopted a baby from a placement agency (though other close relations may have suggested adoption). One couple told me that they decided to go for adoption because the brother of their builder had just adopted, and the builder had told them about the family event in a very happy and excited manner. Due to his family's happiness they began to consider adoption (from an agency) more seriously. In fact, I met this couple, accidentally, just two weeks before I left Delhi in 2003; both husband and wife seemed very happy and excited; they had just taken home a baby girl from Palna. The mother expressed gratitude towards Ms Mary and her clever matching of the child. She told me: "People actually think she is our natural child, many comment on how she has my good complexion and eyes." (The mother was quite fair, whereas the father was fair to wheatish and the girl they adopted was quite fair). I told Ms Mary about meeting the couple and the mother's excitement. Ms Mary explained that since the child was a good match for the family and she had no other families with a similar fair complexion (to that of the child) on her waiting list, the couple had been given a priority higher than other less matching couples, though these couples had been longer on the waiting list. Ms Mary underlined the importance of complexion in matching, "You know, most families want a fair child, though I can not give a fair child to a family with dark complexion; the child will stand

out; everybody will wonder why this family has such a fair child, and if they find out about the adoption, it might become a burden for the family to have a fair child; people may say all sorts of things. In this case, the matching is perfect; even the mother told you so; then everybody is happy, and the fact of adoption will not be in their face all the time.”

In adoption in Delhi, prospective adoptive parents have a number of expectations regarding the child they desire to adopt. In this chapter I have shown some aspects of the most prevailing of these, like sex, complexion and age. It is according to this backdrop as well as physical matching that the social workers place a child. I believe that many prospective adoptive parents think that when the child has a fair complexion, is three months old, a boy and with a horoscope that matches the family; he will in fact turn out to be, in the end, the child who is *most their own*. By ‘most their own’ I mean a firmly founded relationship based on the kinship relationship between parents and child. The parents’ great expectations are, however, levelled during counselling. Also, I think the expectations that prospective adoptive parents have may be seen as a manner of coping with the social stigmas attached to adoption.

Chapter 3

Guardian Angel: The Role of the Social Worker

In this chapter I intend to present the social worker's position (to a small extent vis-à-vis the General Secretary) in the adoption process. I also describe a few incidents from my field study in YCW, in order to present some central aspects of the relationship between adoptive parents and social worker. These episodes are important since they shed light on the *role* the social worker holds as well as important aspects in the adoption *process*. The most important aspect of the social worker's role is that she works as a mediator for social change. This will be made evident in the home study visits that I refer to.

In practice, it is the social worker who has the overriding power and authority to decide which couples who register at YCW or VCA are 'suitable' as adoptive parents, and what child will be a 'suitable match' for them. This is so, despite the fact that the general secretaries in YCW and VCA have the final word in approving the prospective adoptive parents for a child in the care of the institution. However, the general secretary has merely a formal approval or veto in the adoption cases, since it is the social worker who presents the general secretary with the facts of every case. The social worker presents her opinion of the prospective adoptive parents and suggests a suitable child, and in most cases her advice is heeded. I know of no cases where Mrs Mehta accepted an adoption to which Ms Mary was negative.¹ Nonetheless, Mrs Mehta did on one occasion, during my field study, reject a couple Ms Mary had accepted as suitable adoptive parents.²

First I briefly describe the adoption process. Then I continue by relating how the prospective adoptive parents are prepared for adoption by being coun-

¹Mrs Mehta did on one occasion accept a family Ms Mary had rejected, but only because she was under the misimpression that Ms Mary had approved the family.

²Ms Mary referred this couple to an agency in Mumbai.

selling with regard to learning disabilities in adopted children and disclosure. Finally in this chapter, I briefly touch upon the issue of secret adoption.

But before I focus on the social worker and adoption process I wish to describe one morning in YCW in order to give an idea of the arrival of a new child in Palna.

One Morning in February

It is a cool morning, though the dreadful Delhi fog has gone so the sun warms me on my way to Palna. I arrive at the gate, nod hello to the guard at the gate, before I continue inside YCW. In the corner of my eye I notice a man and a child walking past me towards the lawn and swings. The man looks like any Indian man, and my guess is that he belongs to the working class or lower middle class. He is wearing the customary moustache, is of medium height, thin, dressed in a long-sleeved shirt under a pink wool vest, wearing pale trousers and *chappal* (sandals). The child holds the man's hand. I am not sure whether it is a girl or a boy; the child has a big mop of black, shiny, fairly short hair, and is dressed in well-worn clothes. I assume it is a girl about five years old, but it is hard to tell; the child might be older. As I walk inside the doors of YCW I forget everything about the man and the child.

As usual I walk into the office of Ms Mary and I put my handbag in my corner on the shelf. It is only a little after half past eight, but Tincy, the secretary, is already in front of the computer printing out emails to Mrs Metha. As I say hello to Tincy I notice Ms Mary's *tiffin*³ on its usual spot on the shelf, a sure sign that Ms Mary has already arrived. "Is Mary in Mrs Metha's office?" I ask Tincy. Tincy replies: "No, she has gone to Palna with Mrs Metha." Every morning Mrs Metha goes on an inspection in Palna, except on Tuesdays, when she is driven in the YCW van to the orthopaedic centre, also run by YCW, to inspect the hospital and to hold meetings with the staff there. It is a quiet Monday morning, there will not be any prospective adoptive families coming in today. I pull out my field diary from my handbag and look at the notes I made on Saturday, eavesdropping on one of Ms Mary's registration conversations. However, I feel bored, so I walk over to VCA, but Ms Kalini and Ms Mashia have not arrived yet; it is still not nine o'clock. Back in YCW, Manu, one of the menservants in YCW, serves chai (tea). Tincy and I have a cup each, and sip the milky, steaming hot and heavily sweetened drink. I look up at Tincy and say: "It is too sweet, do you not think so?" "I think it is nice, it is so cold inside today," Tincy replies. And Tincy is right; the tea warms you up. Even though the sun is warm during the day it is

³A tiffin is an Indian packed lunch. It usually comes in a distinctive lunch box, sometimes having only one compartment, sometimes up to five. The compartments stack on top of each other.

still freezing cold inside the office. We chat and drink our sweet tea while we wait for Ms Mary.

Tincy takes our cups and places them under the small table with the water cooler, which Manu fills every day with fresh filtered water. All the dirty cups and dishes are placed under that table; after lunch Sita collects the dirty dishes and cleans them. Sita is a hired cleaner in YCW. She helps Manu sweep and wash the floors and dust the fans and desks. These cleaning tasks are done every morning before the office workers come to YCW.

Tincy goes back to the computer. She has to write up a letter for Mrs Metha. I find a folder in the record room and take it back to Ms Mary's office in order to browse in it. Every now and then Tincy calls me over to help her decipher Mrs Metha's handwriting. I look at my watch, as usual the sweet tea has made me peckish, but it is only eleven. As I wonder why Ms Mary is taking such long time in Palna, she enters her office holding a child's hand. I look at the child and realise that she is the same girl I saw this morning as I arrived. I look back at Ms Mary and notice that she has a distressed and slightly annoyed look on her face. "Somebody has left their child in the garden. The watchman found her wandering around, and when he asked her, she told him she was waiting for her father, but he has obviously left her behind. Some parents come here and leave their child in our basket,⁴ or in the garden. You would think that the least thing they could do for their children was to relinquish them formally. Then we only have to wait for the child's release order;⁵ it would save us a lot of extra work you know, and give the child a shorter period in Palna [before being adopted]."⁶

Ms Mary leads the girl to her desk, and sits down. She and the girl are more or less at face level with each other now, and Ms Mary asks the girl her name in Hindi. The girl does not answer. Ms Mary says to the girl: "Come on, tell me your name. I am Mary *didi*⁷; what is your name?"

The girl still does not answer, and Ms Mary looks up at me: "Audhild, can

⁴Outside their gate, YCW has placed a white basket where parents may leave their child or children.

⁵The release order is issued by CARA, and states that the child is legally free for adoption. It is issued after the child has been in the institution for three months. However, if the biological parents do not relinquish the child, but leave them at the gate or inside the garden, the adoption agency has to report the child to the local police station as lost. The agency also has to advertise the child as found, with name and photo, in the newspapers as well as on the radio and TV.

⁶The majority leave their children in Palna without relinquishing them or leaving any information except what the child will tell the social worker or ayahs. As Ms Mary says, this is a shame, because if a child is relinquished the process of making the child available for adoption would have been reduced by a minimum of three months, which in terms of institutionalisation is quite a long period.

⁷'Older sister', a familiar term for a respected older woman.

you give me some of the toffees from my cupboard, please?" I open the cupboard and find a few lollies, which I pass to Ms Mary. She asks the girl again about her name, bribing her with the lollies, "Please, tell me your name and I will give you these toffees." The lollies have the intended effect, and the girl finally answers: "Aishwarya," in a very low voice.

Eventually, after bribing the girl with a few more lollies, Ms Mary is given the whole story. Aishwarya and her father came this morning. He told her to wait patiently in the garden while he went into the office to talk to somebody, before he left her by the swings. (The swings are placed at the far corner in the garden, and the area is quite secluded). Aishwarya tells Ms Mary that she waited for a long time, and that she was bored so she played a bit on the playground, and then the watchman found her and took her to Ms Mary.⁸

As the story is coaxed out of the child, Ms Mary calls for Tincy and tells her in English: "Tincy, can you take the girl over to Palna and let Mala see her before you take her to the girls room for Anna didi to care for her. The girl needs a wash, some clean clothes and food. And then you need to take her photo."⁹ Tincy tilts her head in agreement and takes the girl by the hand and leads her to Palna.

I sit down by Ms Mary's desk and tell her how I saw the girl with her father arriving in YCW at the same time as I did that morning. Ms Mary shakes her head and says: "What can you do? Parents with no means find it difficult to care for a daughter, and, who knows, maybe the mother died. A father cannot care for a daughter, a son maybe, but not a daughter. Daughters are more work, you have to watch them more closely, following their every step, and some things only mothers can teach their daughters. If the mother dies the father cannot look after the children; he can barely look after himself, and if he has family and they are willing, they will only look after sons, not daughters. They cannot afford that."¹⁰ Here in India daughters are also seen as a constant source of expenses, much because of the dowry the family has to pay when she is married off. That is too much for some parents." At that moment Tincy returns to the office, and says to Ms Mary: "Mrs Metha wants you in her office." Ms Mary leaves, and I dig out my notebook to record the morning's events.

As an older child, Aishwarya is expected to be adopted abroad. Indian

⁸The conversation takes place in Hindi. I understand some of it, Ms Mary translates the rest of the conversation to me afterwards.

⁹Every child is photographed upon the day of arrival. The agency keeps some photographs for their records. A photo of the child is also required when notifying the authorities about the child's arrival to the institution.

¹⁰As I understand Ms Mary in this conversation, she refers not only to the financial expense but also to the emotional and social expense of bringing up (somebody else's) daughters.

adoptive parents are not interested in adopting an older child; they prefer young toddlers, infants or newborn babies. A year later, when I returned to Palna on a follow up field study, Aishwarya was still in Palna. She had grown quite happy and outgoing. She could not remember me, though both my then two-and-a-half-year-old son and I had spent quite some time with her. Ms Mary told me that an Italian adoption agency had located a family for Aishwarya and that they expected she would be gone to Italy before the summer (of 2004).

A Guardian Angel

The social worker holds an important position in the field of adoption, which is mainly due to the fact that she meets the parents and organises most of the practical aspects in the adoption process. The initiating part of the process is the first phone call the couple makes to the agency, a phone call often made by an anguished woman who finds comfort in the “down to earth and matter of fact answers from Ms Mary”, as related by several prospective adoptive mothers. That the social worker already from an early stage in the adoption process comes to hold a special position in the lives of the adoptive parents seems apparent. Likewise, a prospective adoptive mother, Ragini, described Ms Mashia: “Ms Mashia is my guardian angel. When I first called VCA and inquired about adoption, the calmness and practicalness of Ms Mashia eased my tension and worry.” When the social worker presents the pragmatic aspects of the adoption process, the adoption initiative is sorted to an approachable and possible task, as something the childless couples can actually accomplish, contrary to natural conception. Furthermore, the act of adoption is described as a natural thing to do, partly because it is placed within the chain of action that concerns one’s destiny.

The Process of Adoption

When they file their application with the agency, the social worker informs the couple about the adoption process in detail. The process is carried out according to the CARA guidelines. In addition to registering their application, the couple also has to hand in the required documents and participate in a counselling session with a professional counsellor from VCA,¹¹ before the social worker conducts the home study visit.¹² One of the required documents

¹¹See the appendix for a copy of a conducted counselling session.

¹²The counselling session is not a requirement at every adoption agency, but it is a requirement at VCA and in YCW. See the appendix for a copy of a Home Study Report.

is a medical certificate, which states the couple is physically fit, and that neither suffers any serious medical condition. Further, the medical certificate must also state the couple's specific infertility problem; the cause of their childlessness.

In YCW every couple is required to sit for a counselling session. The purpose of this assessment is to determine the couple's suitability and emotional readiness as adoptive parents, as well as their emotional state of mind or mental well-being. Further, the counselling also deals with issues relating to the child's unknown background. During counselling sessions the social worker or the professional counsellor discusses with the couple how the child arrived in Palna, and how adopted children are the same as but also different from biological children. The latter issue deals with hereditary and environmental influences on the child, and the expected propensity to learning disabilities in institutionalised children. This is due to the time the child has spent in Palna; here the length of time is essential.

The Home Environment

In counselling and on the home study, the expectations of the adoptive parents are also discussed, and the adoptive parents are informed about whether their expectations regarding the child are reasonable or unreasonable. The home study is conducted by the social worker, in order to "meet the couple in their home environment where they are relaxed and comfortable, to establish family relations." But the home study is also important in settling the match between the parents and adoptee, with regard to the available children in Palna. Subtly, the social worker also drops hints regarding the child she will give the couple. Ms Mary says:

When I have seen a couple in their home environment with their families, and seen how the family interact, I find it much easier to match them with a child. This is because I know them and know a bit about the family dynamics. So next time I am in Palna I will look at the babies and have the last home study in my mind, and then I find the right child. To match child and family before the home study is impossible; you need to see the family at home first.

When the home study visit is conducted and a suitable match found, the social worker helps the couple to organise a medical examination of the child. The CARA guidelines state that a couple, before accepting any child from the agency, has a legal right to take the child to the family's doctor in order for

him to perform a thorough medical examination. Ms Mary also told me that this particular practise assures the couple of the agency's good intentions, "That we are not in it for the money or anything, but that we work in the best interest of both the parents and child and have no intention of tricking the couple into taking a medically unfit child."

Finalising the Adoption

The correspondence between the prospective adoptive parents, the adoption agency and the legal bodies in the adoption process is mainly organised by the social worker. The General Secretary is the official authority and is informed by the social worker on all the matters related to the official correspondence. Also, most of the outgoing correspondence is signed by the General Secretary.

The finalisation of the adoption case happens in the court room, with the child and the adoptive parents present, as well as a lawyer (appointed by the adoption agency), the judge and, most often, the social worker, though in some cases the General Secretary. The adoptive parents and the child will, by the time the adoption case is finalised, have lived as a family for some months. Until the adoption case is finalised by a judge, the adoptive parents will only have the custody of the child and the legal status as foster parents. The majority of adoption cases are finalised according to HAMA, but in a few cases according to GWA.¹³

The prospective adoptive parents rarely meet the General Secretary at an early stage of the adoption process. Even so, the General Secretary is informed about the numbers of new registrations by the social worker. When the couple is accepted as suitable adoptive parents, a status gained after the assessment by the VCA's counsellors, the social worker keeps the General Secretary informed on the development of the adoption cases in much greater detail.¹⁴ Most commonly, the prospective adoptive parents meet the General Secretary when they take their baby home, though a few meet her on the same day as they have been shown and accepted a baby.

¹³Return to chapter one for an account of HAMA and GWA.

¹⁴As mentioned, Mrs Mehta used her veto on one occasion during my field study, because she found the husband's age unacceptable under the guidelines. The guidelines recommend that one of the adoptive parents should not be more than forty-two years older than the child or that the combined age of the couple should not exceed ninety years. Most agencies, including YCW, work by this standard. What is remarkable in this case is that the rejection happened after the home study visit, though Ms Mary recommended the couple to opt for inter-state adoption.

The Pragmatic Authority

In my view, because the social worker knows who the registered prospective adoptive parents are at any time, she possesses an unquestionable authority when it comes to making the important decision in every adoption case. The social worker's authority concerns whether to accept a couple as suitable and, hence, place a child from Palna in their care. It is up to the social worker to decide whether a couple is 'emotionally and mentally ready' to become adoptive parents (a decision based upon the first meeting and the VCA counsellor's assessment).

Conclusively, the social worker's authority is located on a pragmatic level with only a few formal attributes. The General Secretary is the official authority whose signature is required on official papers. Thus, the public representations and the official responsibility of the adoption agency are held by the General Secretary and the other board members. I believe that if asked,¹⁵ neither the prospective adoptive parents, the board members nor the state and government bodies (like CARA) would deny the fact that the social worker plays *the* most central role in each adoption case. Though the authority of the social worker is at a pragmatic level, one must keep in mind that the social worker's duty is primarily to conform to the various laws and guidelines. If she fails, CARA may refuse to reissue the agency's adoption licence. The social worker is also greatly concerned with the 'best interest of the child' when placing a child in adoption, which in turn may be seen in relation to her educational training in social work, child development or psychology. Thus, the social worker holds a certain authority, and a great deal of expertise, due to her professional education and experience in the field of adoption. I return to the aspect of the social worker's expertise and the value of the 'best interest of the child' when placing a child in adoption in chapter four.

Dealing With Prospective Adoptive Parents

One of the first things social workers warn prospective adoptive parents about is their expectations in relation to the child, by referring to studies conducted on children who are abandoned, destitute and institutionalised pre-adoption. During the counselling session, couples are warned that research done on these children indicates they may develop learning disabilities. The intention behind such warnings is to advise and prepare the couple to be open-minded about the child's possibilities and abilities, other than academic achievements.

¹⁵I base my belief on statements from all the above mentioned parties.

Coming to Terms

One of the counsellors, Mrs Bhargava, has herself adopted a child, though ‘out of ideological reasons’. Mrs Bhargava has also studied disclosure in adoption for her Ph.D. in child development. By adoption ‘out of ideological intention’ she refers to her and her husband’s decision to take care of and help a child who had had an unfortunate start in life, when they already were parents to a biological son. Mrs Bhargava told me in a conversation that, after they had their son, they desired a daughter in order to ‘complete their family’.¹⁶ Both of them agreed that adoption was a very good alternative to having a biological daughter. An important factor, according to Mrs Bhargava, was that she and her husband were well aware of the general disregard in India for the girl child. Therefore, in order to help an abandoned and destitute child who needed new parents, Mr and Mrs Bhargava adopted. Mrs Bhargava also said that they did not feel it was right to bring another child into the world when there are already so many children who desperately need parents to give them love and care. At a seminar organised by the VCA, which aimed at social workers in the field of adoption, Mrs Bhargava referred to her own experiences. According to Mrs Bhargava, her own experiences as an adoptive mother were an important asset in her work as a counsellor, since she herself had experienced the toil most adoptive parents’ experience. An example is when she and her husband, a medical doctor, discovered that their adopted daughter did not have an ‘academic mind’ like themselves. “My daughter is a very skilful singer and dancer, and we have come to terms with her not being academic. We are now determined to help her as much as we can so that she can establish a career as a singer and dancer, instead.”

Later I interviewed Mrs Bhargava about her experience of her daughter’s learning difficulties.

ME: “Was it hard coming to terms with your daughter’s learning disabilities, since you both are highly educated?”

Mrs Bhargava: “And our son too, he got into medicine, he got into engineering. Everybody knows he is so bright; and school teachers often think, oh she is his sister, and she should be like him. They compare; where is he, where is she; that kind of thing. But when they find that she sings so well, they will come and tell me. They say ‘Everybody can study, but this kind of talent very

¹⁶My acquaintances mentioned the importance of completing the family. The term refers to the notion that a family is complete when the wife has given birth to (first) a son and then a daughter. Many of the urban middle-class practice birth control and limit themselves to raising only two children, in which case all of those I talked to saw one son and one daughter as the ideal.

few people have,' so it works to her advantage." She pauses, and continues: "It was very tough; class four to class six was when I had to come to terms with it, both of us, my husband too. We had to make some hard decisions; look, if she does not succeed in academics, then what; we had to channelize. What is she good at, rethinking your vision for your child."

The social workers are quite concerned with the expectations adoptive parents may have in relation to their adopted child, particularly because, as Ms Mary once said, "if the child fails to live up to their parents' expectation, the parents are likely to blame it on the adoption." Thus Ms Mary sees it as essential to

[L]evel the adoptive parents' expectations when it comes to the child. We have to tell them that an adopted child is less likely to perform well academically due to institutionalisation, low-birth weight and so on; we have to prepare them so that they will not be disappointed when the child starts school. We have to tell them to be open-minded and to look for the child's abilities and capabilities. We have to tell them to accept the child as he or she is, like they would have to with their own natural child. In a way they forget that even with your own natural child you are not given the perfect child; that even then you have to level your expectations. They would not be guaranteed a better child if he or she was their natural child.

In handling the prospective adoptive parents' expectation regarding the adoptive child, the social worker and counsellor attempt to level these by discussing learning difficulties. Furthermore, they also remind the parents that had the child been their own biological one, they still would not been guaranteed a perfect and flawless child. The social worker when counselling adoptive parents emphasises that the personal traits and qualities of a natural born child are just as randomly given as the adopted child's.

Disclosure

In the field of adoption in India twenty years ago, disclosure was not an issue. Adoptive parents did not tell the child about the fact of adoption. However, this trend has changed, and this change has come about due to the strong influence of western adoption policy, particularly through the transfer of ideas, literature and education from the US and other influential western countries. Hence, it has become the policy of adoption agencies

to encourage and, moreover, to discuss and counsel at length, reasons why adoptive parents should tell the child about the fact of adoption, though this may be in spite of the social workers' awareness of the problems related to disclosure in the Indian context. Disclosure is interconnected with the social stigmas attached to infertility (as mentioned in chapter two), and the adoption of an unrelated child. Disclosure contains a duality which, on one hand, deals with motherhood (including unwed) versus female infertility (in marriage) with regard to destiny. On the other hand, disclosure deals with ideas and notions around a person's traits and qualities in relation to substance (-codes). I return to these aspects in chapters five, six and seven.

Disclosure is discussed and emphasised quite thoroughly during the home study. Below, I present some observations from my field notes that describe the context of disclosure and clarify why disclosure is an issue in adoption in India.

The Fact of Adoption¹⁷

I accompany Ms Kalini on a home study visit in South Delhi. During the conversation Ms Kalini introduces the issue of disclosure by asking the couple, the Singhs, how they feel about telling the child about the fact of adoption.

Mohinder Singh:¹⁸ "A while ago I watched a program on TV about adoption, and it really made an impression on me. After watching this program I personally felt that it is quite important to tell the adopted child about the adoption. But the program did not say much about when it is a good time to tell the child. So I wonder when should we tell the child. When is the child old enough? Is it at school age, in the teens or when he has grown up? And how should we tell the child that he is adopted? To me adoption is not just an issue one talks about, casually, at dinner. When will he be ready, be mature enough to learn the truth and understand what adoption is really about? What is your advice?"

However, Mrs Singh interrupts her son and says to Ms Kalini:¹⁹ "I have told him that I am totally against the idea of telling the child about adoption. I think that if we tell the child, we will cause ourselves and the child additional grievances. And I think that telling will cause problems in the child's adjustment to our family. If we tell him, he might not feel like a proper member of our family and, therefore, think that he does not quite belong to us and rather see himself as a stranger or outsider."

¹⁷This home study is also referred to in chapter two.

¹⁸The husband answers in English (though with a lot of Hindi words) because of my presence. However, I have left out the Hindi words in this section.

¹⁹The husband's mother speaks in Hindi, translated for me by Ms Kalini.

This episode reveals that disclosure is a troubled issue in adoption. Often, as in the conversation above, the family members may disagree on the issue of disclosure. Unless the social worker manages to ease this tension, such disagreements may be further emphasised and create some antagonism between the family members. Particularly if the couple lives as a joint family, this may become a recurring issue in the family. This conversation also touches on the time aspect of disclosure, when to tell the child about the fact of adoption. I observed many prospective adoptive parents expressing insecurity in relation to what stage in the child's life they should introduce the issue of adoption. In relation to this Ms Kalini told the Singhs:

I, personally, believe the ideal time to be as soon as you take the child home. We have experienced that many families are most comfortable with disclosing the fact of adoption when using the form of a 'creation story'. Alternatively you can turn the child's coming to the family into a fairytale.

As the example shows, the social worker actively promotes disclosing the fact of adoption to the child. And when conflicting views exist within the family, she tries to create harmony between the opposing views. The social worker also provides the family with several modes of telling the child about the adoption. The episode below gives an example of one such mode, the creation story. The creation story, to some extent, may be seen as a norm for how to disclose.

From the Moment I First Saw You . . .

I accompany Ms Mary on a home study visit to the Agarwals'. During the visit she asks the couple how they feel about telling the child about the fact of adoption.

Arun and Geeta Agarwal look at each other, and answer Ms Mary's question: "We do want to tell the child about the adoption. We think that it is probably for the best. When we visited you in Palna you told us about disclosure, and since then we have thought a lot about it."

Ms Mary: "When do think you will tell the child?"

Geeta Agarwal hesitates a bit before she answers: "I think when the child is old enough to understand." But Geeta Agarwal seems a bit uncertain about her answer, so she pauses before she asks Ms Mary: "When do you think is the right time to tell the child? And should we tell the child about the adoption just once or keep repeating the event to him?"

Ms Mary tilts her head before she answers the questions: "You should tell the child when he asks questions about where he comes from, which is most

commonly around the age of three or four. But let me tell you the story one adoptive mother told me about how she disclosed the adoption to her child:

This mother and her daughter were in a shop when the little girl saw a pregnant woman. The girl wondered about the woman's condition and was told that the woman carried a baby in her tummy. The daughter thought about this information for a little while, before she said to her mother: 'Then I must have been in your tummy too.' The mother was taken by surprise and felt a bit awkward. She had not quite imagined that she would tell her daughter about the adoption this way, but still she decided to answer her daughter honestly: 'No darling, you were not in my tummy. I am unable have babies in my tummy, so another woman carried you in her tummy instead. But *from the moment I first saw you* I instantly knew you were very special and that *only you* could be my daughter. You are more special [than other children] because you were *born of my heart* instead of from my tummy.'

Ms Mary pauses and looks at the Agarwals. I guess Ms Mary wants to make sure that they are paying attention to her story, and maybe that they accept her reference to the adoptive mother's heart as the child's origin.

Ms Mary continues: "The little girl accepted her mother's explanation about her origin. She wondered about where she came from; her mother told her earnestly about the circumstances of her background, and she was satisfied. She was happy with the answer her mother gave." Ms Mary pauses again before she resumes: "But if you want to, you can also tell your child the story of the god Krishna. Or you can make up your own bedtime stories for your child, the story about how you adopted him, but you must make it to a special story where the child is the hero, and you must be in it too." The couple nod in agreement to Ms Mary's advice.

The social workers emphasise the importance of disclosure, but at the same time they also insist that the adoptive parents should make the act of adoption to a special event. In my view, the stress placed on telling the child about the adoption is likely due to the social workers' professional training and the notion of the 'best interest of the child'. I return this to in chapter four. In relating to the mother and daughter above, Ms Mary also stresses an aspect of the adoption act as predestination; the child and the parents were meant for each other. The family came together in an extraordinary manner, and therefore the child must be more unique than any biological child would be. Thus, she emphasises that the parents must make the act of adoption a significant event both for themselves and the child. In my view, the predestined aspect of adoption is emphasised in the metaphor 'born of my heart', which I shall return to in chapter seven. Also, by referring to the important Hindu god Krishna, the social worker gives the adopted child a divine aspect. I see the inclusion of Krishna in adoption in relation to

the incident recorded by Jacobson (1999), when a village woman gave birth to a baby girl. The village woman's mother-in-law said: "Never mind, all babies are made by God" (Jacobson 1999: 27). As mentioned, I believe the same quality is attributed to the babies in Palna by the social workers, upon counselling the childless couples about disclosure.

The Emotional Adoption²⁰

Geeta Agarwal: "Will not the child use the fact of adoption in order to blackmail us emotionally? Like, the child may tell us that the reason we deny him various things, are too strict or too demanding and so on, is because he is adopted?"

Ms Mary: "In such cases you will just have to trust your own good intentions and not give in to the emotional blackmailing. All children try to blackmail their parents; this is just another way of expressing it. You will just have to say: 'Nonsense, you are my child and I love you. That you are adopted has nothing to do with it. You are our child in every way.' My opinion is that you keep in mind that also your own natural child would have tried to blackmail you emotionally."

Both Geeta and Arun Agarwal nod in agreement with Ms Mary's advice. Again, Geeta Agarwal is confident enough to raise a new issue with Ms Mary. Someone in her distant family went through with adoption, and this adoption has left Geeta Agarwal with a few unanswered questions: "My sister's sister-in-law adopted a child a couple of years ago. However, three months after adopting she conceived, and she gave birth to her own natural daughter a year after the adoption. But you see, since the birth of her own natural child she has been troubled, and she tells my sister that she feels more love for her own daughter, the biological child, than for the adopted child. She feels guilty because she loves her own child more than her adopted child. What is your advice? What do you think we should do if we conceive and have our own natural child after the adoption?"

Ms Mary: "I do not think you should worry too much about this. It is quite natural that parents love their children differently, whether their children are adopted or not. When one child is adopted and one natural, parents often feel an element of guilt. And they may start to question their own good intentions and question their motives; 'Do I love my natural child more than my adopted child?' All parents love their children differently, not more or less, not qualitatively differently. I think it is important for you to remember that. But there is another aspect to this case, and that is sibling rivalry, which is very common. In such situations you must remember that rivalry between siblings has nothing to do with one child being adopted and the other biological. It is important to treat the children alike, you should not take any special consideration in relation to the

²⁰This is the same home study visit as above.

adopted child.”

These home study abstracts show that adoptive parents have several concerns when it comes to telling the child about the adoption, and show how the social worker deals with these. Many couples expressed anxiety about whether the child will bond well with the family if he or she knows about the adoption. The families show doubts; will they bond well with the child if they are constantly reminded about the adoption? The disagreement between Ms Kalini and the Singhs regarding the child’s ideal age, in chapter two, is related to this concern about bonding between the parents and adoptee. Some would rather ‘forget about the whole thing’, however, the social worker encourages disclosure by relating her previous experiences with other adoptive families and by trying to give the couple confidence. Another cause for distress is the worry related to the reaction of the adoptive family’s community at the time of disclosure. Will the community accept the adoption and their child as if he or she was the couple’s own natural child? To some, such worry may actually be the strongest motivation not to disclose the fact of adoption. However, the social workers themselves are quite pragmatic with regard to disclosing the adoption to the family’s community, since it is not uncommon to be faced with social stigmas from one’s community.

Informing the School

According to Indian law, the adopted child’s birth certificate must declare that the child is adopted. Thus the label ‘adopted child’ will officially follow the child all her life, first at school, then at university, and later in her career. When adoptive parents enrol their children in school, a copy of the child’s birth certificate is required. In this way the school is informed about the adoption. Some schools, often the prestigious private schools, will refuse to accept an adopted child due to the social stigmas surrounding unrelated adoption, because the child’s unknown background is presumed to be ‘low’ (in terms of Frøystad (2001), see chapter five). On one occasion Ms Mary told me of one pair of adoptive parents she knows, who sued the school when it rejected their child due to the fact of adoption. The parents won, and the school was ordered by the court to accept the adopted child. However, the parents did not enrol their child in that school, due to its attitude. As Ms Mary said: “By no means did they intend for their child to enrol in such a school, which showed such hostility towards adopted children; the parents just wanted to teach the school a lesson.”

Below is another episode that illustrates the extent of the social stigmas attached to adoption in Delhi. This example may also be related to the schools’ uneasiness about enrolling adopted children.

Ms Mary and I are in the YCW van. We talk a bit about the Agarwals and the issue of disclosure, and I ask Ms Mary why she advised the couple not to tell the school about the adoption when it is time for the parents to enrol their child in school.²¹

Ms Mary: "When parents ask me directly whether to inform the school I always tell them not to disclose. Mrs Mehta does not agree with me, and I too used to think that it was important that the parents informed the school. But then a friend of mine, a teacher at a private school here in Delhi, told me about an adoption-related incident in her school. She told me that one day when they [the teachers] were on a break they happened to discuss the behaviour of their various students, when one teacher said, 'One of my students, Pooja, is really naughty. She often misbehaves and is rather impossible to control.' This statement is followed up by another teacher who also teaches Pooja says: 'But you know of course that she behaves in that way because she is adopted!'"

Ms Mary pauses in her story, before she continues: "My friend was quite shocked and told me how it made her feel to hear these prejudices voiced like that, saying: 'It made me feel quite ill to hear a teacher discuss and relate such personal matters of a student quite publicly to the other teachers, many of whom did not have anything to do with Pooja.'"

Ms Mary pauses again, and I let her friend's story sink in. I wonder whether the teachers are concerned about unknown caste membership in terms of purity and pollution or if it is the notion of bad blood that is at the core of such assumption. Ms Mary concludes her story: "You know, I think the reason Pooja behaves like a naughty girl is because the teachers treat her differently, which probably is due to the teachers' awkwardness towards her being adopted. The child is given a kind of special attention, compared to the other students; she notices it and will continue her ill behaviour as long as she receives the attention she has learnt to expect from her teachers. This is the main reason why I began advising couples against informing the school."

Me: "What will happen if the school finds out that a child is adopted and it was not informed? Will the school expel the child?"

Ms Mary: "Well, if that happens, I advise the adoptive parents to tell the school that they did not think it mattered to the school, since the fact of adoption does not matter to themselves. But I also tell the parents to be frank with the school when the truth of the adoption has been spilled. Then they should say 'yes we have adopted our child', and that 'he is our child whether adopted or natural born.'" Ms Mary pauses again: "Of course, this is mostly an issue that concerns parents who opt for the private schools. In government schools the families will

²¹In order to keep the school in the dark about the adoption the adoptive parents will have to acquire a birth certificate that states that the couple are the child's natural parents.

not experience adoption as a problem to the same extent."

In this story Ms Mary refers to the general attitude in Delhi towards adoption, that it is an unacceptable practice. This attitude I believe is also detectable when the social worker explains the profound consequences of the birth certificate²² to prospective adoptive parents. As a result the social worker advises the parents, by gently hinting that they should bribe the clerk at the registrar's office, "since it is possible in India, just to pay a bit extra and request that the information about adoption is left off the birth certificate." In other words, though the social worker places emphasis on telling the child about the adoption, she also is very much aware of the existing social stigmas in relation to adoption.

An Ordinary Birth Certificate

One time, a mother told me that she and her husband had acquired a birth certificate for their child that states that the child is their own natural born. She explained this action as a matter of giving themselves an actual choice when to disclose the fact of adoption to the child:

We requested to have an 'ordinary' birth certificate for our child, but not because we want the adoption to be a secret. We just want to make sure that we ourselves will be the ones who disclose the fact of adoption to our daughter. We also want to choose those with whom we share the knowledge of adoption. As we see it, adoption is a matter concerning our family only and not outsiders.

An assumption about disclosure in adoption is that the adoptive parents themselves must not only 'come to terms with their infertility' and accept the 'fact of adoption'. They must also present, to the child, their respective families, friends and community, adoption as a favourable (and maybe even desirable) alternative to biological children. As mentioned in chapter two, the adoptive parents have to fight two sets of social stigmas: those attached to infertility and those attached to adoption. It is suggested both by my social worker acquaintances and Bharadwaj (2002) that many adoptive parents do not disclose the adoption to the child or 'outsiders' due to the stigmas evoked by both infertility and adoption. Furthermore, as long as the birth certificates of adopted children continue being labelled, and teachers treat adoption as a personal trait and quality in children, the society at large will view the practice as undesirable. I believe that due to these social and

²²Unfortunately, I was not able to acquire an example of a birth certificate.

cultural stigmas, social workers when counselling the prospective adoptive parents may encourage the family to be selective when it comes to telling others about the fact of adoption.

Beans Spilled

When it comes to the parents' intentions regarding disclosure, it is my view that in order for the kinning of the adopted child to succeed, disclosure is only possible to a certain extent. Like the example above shows, when the child is told she is 'born of her mother's heart', it is essential to disclose the adoptee's cosmogony. However, my material suggests that parents are worried (and maybe society makes this inevitable) that too much focus on disclosure may ruin the process of kinning. Ms Mary told of one case where the parents had told their daughter that she was adopted from Palna. The girl wondered who her mother was and why her mother had given her away. The parents had told her that probably her birth mother was very poor, and could not afford to keep her. The girl had then assumed that her mother must have been a maid, maybe one of the maids working in her house (the family was extremely wealthy) and thus she began to hang around the maids, help them with their duties and in the kitchen. The adoptive parents rang Ms Mary in despair and told her about the situation. Ms Mary told me:

What to do? The beans had already been spilled. I advise the parents always to tell their child that they do not know anything about where she comes from. We can not assume that the birth parents are poor; we do not know, and therefore we should not speculate. Telling the girl that her mother was poor created a divide between the child and her parents. They felt awkward about the girl doing a maid's work, and maybe they began thinking about where the girl came from, that maybe being a maid is in her nature. I told them to be patient, to show her their love and affection, and to spend more time with her and to be understanding and not dismissive. We shall see.

As Ms Mary relates, in some cases disclosure may work as a constant reminder that divides where it should bond, and thus *de-kin* (Howell 2006). Instead of becoming kin, they remain childless couple and child, not a family. According to Howell, an abandoned child is de-kinning or denuded of kinship or kinned relations and "may be transferred to new kin" (ibid.: 49). Likewise, the girl that Ms Mary related to above might enter a de-kinning process with her adoptive family by inaugurating new and informal relations with the family's maids, as well as imitating their practices. The advice the social worker

could give in this situation was for the parents to try and reverse the girl's familiarity with the servant, the de-kinning process, by spending more time with her, hence reincorporate her in the family and stress her attachment to it.

The Collectivistic Group

Mrs Bhargava states similar notions, which I understand in terms of kinning and de-kinning, in an interview.

ME: "Why is disclosure such an issue in adoption?"

Mrs Bhargava: "There is too much emphasis on disclosure. I think it has come down from Kirk's work²³ on adoption disclosure. He basically talks about how a person acknowledges differences and rejection of difference. And based on this, the kind of interaction between parents and child determines how well the child will do. Therefore, if you acknowledge difference, the child does better. The basis of disclosure must be to acknowledge difference.

Kirk's work was taken up as a policy foundation in the West, I looked at that and I look at our [Indian] context and I found that it would not work. You have to look at it contextually, within the country, to lay down certain norms. What I found [in research for her Ph.D. thesis] was two sets of parents. One set was very individualistic, individualistic meaning that they were saying, we are different, we are adopting, we have a marriage, we are doing what we want to do. So I categorised that kind of family *individualistic*.

Then there was a second set of families, the *collectivistic* group. These were very determined by extended family life, community, the culture around them, and whatever, so they had to be within that framework. The ones that were individualistic in their orientation, found it easier to address the issue of disclosure, because anyway they said, 'We are different; we do not have any issues, it does not matter.' They addressed it [disclosure] with great ease.

The collectivistic group found it extremely difficult to address the issue [of disclosure]. Then when I came to look at the self esteem of the children from both these categories, I found that it was not as if the collectivistic children had low self esteem, and

²³Kirk's work that she is referring to here are the books *A Theory and Method of Adoptive Relationships* (1964) and *Adoptive Kinship: A Modern Institution in Need of Reform* (1985).

the individualistic children had high self esteem. I did not find that. I found it was obviously not disclosure that was important, but something else; so then I started looking; what was it that was important?

Then I found that what was very important was *accepting*²⁴ the child with whatever problems she or he has, if in a collectivistic family, they accepted; 'Ok, he is not good in studies, he will do something else; fine, he is hyperactive, fine, we will deal with it', that they are positive in their attitude. So that was more important, it was accepting the person as he was. That became more important than the fact of disclosure. I accept you; I live with you as you are. The acceptance in the relationship, it is like that even between couples; the function is much easier.

So I found that with families where the extended family said, 'Do not tell the child; it is going to burden the child', and the family did not tell, but they were accepting of the child, it did not matter if he was not good looking; they were completely at ease [in] communication of other things [acceptance] but not about adoption. Even if the child got to know later, there was no problem, because the child knew he was loved and accepted no matter what.

But if the mother and child were already having conflicts about acceptance, then if disclosure came in the middle, it completely wrecked the house. This is the point where my hypothesis differed completely from Kirk's work. I found that this excessive hype about disclosure is not really called for. In adoption we segregate them, we tell them that they [the adoptee] are different. Why? In any case, culturally they come from the same culture, the child does not stand out as different, so then why do you want the child to stand out? I told my child, but I was also more comfortable about telling; therefore I told. If I am not comfortable with the telling, then I am going to make a mess of it, whatever I do. The parents have to be made comfortable, like with interaction with other adoptive parents.

If you tell a family, 'You have to tell the child, or we will not give the child to you,' and there is no supportive structure, how is that family going to survive? They are not going to be able to cope with it. You need family support groups."

²⁴I see this reference to acceptance as described by Waldrop (2000: 161) in arranged marriages.

Here she relates to her own study, which revealed that the level of acceptance the adoptee has for whom she or he actually is is more important than disclosure. A family should disclose only when they themselves are comfortable with it, or else it will only lead to tension and problems within the family. In turn, the ease the adoptive parents may feel regarding disclosure is in many cases dependent upon the counselling given by the social worker and counsellor.

When counselling, the social workers also emphasise disclosing the fact of adoption to the adoptee. First of all the social worker seems to believe that the relation between the child and the parents should not be based on a secret. It may be traumatic for the child if he or she discovers in other ways that he or she is adopted. Second, disclosure may help the parents to come to terms with their own infertility, and, thus, they themselves will accept the fact of adoption more easily. Third, disclosure will also strengthen the parents in their parent-child relation and enable them to appreciate more easily the child's actual abilities and capabilities, hence, the adoptive parents' hopes and desires will be levelled to the child. And fourth, disclosing the fact of adoption to the child, family, neighbourhood, school, and the society at large helps promote unrelated adoption.

In the next part of this chapter I intend to present the various aspects surrounding secret adoption. At the centre of secret adoption are the adopted child and her parents, though the social workers and counsellors play a significant part in the matters relating to disclosure. During counselling and the home study visit the social workers and the counsellors discouraged the prospective adoptive parents from faking pregnancy in order to keep the adoption a secret to both the child and others. Also, the several guidebooks on adoption on the Indian book market, aimed at social workers and prospective parents alike, encourage disclosure of adoption to the child. However, these books merely encourage disclosure to various categories of 'outsiders' in a mixed degree, a recommendation that the social workers also are inclined to suggest.

To Maintain One's Own Varied Nature

The phenomenon referred to as 'secret adoption' is applied to cases 'when the fact of adoption is not disclosed to the child', as my acquaintances in YCW and VCA say. Nilima Metha claims that in the Indian context secret adoption is not an unheard-of request. Metha, like Bharadwaj, relates such requests to the social fact that "threatens a woman's social status and, to some extent, a man's feeling of inadequacy" (Metha 1992: 43). According to

Metha, there were traditionally two options available when a married couple remained childless: “one is remarriage²⁵ and the other is adoption of a male, preferably from within the family or from a distant relative.” (ibid) Today, adoption from a placement agency has become another alternative, though mainly in urban India.

In her book Metha, like my social worker acquaintances, discourages the practice of secret adoption due to the best interest of the child.

Taking the welfare of the child into consideration, this deception cannot be encouraged. There have been many cases in the past when agencies have worked in co-operation with adoptive parents to help them through a secret adoption. Still, the unanimous belief amongst professionals today is that they should be discouraged. Much counselling is necessary to bring about an attitudinal change amongst the couple’s community and relatives so that they are spared the agonies of secrecy. (Metha 1992: 44)

When the social workers are faced with a couple that desires secret adoption, the couple is simply told, “You are not ready to adopt and need extensive guidance and counselling in order to come to terms with your problems.” For a couple, coming to terms with their problems involves accepting both their infertility and adoption, as well as ridding themselves (and their families) of the notion that adopted children are inferior to natural born children.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, some parents keep the school in the dark about the child’s adopted status; furthermore even friends or relatives may be considered as ‘outsiders’ when sharing such information. I was told by my acquaintances that the former trend amongst the adoption agencies actually encouraged the couple to simulate a pregnancy by sending the wife away, to her parents or natal residence, during pregnancy. Today, this procedure is neither an accepted nor encouraged practice among the placement agencies. Though the adoption agencies may reject and discourage such practice, it still takes place within the field of adoption in Delhi. This will also be shown in the home study below.

The following home study illustrates a case where pregnancy is simulated. Furthermore, it also depicts the dilemma in the present situation in adoption in India, which both deals with social stigmas attached to marital infertility and adoption which may be seen as transfer unknown substance (-codes). But in the home study it is also stressed that in the Indian context a couple is merely a couple, not a family, unless they reproduce; then they are a ‘complete family’. I believe that these findings reveal that children are an

²⁵Chapter four will address the assessment of a couple where this issue was raised.

essential property of the Indian family structure. Below, secret adoption is desired.

“More our own child”

On this home study visit to West Delhi I accompany Ms Mashia. The couple, Sanjay and Savita Chadha, pick us up from Sunder Bagh in their Tata²⁶ on their way home from work. On our way to their home Ms Mashia asks them about their marriage and background. Sanjay Chadha has an elder brother, who lives outside of Delhi, and a younger sister residing in Delhi. Savita Chadha has a seven-year-younger sister with two children.

Savita Chadha does most of the talking: “We have a love marriage. We met through some common friends and started off as friends, but our friendship blossomed and we decided to marry. There were four years of courtship before we tied the knot. But neither of our families objected, since we are both Punjabis and have the same background.”

After about an hour we arrive at their home. The couple lives in their ancestral house. At the Chadhas’ home, the husband’s retired mother is waiting. The house consists of one bedroom, a common room, a kitchen and a bathroom. The house is clean and tidy, and the Chadhas have a TV, a phone, a washing machine and a fridge. We sit down and Savita Chadha serves us some chai and biscuits.

Ms Mashia: “How did you reach the decision to adopt?”

Savita Chadha: “My sister has just given birth to a daughter, only a year and a half after her son was born. She is still exhausted after having the first child, so she asked me if we wanted to adopt her daughter. But my sister’s mother-in-law opposed the suggestion. She does not want us to adopt the child. She said that my sister first of all should complete her own family, by having both a daughter and a son. She told my sister that if they have a third child, we could adopt that child instead. Even though we did not end up adopting my sister’s child, the thought of adoption was planted in our minds, so we decided to contact a placement agency and adopt from outside our family in order to complete our family.”

Ms Mashia: “So initially you were opting for adoption within the family?” The three Chadhas all nod in agreement to Ms Mashia’s statement.

Ms Mashia continues: “The agency you are adopting from, in Jaipur I believe,” the wife nods to confirm, “told me that you will not disclose the fact of adoption to the child. I have to ask you if you still feel the same about disclosure.” The couple and the husband’s mother all nod again in the affirmative. “I ask you this

²⁶A modern Indian-produced car. The Tata is small and efficient in order to navigate in the congested Delhi traffic. It is popular amongst the middle classes.

because it is our policy to encourage prospective adoptive parents to tell the child that she is adopted. We believe that it is better for the child to grow up knowing about the fact of adoption. I saw in my papers that you have been counselled upon this issue, but that you come across as quite set in your minds about not disclosing."

Savita Chadha: "We have not changed our minds. We do not wish to tell the child about the adoption, even after talking to your counsellor. She was very insistent. But the agency is fine with our decision, and we think it is for the best."

Ms Mashia: "Can you also tell me who else knows about your intention to adopt a child?"

Savita Chadha: "As a matter of fact, we do not want to tell anybody at all about the adoption. But of course, my mother-in-law, my sister and her family know, since we were discussing the adoption of her daughter, and my parents know. But we will not tell anybody else. We have not even told my husband's older brother that we plan to adopt. As a matter of fact, we have told other family members, friends, colleagues, and so on, that I have conceived and that I am with child. The family members who know about the adoption support our decision to adopt, but they also agree that we should keep the adoption a secret."

Ms Mashia: "So you plan to simulate a pregnancy." The wife nods her answer. And Ms Mashia continues: "But why have you decided to keep the adoption a secret?"

Savita Chadha: "We do not want people to talk about the adoption or our adopted child. Also, I think the adopted child will be *more our own* child if we do not talk about the adoption or constantly mention that she is adopted. Talking about the adoption to the child might make her feel like an outsider in our family. And after all, since the child will be legally ours, we think that nobody really needs to know about the adoption. The child will be ours in every way. But you know, it is not just about coming to terms with adoption; there is so much pain involved in our situation. I have had several infertility treatments, but have never been able to conceive. My tubes are blocked, and the doctors say that they can not help us anymore." The wife breaks into tears, and Sanjay Chadha sitting in the armchair next to his wife, pats her on the shoulder. (Afterwards Ms Mashia told me that she thought that this gesture revealed Sanjay Chadha as a particularly supportive and affectionate husband.)

Savita Chadha makes an effort and pulls herself together; she dabs her tears and continues: "During all this, my problems, my husband and mother-in-law have been nothing but supportive of me; not even once have they blamed me. When we first were introduced to the idea of adoption we did not think so much about disclosure, since it was my sister's child. But now that we have decided to adopt from outside the family we are joined in the decision to adopt and to keep it a secret."

Ms Mashia concludes the conversation: "I will have to write it in the home study report that you want to perform a secret adoption; this might influence the legal aspect, but probably not. However, it is the chance you have to take if you want to perform a secret adoption."

Below is an extract from the home study report Ms Mashia wrote on the Chadhas:

Disclosure issues were discussed with them but the couple, bound by social stigmas, were not open to accept the advice given.

And a little later the report continues:

They have given thought to adoption and they have the capacity to absorb, care for and nurture an adopted child who will be an integral part of their family unit. But at the same time it is recommended that the concerned agency should further talk to them about disclosure and taking adoption as an honour, if the need be felt by them, before giving a child to the family."

On this home study it is revealed that the couple do not even intend to tell everybody in their close family about their decision to adopt. They expressed very clearly that they do not intend to tell the husband's older brother about the adoption. Hence, telling somebody outside the family about the adoption did not even present itself as an issue. Neither do they wish to disclose the fact of adoption to the child, because, as they put it themselves: "The child will be ours in every way." To Ms Mashia the couple expressed that the child would be more theirs if disclosure is not carried out and if the act of adoption is not discussed. However, the manner in which the child becomes a member of the family is irrelevant,²⁷ as long as the couple can complete the family and live a normal family life.

Inevitably, the desire to ignore and not to discuss the fact of adoption is connected to the stigmas attached to the adoption of an unrelated child and to the inauspicious status of the infertile or 'barren' woman. The social stigmas in relation to adoptions outside the family are connected to ideas about caste membership, and even substance (-codes),²⁸ as transformed and transferred. In family life, particularly, substance (-codes) are transformed and transferred between the members. In Indian thought, family members

²⁷Why the matter of how the child will become a member of the family is irrelevant will be clear in chapters six and seven.

²⁸The issue of substance in relation to adoption will be discussed at length in chapter seven.

become biological relatives, not only through the fact of blood or biogenetic substance, but also due to nurture, interaction, commensality and co-habitation (as following Marriott 1976). However, the couple's desire to complete their family is a powerful force that makes them commit themselves to the act of adoption.

In my view, secret adoption is an attempt to bond better with the child, to ignore the child's unknown background and to put an emphasis on the bonding between parents and child through nurture²⁹ rather than nature. Secret adoption must be seen as a strategy to escape certain social situations, like those attached to female infertility and inauspiciousness.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have presented the role of the social worker and the adoption process by introducing several encounters between potential adoptive parents and the social worker. The purpose of both the counselling and the home study is to establish the prospective adoptive parents' emotional readiness, acceptance of their infertility, and to promote adoption as an equally good alternative to biological children by stressing the importance of disclosure in adoption. The two required encounters between the potential adoptive parents and the professionals deal mostly with these issues.

As mention at the start of this chapter, the social worker must be seen as a mediator for social change due to the fact that she over and over again challenges existing values, norms and stigmas in Indian society at large. This is carried out when she places an unrelated child in the care of a childless couple, hence challenging ideas concerning both unwed fertility and marital fertility. Furthermore, the social worker also urges the family to disclose the fact of adoption to the child as well as encouraging the parents not to inform the school about the adoption. Finally, she challenges that natural children's position is better than adoptive children. In my view, the latter is manifest in her introduction of the 'creation story', which aims at making the act of adoption, the coming together of adoptee and parents, as more special and predestined than natural children, since in adoption there are greater obstacles to overcome.

²⁹The aspect of nurture will be discussed further in chapter seven.

Chapter 4

Applying Governmentality and Expertise, or Safeguarding the Best Interest of the Child

“The forms of political rationality that took shape in the first half of this century constituted the citizen as a social being whose powers and obligations were articulated in the language of social responsibilities and collective solidarities. The individual was to be integrated into society in the form of a citizen with social needs, in a contract which individual and society had mutual claims and obligations.” (Miller & Rose 1993: 97)

In this chapter I will discuss the social worker, her unique position in the adoption process, and her influence on both the adoptive parents and adoption policy. My view is that in order to understand the role of the social worker in adoption, she must be perceived as a mediator for social change and change in values. I observed during my fieldwork that the social worker decides which couples are suitable adoptive parents, and it is therefore possible to see the social worker as a representative for the benevolent state. Furthermore, her manoeuvring of the adoption process may be viewed in terms of ‘action at a distance’ and ‘governmentality’.

Rather than answering to what extent the adoption law, guidelines and the general routine are directed by western ideas, I intend in this chapter to show how the social worker is the holder of ‘expert knowledge’ in adoption in Delhi. This is a role the social worker holds due to experience and data from the field of adoption, as well as her degree in social work. Miller and Rose (1993) point to the unique positions of experts, who “... have acted as powerful translation devices between ‘authorities’ and ‘individuals’, shaping

conduct not through compulsion but through the power of truth, the potency of rationality and the alluring promises of effectivity.” (Miller & Rose 1993: 93) After the Pandey judgements the placement agencies were instructed to place a given minimum¹ of adoptees in Indian families. Thus the field of adoption became heavily regulated, even controlled or ‘governed’ by the State. Previous chapters describe the social worker counselling potential adoptive parents. In counselling and other conversations she relates to both local and global ideas regarding adoption and the adoptee. In many ways, introduction of a new rationality comes about through the experts. Ms Mary would say to me, “We in Palna do adoption in the ‘best interest of the child’, we do not cater for the needs of childless couples,” thus relating to directives stated in CRC and Hague Convention. According to Miller & Rose, ‘government’ rests on knowledge (Miller & Rose 1993). This chapter intends to show that the social worker holds the knowledge necessary to ‘govern’ the field of adoption in Delhi.

I also intend to show how the social workers act as agents who transfer western values and ideas from the CRC, where the emphasis is on the ‘best interest of the child’, to the Indian context. As a result, the social workers actively initiate social change in relation to adoption since they introduce new ways of conduct and ideas to domestic adoption. As mentioned in earlier chapters, Indian adoption traditionally concerned mainly the family and did not consider whether the act of adoption benefited the child in particular. Traditional adoption took place in the best interest of the family. However, as related in previous chapters, due to the Pandey judgements, adoption in modern, urban India takes place on the foundations of the ‘best interest of the child’. In the minds of the social workers and at the base of the placement agencies policies (VCA and YCW), ‘child oriented’ adoption has replaced their former concern for the continuation of the family line.

In nineteenth century Europe there was not only a shift in the perception of the citizen but also of the child. Now, not only the family but also the state government was included in the responsibility of caring for the child. Furthermore, the child was also considered to have needs and the right to have these needs fulfilled (Cunningham (1995), and following Miller & Rose’s argument of “the citizen as a social being” (1993: 97)). Hence, the ‘new’ European conception of the child constituted the base for formulating family law (Cunningham 1995). Likewise, in the twentieth century, described as the ‘century of the child’,² there has been a strong initiative for a global law

¹A minimum which has increased from a meagre 10% to 50%, with a 100% as the long-term goal.

²Ellen Key, Swedish feminist, published the book *The Century of the Child* in 1900. “Key’s vision of the future was one in which children would be conceived by parents who

concerning ‘the best interest of the child’, based upon Western family law (Howell 2003a). The perception of children altered from viewing children as an (economic) investment to establishing children as a (family) expense, and thus the child was eventually considered (by society) to be a consumer (Cunningham 1995; Weiner 1991). In other words, many interpret the drafting of the CRC and the Hague Convention in relation to the notion of the child as a consumer and an expense, where the parents and the state have a series of responsibilities and duties towards the child.

During the field study I met many social workers from all over India who worked in the field of adoption. These social workers claimed that the ‘best interest of the child’ is an essential issue in adoption today. Hence, adoption may be understood in terms of ‘east meets west’, since the placement agencies negotiate between local and global perceptions of adoption. Within India, international declarations like CRC and the Hague Conventions are made important points of reference in the adoption process, due to, amongst others, the Pandey judgements (see chapter one). The placement agencies and the Supreme Court mandated bodies (i.e. the VCAs and CARA) have been instructed to relate to a socially constructed reality outside their own cultural context and to counsel potential adoptive parents accordingly. Therefore both local and global (‘Western’) views on personhood, kinship (more specifically, integrating an unrelated child in the family or kinning (as following Howell (2001, 2006)); see chapter seven), the ‘best interest of the child’ and the adoptee are issues the social worker and other professionals working for the placement agency (i.e. doctors, lawyers, counsellors and other bureaucrats) introduce when they meet the potential adoptive parents and the extended family.

Children’s Rights and Protection in Adoption on an International Level

For the past fifty years the issue of adoption on the international level has been discussed in several forums: CRC, the Hague Convention, by European and American adoption agencies, at national and international conferences, to mention a few. As a consequence, the practice of adoption has been separated into two categories: the strong adoption and the simple adoption. ‘Strong adoption’ is the policy where the bonds to the biological family are completely

were physically fit and in a loving relationship, and would then grow up in homes where mothers were ever-present ... Success in child-rearing lay in becoming ‘as a child oneself’, and then if this happened, ‘the simplicity of the child’s character will be kept by adults. So the old social order will be able to renew itself.’” (Cunningham 1995: 163)

cut (the Hague Convention). This practice is common in Western countries. ‘Simple adoption’ is the practice where the bonds to the biological family are not completely cut when the child is adopted (Code Napoleon, French West-Africa during the colonial time). There are many indigenous or local adoption customs practising ‘simple adoption’ (Howell 2003*a*, Goody 1982).

Convention on the Rights of the Child

In November 1989 the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) came into force; since, it has “dwarfed all previous international human rights treaties”, “because the rate of ratification was unprecedented and the Convention could enter into force the following year” (Franklin 2005: ix, Howell 2003*a*:205). India is one of the countries that have signed and ratified (two that have not are the USA and Somalia). Some claim (Franklin 1995) that the CRC manifests fundamental values about children and their treatment, whereas others (Howell 2003*a*: 206, 2006) find such claims ‘highly questionable’. According to Howell the articles in CRC are based upon some undisputably (Western) assumptions or ‘moral values’: these are “that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance”, that “the family [is] the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children”, “that the child, for a full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment”, and finally “that the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society” (Howell 2003*a*: 207).

Of interest here is article twenty-one of the CRC which concerns national and transnational adoption where the emphasis is on the adoption in the ‘best interest of the child’. Article twenty-one holds that the adoption must be processed by ‘competent authorities’, in order to secure a practice which in particular is not concerned with benefiting financially from placing children in adoption. This is a standard that has been accounted for in the Indian adoption practice both on a national and an international level.

However, the Convention does not discuss how to understand what the ‘best interest of the child’ actually is, nor what constitutes the family (Howell 2003*a*). Further, persons are not conceptualised in terms of their sociality, i.e. “by making the bounded individual the basic unit . . . a conceptual leap is made from the individual to the universal and the global. In effect, humans are desocialised and deculturalised” (ibid.: 207). In turn, the focus in the Convention is upon ‘the bounded individual’. Thus local ideas and values as well as the person and kinship are rendered irrelevant.

The Hague Convention

The content of Hague Convention was fixed in 1993, and in 1995 it came into force. The aforementioned Article 21 in the CRC is at the heart of Hague Convention (Howell 2003a). According to Howell the Hague Convention developed five principles. The first is that “adoption must be in the best interest of the child”, the second that “central authorities and accredited bodies only shall control all intercountry adoption”. The third is that “the subsidiary principle, i.e. [that] adoption can only take place when efforts have been made to place a child with close family or in a family-like environment in the country of origin, must be adhered to. But ‘intercountry adoption may offer the advantage of a permanent family to a child for whom a suitable family cannot be found in his or her state of origin.’” Next is “the need to establish cooperation between the countries in order to ensure that children’s best interest are looked after and that their basic rights are not violated”, and the final principle is to “ensure proper procedures in both donor and recipient countries” (ibid.: 209). Of particular interest to the Indian context is the third principle. The third principle communicates an idea of the child’s best interest which is very much at the heart of the CARA guidelines.

Due to the aspect of Hague Convention that argues in favour of strong adoption, many nations do not recognise the Convention. Amongst these countries are India and several Muslim states. In the latter, strong adoption is prohibited since the practice is illegal according to Islam (Howell 2003a). According to an official at CARA (Mr Dev Verman), India has not ratified the Hague Convention since its content is already a part of the Indian Constitution and Law. Furthermore, the court ruling in the Pandey Kant judgements favoured the ‘best interest of the child’ and the Convention (see chapter one).

Another aspect of the Hague Convention that was much disagreed upon by several states is whether the child should be granted a legal right that states her right to gain information about her biological background. Many Western countries argued in favour of the ability of the child to receive this information, due to the perception of the ‘bounded individual’ (ibid. 2003). Amongst my social worker acquaintances it is common to discourage seeking extensive information about a child’s (biological) background, both in regard to the information YCW gathers and questions asked by the prospective adoptive parents. I see this discouragement in relation to what Howell (2006) names social nakedness, that the abandoned child is socially naked. According to Howell, by the act of being abandoned by relatives, the child left in the care of strangers is denuded of kinship ties. She is ‘de-kinned’ by her relatives

and ‘removed from kinned sociality’ (ibid. 4). Howell states: “The nakedness enables the state to relinquish a citizen, and the new state to accept one, because she will not be naked in her new country. She enters it fully clothed in new relatives. By this act biology is rendered insignificant, sociality becomes all important” (ibid.: 5). Likewise, the abandoned child’s state of social nakedness in Palna enables her to be ‘fully clothed in new relatives’ by her adoptive parents when they take her home. Also, literally, the child is fully clothed by the parents; they bring her new clothes in which the ayahs dress her before she leaves Palna.

As shown, both CRC and the Hague Convention stress the ‘best interest of the child’ and the importance of growing up in a family. Moreover, both declarations follow a discourse that relies on expertise or expert knowledge and the psy sciences (as following Rose 1999: xiv-xv, xxii, 10). Their success, i.e. reification, relies on ‘action at a distance’. Later in this chapter I intend to show that the social worker performs ‘action at a distance’ when promoting the ‘best interest of the child’ in the adoption process.

Western Influence in India

As mentioned, the Hague Convention and CRC are both based upon the ‘best interest of the child’, where the family unit are responsible for the child’s “full and harmonious development of his or her personality” as well as providing “an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding” (The Convention of the Right of the Child). The biological family is preferred to the adoptive family, and the adoptive family to the institutions (a view also CARA dwells on in its guidelines). However, the Hague Convention places upon the state the primary responsibility for safeguarding these principles in relation to every child (Howell 2003a).

The local adoption agencies are influenced by CRC and Hague Convention, by virtue of both the Supreme Court mandated bodies (CARA and VCA) and foreign collaborating agencies. The latter is a relationship which most often is governed by a giver (foreign NGOs) – receiver (Indian NGOs/local adoption agencies) relation. Much financial support is received from the foreign collaborating adoption agencies (in the case of various nation states, but all from the West). The Western influence is yet again emphasised when the state-mandated bodies and the placement agencies meet in official settings like conferences and seminars. At such meetings the state-mandated bodies insist the social workers have to be further encouraged in order to place more children with Indian families, promote disclosure and educate or counsel the prospective adoptive parents in relation to the abandoned children who are

hard to place domestically.³

Like others, I understand ‘the inalienable rights the individual’ is assigned as a Western influence and a consequence of the religious and moral spheres of the UN Human Rights, CRC and the Hague Convention, which, again some scholars have been established as a consequence of Christianity. Some (Howell 2003) claim that Christianity has a proselytising dimension, which lately has been replaced by the expansion of human rights (included here is of course CRC and Hague Convention). It then follows naturally to many that the moral duty of the Western countries is to spread human rights as a general notion or universality (ibid. 2003).

Even in those areas where old religions have withstood the pressure of Christianity, like India, China, Japan and the Muslim world, the ideas about democracy and the inalienable rights of the individual, whose roots can be traced to Christianity, are strongly felt today—even when not adhered to. (ibid.: 200)

Benevolent Control: In the ‘Best Interest of the Child’, or the ‘Art of Government’

‘[G]overnmentality’ can be usefully developed to analyse the complex and heterogeneous way in which contemporary social authorities have sought to shape and regulate economic, social and personal activities. (Miller & Rose 1993: 101)

Governmentality (Foucault 1991) may be seen as the intent to act in the best interest of the citizen, i.e. to satisfy the needs of the citizen. In my view the social worker exercises governmentality on a lower level, by attempting to give the children a better life.

Governmentality

In contrast to sovereignty, government has as its purpose not the act of government itself but the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, etc; and the means that the government uses to attain these ends are themselves all in some sense immanent to the population; it is the population itself on which government will act

³These children are the darker child, the older child, and the child with a medical condition.

either directly through large-scale campaigns, or indirectly through techniques that will make possible, without the full awareness of the people, the stimulation of birth rates, the directing of the flow of population into certain regions or activities, etc. The population now represents more the end of government than the power of the sovereign; the population is the subject of needs, of aspirations, but it is also the object in the hands of the government, aware, *vis-à-vis* the government, of what it wants, but ignorant of what is being done to it. (Foucault 1991: 100)

Manifest in governmentality or benevolent control is the state's obligation to look after its citizens. The prevailing rationality is that in order to ensure the continuity of the state, the citizens must be looked after, in other words benefit from the state's produce; thus the individual will in turn have appropriate behaviour (Foucault 1991).

According to Foucault governmentality is the *mentality* that is "the common ground of all modern forms of political thought and action." (Miller & Rose 1993: 76) Furthermore, government depends on knowledge and information, evaluations of policies, a particular mode of representation and language. "Rather than 'the State' giving rise to government, the state becomes a particular form that government has taken, and one that does not exhaust the field of calculations and interventions that constitute it" (ibid.: 77). Furthermore, the management of the state has become dependent on expertise, particularly that "concerning the psychological features of the producing subjects ... the social authority ascribed to particular agents and forms of judgement on the basis of their claims to possess specialised truths and rare powers" (ibid.: 76). In other words, there is a certain kind of power connected to these experts the state has come to depend upon. In order to manage the population the state depends on 'action at a distance'. This is a method that fashions the economic or social behaviour of the 'bounded individual' without crushing its autonomy (Miller & Rose 1993: 88).

In *Governing the Soul* Rose says that rather than investigating how various circumstances influence the individual, it is far more engaging to examine "how persons have been understood within particular practices, how these understandings might have come about, what kinds of techniques for acting on human beings were linked to these understandings, what kind of consequences followed" (Rose 1999: xvii). To give an account of how human beings have been socially determined by various social and cultural institutions is less interesting.

Instead Rose mentions three distinctive ways in which one can establish the modern state's impact and governing of the individual. Rose has named

it ‘the management of the contemporary self’ (Rose 1999). The first way is how (democratic) governments and political parties have proposed policy programmes whose aims and scopes are to regulate and direct a political discourse regarding the welfare of the citizens and the nation state. The second is the role modern organisations play in the management of the ‘contemporary self’. Hence, the management of subjectivity is central to maintaining authority and to pursue the particular organisations’ objective. “Organizations have come to fill the space between the ‘private’ lives of citizens and the ‘public’ concerns of rulers” (ibid.: 2). The third is the impact of expertise, the so-called expert knowledge, on the individuals.

It is this third way that Rose proposes that I find useful in order to understand my social worker informants as mediators for social change. Rose describes the properties of expert knowledge:

We have witnessed the birth of a new form of expertise, an expertise of subjectivity. A whole family of new professional groups has propagated itself, each asserting its virtuosity in respect of the self, in classifying and measuring the psyche, in predicting its vicissitudes, in diagnosing the causes of its troubles and prescribing remedies. Not just psychologists ... but also social workers, ... counsellors and therapists of different schools and allegiances have based their claim to aspects of the person and to act upon them, or to advise others what to do. The multiplying powers of these “engineers of the human soul” seem to manifest something profoundly novel in the relations of authority over the self. (ibid.: 2-3)

Though here I do not intend to analyse any forms of state government *per se*, I do find Rose’s approach to understanding power, (benevolent) control, information and knowledge quite helpful in order to understand the extensive influence the social worker exercises, particularly during counselling and in relating to the prospective adoptive parents about adoption in general. “My claim is that the psy [that is human sciences and in particular psychology] disciplines and psy expertise have had a key role in constructing ‘governable subjects’” (ibid.: vii). I believe that one reason the social workers are rather successful in ‘governing’ the childless couples is that at the heart of their actions and decisions lies the ‘best interest of the child’ and their training as social workers.

I would like to emphasize that I do not believe that any of my social worker informants acted in any manipulative manner toward the couples; rather, they acted upon their expertise derived from training and experience. Further, as I understand Rose, a part of the “psy expertise’s” success is

derived from how the social workers are “asserting its virtuosity in respect of the self, in classifying and measuring the psyche, in predicting its vicissitudes, in diagnosing the causes of its troubles and prescribing remedies” (ibid.: 2) by being engineers and not by manipulating the ‘souls’ of prospective adoptive parents.

Expert Knowledge

[We adapt] Bruno Latour’s notion of ‘action at a distance’ (cf. Latour 1987). We argue that such action at a distance mechanisms have come to rely in crucial respects upon ‘expertise’: the social authority ascribed to particular agents and forms of judgment on the basis of their claims to possess specialised truths and rare powers . . . We argue that management has come to depend upon expertise not only concerning the technical features of production, but also concerning the psychological features of the producing subjects. (Miller & Rose 1993:76)

In the world today, in many aspects of our lives, we depend upon *expertise*, particularly that of the psy sciences (as following Rose (1999)). Moreover, in many ways this dependency is moved to and is generated in most non-Western countries. India is no exception. I observed during my field study ‘agents’ possessing ‘social authority’ in managing the adoption process. These agents generated their expertise mostly through their professional training in social work, child development, psychology, medicine, or simply extensive experience in the field. Chapter one showed that the legal framework for adoption relies on the psy expertise, i.e. the Pandey Kant judgements and the CARA guidelines.

Howell investigates how expert knowledge is “used, absorbed and transformed” in the periphery with “non-Western cosmologies”, away from the Western centre (constructed on Hague Convention, CRC, and Human Rights) (Howell 2003). She concludes that there is a flow of ideas and practices in transnational adoption emanating from the centre, i.e. the Hague Convention, CRC and Human Rights (western ideas), to the periphery, i.e. Palna (YCW) and VCA (and in particular the prospective adoptive parents). This flow is detectable in the expertise of my social worker informants.

Regardless of country of origin, influential non-Western intellectuals . . . do not bring the specific local traditions of knowledge to bear on the debates, since the sources of their intellectual training emanate from within same global (Western) academic

traditions . . . [L]ocal ethical values or morally informed practices are not regarded as relevant for present-day problems. (ibid.: 201)

In my view, the social workers in VCA and YCW are entrepreneurs for social change due to psy expertise. The social workers have a unique position within the organisation itself and in relation to the prospective adoptive parents. This position is mostly due to the fact that they make most decisions in every adoption case, i.e. exercising authority. These decisions, in turn, are legitimised by virtue of their professions. A social worker's reputation also benefits the longer she remains in the field. The operative discourse in adoption practice relies on the expert knowledge of the social workers, whose social authority is legitimised in effect by their professional training in a universal academic tradition.

Suitable Parents

In his book *Governing the Soul* Rose states:

The government of the soul depends upon our recognition of ourselves as ideally and potentially certain sorts of person, the unease generated by a normative judgement of what we are and could become, and the incitement offered to overcome this discrepancy by following the advice of experts in the management of the self. (Rose 1999: 11)

The interaction between the social worker (or the counsellors) and the prospective adoptive parents, set in the context of a home study visit or a counselling session, may be described in similar terms. The childless couple's future prospects of becoming adoptive parents are in the hands of the social worker, the expert. Moreover, the adoption process *per se* as well as the fact of infertility seem to place the couples in a position where they are constantly aware of their own shortcomings. They are reminded every day that, though married, they are not a family due to the absence of a child.

Many couples explain that the feeling of being inferior and worthless (particularly for the woman) is deepened by the social worker's and the counsellor's assessment of their suitability as adoptive parents. One potential adoptive father said, "When couples are expecting [a baby] they do not have their abilities as parents assessed or evaluated by strangers coming inside their home. We cannot have our natural child, and because of that we have suffered, but we have to suffer even more . . . because we want to adopt a child; we have to be considered as suitable parents by a social worker." In order to

overcome the obstacle of infertility and become what they most desire, 'just a normal family' or a 'complete' family, the childless couples must follow advice of the expert; the social worker. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the counselling and the assessment of a childless couple, the Sharmas, who applied for adoption at the VCA.

The Sharmas

I wish to explore the assessment of the Sharmas, which used the 'best interest of the child' as a discourse. The home study was conducted by one of the social workers in the VCA and presented itself to be a useful reference later, particularly in discussions with my social worker acquaintances. This home study proved to be a useful tool in order to bring in the 'best interest of the child' to conversations.

To save a marriage

I am outside YCW and VCA, enjoying the beautiful warmth of the November sun, when I see Ms Mashia in the doorway of VCA. She waves to me and comes over; asking me "I am going on a home study visit, do you want to come with me?"

I answer: "Yeah, of course, I would love to. When are you going?"

Ms Mashia: "I am leaving any minute, I am just waiting for the wife's brother; the family wants him to come. You see, the home study is bit unexpected. The couple has just had a counselling session with our counsellor, and she is not at all happy with the counselling. The counsellor thinks the wife is dull and not able to take care of a child by herself, that she will not cope with the child alone when the husband is at work. We are worried about the wife's abilities as a mother; we doubt that she will be able to take the child to a doctor when it is sick. I have to go on a home study to their house now in order to establish whether the couple is suitable as adoptive parents. We are just waiting for the wife's brother, and then we will go; he will be here any minute, so just go and pick up your stuff from YCW."

I leave Ms Mashia at the steps of VCA. Inside YCW, I tell Ms Mary that Ms Mashia has invited me to come with her on a home study, that I will go with her and therefore be away for the remainder of the day.

Ms Mary: "That is good. It is good for your study to observe different social workers doing home studies. You must tell me about your experience tomorrow."

I reply, "Yes, I will; it will be fun to see how Ms Mashia goes about her home studies," as I walk across the office and reach for my handbag on the shelf in Ms Mary's office. Outside again, I spot Ms Mashia in conversation with a rather big woman dressed in a colourful sari. I assume that she is the 'dull' wife. I walk over

to the pair. Ms Mashia introduces me to the woman, Mrs Sharma. Close up I see that she is wearing make-up, lipstick and powder, and jewellery, rings, necklaces, earrings and both her arms are covered in bright bangles. Her sari looks clean, though it is made of cotton and seems not very exclusive. Her hair is dark and shiny, a bit longer than shoulder length, held together by a decorated golden hair clip. My guess is that she is in her early to mid thirties.

Ms Mashia is asking the wife a couple of questions, in Hindi. I gather that she is asking about what Mrs Sharma feels about adopting a child, what she thinks about bringing up a child. The husband is out of earshot. The wife is withdrawn and rather evasive, but Ms Mashia is pushy and urges her to answer. I do not understand what Mrs Sharma says, she answers with few words in a very hushed voice. However, Ms Mashia seems not at all happy with the answers she is given, but before Ms Mashia has the opportunity to continue, the husband is there placing his hand on his wife's elbow. Ms Mashia introduces me. He is smallish and light-weight and looks about ten years older than his wife. Because I did not understand what was said I ask Ms Mashia what the wife answered.

Ms Mashia: "Her answers are very unclear; it does not make much sense. It seems like she tries to say what our counsellor told them during counselling, but does not quite remember things the right way round. The wife seems quite dull."

Mrs Sharma's brother finally arrives, and we are about to leave when Mr Sharma and his brother-in-law say to Ms Mashia that it is much better to do the home study visit at the brother-in-law's home.

Mr Sharma: "It is much more convenient to go to his house, since he lives here in Civil Lines."

Ms Mashia: "Why does he live here?"

Mr Sharma: "He works as a police officer at the local police station. It is much closer than our house, and it is far more convenient for you to go there, in the neighbourhood. To go to our place we have to travel far. We live in the south [of Delhi]."

Ms Mashia, on the other hand, insists on going to the couple's residence, saying: "We have to go to your house; if you live at the house of your brother-in-law we can go there ..."

Mr Sharma shakes his head, and she continues, "Then we have to go to the place where you live. An important part of the home study visit is to see the couple in their home environment; we need to see how you relate to each other at home, and what your home looks like. It is an important part of the assessment."

The couple tries to convince Ms Mashia otherwise, but she keeps insisting until the couple agrees to take us to their home. All the time Ms Mashia keeps saying to me, under her breath, "I don't like this; there is something going on. Why do they not want to take us to their home?"

Mr Sharma and his brother-in-law leave and walk out the gate of Sunder Bagh.

Before long Mr Sharma returns. He tells his wife to come with him and turns to Ms Mashia and says, "My brother-in-law will be here any minute; he has gone to hail an auto [rickshaw]. My wife and I will go on our scooter ahead of you to our house." So Mr and Mrs Sharma leave on their dark red scooter. He is wearing a helmet; she is not.

Ms Mashia: "I am not very comfortable with this; something is going on. Why are they going ahead of us, and he [Mr Sharma] tries to stop me from talking to his wife all the time. And all this about Mrs Sharma's brother. I do not like this." Mrs Sharma's brother arrives, and Ms Mashia and I come with him in the auto rickshaw.

On our way to the couple's home, Ms Mashia asks the wife's brother a few questions about the couple. She says to me, "We are travelling far, so I want to begin the assessment of the Sharmas on our way there. I want to hear what the brother has to say about the adoption."

Me: "Will you translate for me?"

Ms Mashia: "Of course I will, I want your opinion on this [afterwards]."

The brother of Mrs Sharma tells us that his family is from Delhi, that they are seven brothers and sisters. His brother-in-law and his family are from a village; Mr Sharma senior is a farmer with ten children. The brother states that he himself has a positive view on adoption, but at the same time he expresses concerns about his sister's future if she does not have a child. He is concerned because the brothers of Mr Sharma have encouraged him to take a second wife since the present wife cannot conceive.⁴ "Though," he tells us, "my brother-in-law is positive to adoption; he is willing to adopt in order to complete their family; the adoption will save my sister's marriage. You must give her a child, and I will be there for her, I will give her my support. If money is the question, I will do my best to help."

Ms Mashia: "Have you not a family of your own?"

The brother: "Yes, I do."

Ms Mashia: "Then you have already a family to care for; you cannot be expected to look after your sister twenty-four-seven;⁵ your obligations and duty are to your family."

The brother: "No, no, I will help her. We want her to have a child of her own; we will support her."

During the rest of the trip Ms Mashia starts on the form she has to fill out with information about the couple. The brother gives her the information she needs. The couple lives in southwest Delhi, close to the airport, in rented accommodations. They have been married for ten years. The husband works as

⁴See footnote chapter five.

⁵Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week; i.e. all the time.

a teacher in a school near their home, whereas the wife is a housewife. In her form Ms Mashia states that they belong to the lower-middle class.

After about an hour we arrive at the home of the Sharmas. The last part of the way we have to walk because the road is too bad for the auto rickshaw to drive on, with too many potholes. The couple's rented home consists of two bedrooms, a kitchen and a courtyard. They use only one of the bedrooms, and the other is empty.⁶ They say they might use it as a room for the child. The standard of the Sharma's accommodation is simple.

We sit down in the couple's room. It is a small room, and it is dominated by the double bed. A metal cupboard, a TV, a fridge and an altar are the other things in the room, and on the walls are colourful posters of various Hindu gods. The wife is in the kitchen. Ms Mashia chats to the husband, waiting for the wife to finish in the kitchen. The wife comes with some refreshments: chai, coke, biscuits and some snacks. However, it is ramadan so Ms Mashia turns down the refreshments. I accept the drinks, for it is a hot day. The wife returns to the kitchen but does not return to the room where we are.

Ms Mashia: "Where is your wife?"

Mr Sharma: "I think she is in the kitchen making preparations for dinner."

Ms Mashia: "You must go and fetch your wife; she has to take part in the interview; we cannot start without her."

Mr Sharma stands up a bit reluctantly, then he says: "She is fine with everything [the adoption]. She needs to do her house work." But Ms Mashia insists, so finally he summons his wife.

Ms Mashia begins the assessment by asking the usual questions about the family of the couple, about their interests and hobbies, what they like to do in their spare time together. Mr Sharma says he likes to watch the news on TV and to read the newspapers. "I like to know what is happening." He reveals that they do not share many common interests. "Partly," he says, "because of my wife's limited schooling. She is a school dropout." When questioned Mrs Sharma tells us in a muffled voice that she had no interest in school. Instead she preferred helping her mother with housework and cooking.

Ms Mashia: "What are your interests?" Mrs Sharma shrugs her shoulders in answer. "Come on, tell me, what do you enjoy doing?"

Mrs Sharma: "I enjoy cooking and watching TV."

Ms Mashia talks to the couple and asks questions (in Hindi). Mr Sharma answers; Mrs Sharma only replies when Ms Mashia presses her for an answer. When Ms Mashia asks about how they reached the decision to adopt a child, the husband answers. Mrs Sharma just looks at her hands in her lap. Mr Sharma tells us that he very much desires a child.

⁶It had previously been let out to a male border.

Mr Sharma: "It is very important for a man to have his own children. Several of my former pupils have come to me and showed me their children. And I think, where are my children? It is not right [normal] to be without children."

Ms Mashia turns to the wife: "Do you too want to adopt and have the responsibility for a young child?"

Mrs Sharma merely answers, "Yes."

Ms Mashia turns back to the husband and asks about his relationship with Mrs Sharma: "Your brother-in-law told me that your brothers urge you to find a new wife who can produce children. Do you consider finding a second wife and remarrying?"

Mr Sharma: "No, I do not want to remarry, but I do want to have my own child and if that means we have to adopt a child, then I will do what it takes. I want to experience proper family life."

Again Ms Mashia turns to the wife: "Are you really prepared to take care of a child, to feed him, to change his nappy, to be up at night?"

Once again Mrs Sharma just answers "Yes."

Ms Mashia has come to the final question in the interview, "What kind of child would you like to adopt?"

Mr Sharma, quite firmly: "My wife and I want a boy less than one year old."

Ms Mashia translates her questions and the Sharma's answers during the interview to me. I notice however, that the questions are a bit different than interviews in the previous home studies I till then had observed. Ms Mashia asks fewer questions about 'values held important in life'; instead, she focuses her questions around what relationship the spouses share.

After the formal interview, Ms Mashia asks to have a look around the house. We are shown the rest of the house. Afterwards the husband goes off to hail an auto rickshaw that will take us back to North Delhi. Mrs Sharma's brother will accompany us; he has been present during the whole interview, though only as a bystander.

During the days after Ms Mashia conducted this home study, the social workers and the counsellors in VCA all agreed that the Sharmas had to be rejected in order to safeguard the 'best interest of the child'. They were uneasy about the couple's suitability as adoptive parents, mainly because of the wife's dullness. Also, the couple's low income, that they live in rented accommodations, and further that the motivation to adopt was to 'save' their marriage, made the social workers and counsellors ill at ease.

When they talked about why the Sharmas were not suitable as adoptive parents the social workers referred to the 'best interest of the child'. In their opinion, a child would be better off remaining in Palna than being adopted by the Sharmas. Like Miller & Rose (1993: 93), I believe that the rejection of the Sharmas' application was founded 'through the power of truth'; the

social workers and the counsellors gathered evidence (i.e. the wife's 'dullness' and the intention to 'save' their marriage) which revealed the Sharmas as unsuitable adoptive parents, a matter of truth.

So while traditionally Hindu adoptions were 'family oriented', a matter of providing a son and an heir to the family, today's practice is founded on the 'best interest of the child'. Hence, adoption must only take place when it puts the child in a better position than present situation. The family should provide him with a better place in life, and better future, than the orphanage can offer. As Ms Kalini said:

Palna can provide schooling, food, everyday care, bed and friends for the child, but Palna cannot give the love and affection of a mother, the security of a family, or the support of parents in schooling. I do not believe that the Sharmas can provide better care for the child than Palna. Their marriage is on rocky grounds, and that will not give the child the love and security he needs. He is working, and she has nobody else to rely on in caring for the child, since they live on their own and not with his family. She is a school dropout and will not be able to help the child with homework. They are not suitable; it is not in the best interest of a child to be placed with the Sharmas. Our job is not to find a child for every family; our job is to locate suitable homes that will give our abandoned children a better start in life.

Next, I will discuss two conversations that proceeded the home study above, in order to further illustrate the impact of CRC and the Hague Convention on the expertise of the social workers working in YCW and VCA. When they assess a couple's suitability as adoptive parents, they do so because they have the key to the 'truth'; that is, they act in the 'best interest of the child'.

The Influence of the Hague Convention and CRC in the Adoption Practice in India Today

The families that are considered suitable adoptive parents and the criteria the social workers (and counsellors) work by reveal an aspect of governmentality. In order to manage the adoption process, the state has come to rely upon a certain kind of knowledge, an expertise, propagated by the social worker. Through being educated in accordance to "an expertise of subjectivity" (Rose 1999: 2) the social worker stipulates objectivity and truthfulness. Thus they possess a certain kind of 'social authority' legitimised and formalised by what Rose (1999) calls, the "psy sciences"—"the heterogeneous knowledges, forms

of authority and practical techniques that constitute psychological expertise” (ibid.: vii). This is the professional training that builds its expertise on and educates its professionals on psychological discourses. The social workers in YCW and VCA are not merely experts; they are in fact *psy* experts, acquiring their expertise from the psychological discourse.

Howell (2006: 8) calls social workers, counsellors and similar professionals having “professions that derive their expertise from psychological discourse” *psycho-technocrats*. I see some similarities between her concept of psycho-technocrats and my social worker and counsellor acquaintances. However, I prefer to call my acquaintances *psy experts*, a term deriving from Rose’s concept of psy sciences and Howell’s definition. In my view, the social worker is less a technocrat and more an expert, in that the pragmatic aspect of her role is more important than the technical one.

Within the process of adoption, the social workers and counsellors act as and are perceived as the *expert* within the practice of adoption. In my view this notion is due to their personal experience as social workers who have successfully placed children in adoption, both nationally and transnationally, as well as their training. Hence, they are *psy experts*, because they draw on their own personal experience within the field of adoption and prevailing social and cultural values in India, and not merely on the ‘new’ Western psychological discourse. In the end, the social worker’s formal education is of little importance to the childless couples in the initial stages of the adoption process. More important is the social worker’s expertise gained from her experience, knowledge of the process and her counselling the couple on their adoption destiny (I return to destiny in chapter six).

Even though I am reluctant to call my social worker acquaintances psycho-technocrats, I acknowledge that their professional training is important. After all they are hired because of their technical training in social work, child development and similar areas. Hence, they are enabled to acquire their professional experience in the field of adoption. The two next conversations that took place in YCW and VCA reveal the influence of the psy sciences on the adoption practice in Delhi.

‘But the Wife Seems Dull’

I enter VCA, and I see Ms Mashia, Ms Kalini and Parvati at the desk discussing an adoption. It turns out that they are talking about the Sharmas. When they see me Ms Mashia urges me to give my opinion of the couple. I do not give an answer straight away, since I feel nervous about giving them my personal view of the Sharmas. Instead I opt for the version CARA endorses in its guidelines for adoption. But I also try to answer in harmony with previous conversations with

Ms Mary. Later I discovered I succeeded in the former, but failed at the latter.

Me: "As I understand it I see no reason to reject the Sharmas as adoptive parents. Sure, they have a small income, simple accommodations, and the wife has no education, but are not poor parents just as good parents as the wealthy ones? Is it right to reject a couple because they do not earn 30 000 rupees a month? Should money be an important criterion when evaluating who are good (adoptive) parents? And is it not so that it is better for a child to grow up in a family setting than in an institution?"

Ms Kalini: "The counsellor has rejected the couple because she thinks the wife is dull and because she seems to have a low IQ."

I notice that in front of Ms Kalini is the counselling report the counsellor wrote up when she assessed the couple the other day. Ms Kalini pushes it towards me so that I can read her observations. I read:

The Sharmas [i.e. Mr Sharma] are from a village in Haryana. The husband seems smart and city-bred though wheatish in complexion, but the wife seems dull, very obese and darkish. She either nodded at every sentence, without seeming to understand, or she answered with 'Whatever my husband says.' If pressured to state her own views, she answered in monosyllables or even completely off-the-track. The husband explained it as being due to a village background, but vehemently expressed that the two are devoted to each other.

The counsellor concludes in her report: "The wife needs to work upon her obesity, dullness and probable depression."

After I have read the report Ms Kalini asks me: "What do you think; do you think the wife is dull?"

Me: "Well, there is no doubt that the wife is very withdrawn and shy. Also, she gives the impression that she has not completed her schooling, but on the other hand she seems competent in the kitchen and knows how to take care of their household; her home was neat and clean. Mrs Sharma herself was clean; her sari was clean, and she wore her jewellery nicely. Is it so that you must have a higher education in order to look after and bring up a child? Is it really so that you will be a bad parent if you have little education and a low income?"

Ms Kalini: "Yes, this is exactly what we were discussing; what criteria should we apply to adoptive parents and which parents should we accept, which should we reject? And if we accept this couple what child can we give this couple? For example, we have a child available, but he has a slight medical problem. Our problem is that we doubt that the wife will be able to cope with this child because of her dullness. She seems to lack social skills, and therefore she might not be able to cope with the child's medical problem nor the doctors."

Above I say, “And is it not so that it is better for a child to grow up in a family setting than in an institution?”, sentiments stemming from the core of CRC. Also, I referred to the ‘the family environment’ as the preferred element for a child to be raised in, because I discovered that it was a much used reference in the recorded written material in YCW, both in the matter of domestic adoption and transnational adoption. These are notions familiar also to Ms Kalini and the others in VCA, thus her response. Further, I interpret the counsellor’s assertion that ‘the wife needs to work upon her ... dullness and probable depression’ as a conclusion she reaches in conformity with her ‘social authority’ due to her training in the psy sciences.

It seems that the counsellor acts more as a professional psycho-technocrat (following Howell 2006) than as a psy expert as the others do. The Sharma’s home study and the conversation in VCA are also at the core of important and more global values. Howell (2003a) makes similar observations:

What constitute children, childhood, and the best interest of the child are all defined according to contemporary Western ideology, derived to a large extent from current psychological thinking. Those involved have chosen to disregard the variety of moralities and cosmologies in favour of assumed universal values, something that often results in ontological incompatibilities. (ibid.: 213)

Hence, the social workers and counsellors have chosen to “disregard the variety of moralities and cosmologies” locally found, i.e. to leave behind the notions of a child to every family. Instead, an adoption placement is conducted in the ‘best interest of the child’.

After discussing the Sharmas’ situation in VCA I decided to address the problem to Ms Mary, as I wanted to know what she thought about the case.

‘To Give Each of our Children a Family’

Ms Mary and I are sitting in her office at her desk. She sits in her chair; I sit across her in one of the chairs where the potential adoptive parents sit when they register their application to adopt.

Me: “Remember the home study I went on with Ms Mashia earlier this week? I wonder what you think about the family.”

Ms Mary: “Yes, of course. I have been wondering about what you thought.”

Me: “The counsellor thinks the wife is dull. Yet, Ms Kalini and Ms Mashia are discussing whether to place a child with the family or not. There is this child with a slight medical problem that they are considering, but they are unsure. They do not know if the wife can cope with such a child. They asked me what I thought,

too." I continue by narrating my meeting with the Sharmas, my impressions, what Ms Mashia told me, what the counsellor's report states and about Mrs Sharma's brother's concerns.

Ms Mary: "To me, from what you just have told me, the Sharmas do not sound like a suitable family [for adoption]. I think that an adoption should be in the best interest of the child. You should not let the child go from the frying pan to the fire; his life in the adopted family should offer opportunities that we cannot provide for him. It is our duty to place every child in a good home. We must therefore make absolutely sure that the decisions we make will give the child a better future. We must make sure that the child has a better future than growing up in an institution or had he remained in the care of his biological family. In adoption it is important that you do not think it would be a good thing for the couple to adopt. We do not work to accommodate for their needs. The outcome of the adoption must be equally good or better for the child.

"However, in the Sharmas' case there are other things too. The dullness of the wife and the fact that she is a school dropout must be considered as well. What are the child's opportunities in the care of the Sharmas? I doubt Mrs Sharma will be able to help the child with his schoolwork. The public schools are often not very good. So in order for the child to go to a good school, they might have to take the child to a private school. Being a school dropout, Mrs Sharma will not be able to help her child with the homework, which often requires a minimum knowledge of English. The next concern is their income; they have a low income. If they want to give the child a good start in life, they may opt for a private school, and then they need at least an income of 7000 rupees a month."

Me: "Yes, but the wife's brother said that he would help them financially if they needed more money."

Ms Mary: "Well, you can not count on that. He has his own family to provide for, too. You said he works in the police. Most likely he will have a low ranking position in the police. Therefore, he too will have a low income and with a family of his own, he will not be able to spare much money for his sister even if he wants to. Finally, the fact that they live in rented accommodations is what concerns me most about the Sharmas. Personally, I am very uneasy with regard to prospective adoptive parents who live in rented accommodations. We cannot follow them up as easily; they can move and not leave the new address behind. There is no way we can locate a family once they have moved. So we will lose all contact with the family and, more importantly, the child. We have less control with the adoption and what happens to the family after the child is placed with the couple, when the prospective adoptive parents live in rented accommodations."

Me: "Mrs Sharma's brother is also very concerned about his sister's marriage. He is worried that if the couple does not have a child, the husband might leave his wife and remarry or take a second wife, because of her infertility and pressure

from Mr Sharma's family."

Ms Mary: "You can not place a child in adoption in order to save a marriage. If the couple is not compatible, there is no way the adoption will be the solution to their problems. Also, in adoption we are first and foremost concerned with the child's well being, not the family's. We are child oriented not family oriented when placing a child in adoption. We do not help a couple to adopt in order for them to save their marriage. We should always act in the best interest of the child."

Ms Mary concludes our conversation: "Adoption has to be done according to the best interest of the child, not in order to help a family to have a child at all costs. Adoption should first of all benefit the child by providing him with a brighter future. It is not as if there are not enough families who want to adopt from us. If one family does not fulfil our criterion, then there will be another family. There are plenty of families. Our job is not to give a child to each family who comes to us, but to give each of our children a family and a better and brighter future."

This last conversation emphasises that the overall issue in adoption is that every adoption should be child-oriented and be in line with Hague Convention and CRC. Ms Mary mentions good schooling, the adoptive parents' insufficient means, the notion of the 'best interest of the child' in regard to placing a child in adoption, how to provide a better future for the institutionalised child, and the agency's ability to follow up the family post-placement. These are ideas that are related to values fundamental to CRC and Hague Convention. The consideration is the child's future, which thus includes ideas about childhood, education and the family environment.

Further, these conversations reveal the social worker as 'engineers of the human soul', like Rose's observations: "Legitimacy is claimed by our contemporary 'engineers of the human soul' on the basis that they can deal truthfully with the real problems of human existence in light of a knowledge of the nature of the individuals who make it up" (Rose 1999: xxii).

The two conversations I refer to above state that the 'best interest of the child' should be the very foundation of every adoption case, and those who can best secure the child's best interest are the social workers and the counsellors. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, they are psy professionals, legitimising their 'social authority' through the psy sciences, and thus able to "exercise authority over human conduct" (ibid.: xxii).

According to Rose the psy sciences have "played a key role in rationalities and techniques of government. Not just on the basis of their knowledges but also on the basis of the forms of authority they have produced and the kinds of legitimacy they have accorded to those who want to exercise authority over human conduct" (ibid.: xxii). The social worker exercises authority over the

conduct of the childless couples. Thus, at the heart of the social worker's expertise is the consideration, is the couple suitable as adoptive parents and is placing a child in their care advantageous and desirable?

The couple must comply with certain criteria. The question arises, why must the childless couples conform to the social worker's 'social authority' and criteria? As a prospective adoptive father complained: "We have to be evaluated and assessed in ways that natural families are not." The answer is located in Foucault's (Miller & Rose 1991) 'action at a distance'. The prospective adoptive parents are both the subjects and objects to the social worker. They are at the same time both managed and the ends of management. Hence, the 'social authority' of the social worker, though questioned by some, is not discarded, and thus the childless couples conform.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have shown that the YCW and VCA actually utilize fundamental notions from the CRC and Hague Convention. These declarations are defined by a global law which derives its force from Western family law. Howell claims that the two conventions reflect established moral values and practices; in other words they seek normatively to change other traditions and views. Ideas and values that are taken from the CRC and Hague Convention flow in an inherently normative way. However, the trouble with these two declarations is that they do not discuss what is meant by the 'best interest of the child' nor define the essence of the family. This is up to the psy experts—the social workers or the adoption professionals—to consider. Thus, both CRC and the Hague Convention are discourses that rely heavily on the psy science expertise.

My social worker acquaintances are entrepreneurs for social change, due to their psy expertise. As pointed out in this chapter, the social workers hold the *truth* (the truth as following Rose), both within the placement agency, but also in relation to the prospective adoptive parents. This position is mostly due to the fact that they are considered (both by others and themselves) to possess extensive knowledge and experience in relation to the adoption practise. In short, expert knowledge is 'a tradition of knowledge developed, by and large, without taking account of non-Western traditions'. I have discussed the movement of Western value and practice in relation to the adoption practice in Delhi and tried to show that local views and ideas are also of great importance in the adoption practice by describing the social workers and counsellors as psy experts. The social worker relies heavily on some local (Indian) views, but at the same time she struggles against other traditional

beliefs. In part two, I will continue this discussion by focusing on the value of destiny in adoption and apply substance-code to processes of kinning.

However important the role of CRC and Hague Convention are in adoption, the social workers still continue to draw on traditional Indian views. Particularly in the case of kinning the unrelated child into the family, which I return to in chapter seven.

The aforementioned CARA guidelines are mainly an initiative to increase the numbers of children placed in adoption domestically. The social workers on the other hand see their main function and role concerned with the 'best interest of the child' in placements and to some extent being both child- and family oriented. The main object of YCW is to provide abandoned children with new and suitable parents. Ms Mary claims that "every adoption case has to be conducted with the best interest of the child in mind." In the next chapter I wish to discuss further the impact of the social worker's expertise in placing a child in adoption. The social workers are actors that operate on a borderline between two social realities: that of their own expert knowledge as trained social workers as well as their own Indian context. The second part of this thesis is concerned with the latter.

Part II

Divine Adoption

Chapter 5

‘A Child with an Unknown Background’: Kinship and Caste

The children adopted were from one’s own family, caste and religion. ... Such adoptions came to be identified as kinship adoptions. They were the only kind of adoptions permitted under the traditional Hindu law. In a society known for its rigid caste hierarchy this was the only way of ensuring the “purity” of the caste of the child being brought into the family. A child who would ultimately perform the last rites of the father, inherit his property and carry on the lineage. (Ananthalakshmi et al. 2001: 13)

Family Relations and Adoption

Chapter two related the expectations of the prospective adoptive parents and family and discussed marital infertility. Here I wish to present some aspects of kinship and caste relations, since the family may be seen as a unit of social structure, as well as a cultural ideal and a focus of identity (Uberoi 1993).

To write about sibling relationships without including other familial relationships, for instance those between parents and children, between grandparents and grandchildren, between in-laws – in other words, outside the entire kinship system – is to commit an anthropological sin: taking relationships out of context. (Kolenda 1993: 103)

In the study of Indian kinship, according to Kolenda, it is essential to account for the aspects of family relations, otherwise relationships are taken 'out of context'. To fully understand the process of adoption it is necessary to account for kinship and caste relations in Northern India. To answer why issues of kinship and caste are important in adoption is to comprehend the adoptive parents' expectations regarding the child, these are concerned with the child's person or 'true nature'.

In India the anthropological inquiry concerning kinship systems tended (and still tends) to focus on inter- and intra-caste relations, the social organisation of lineages or descent groups and on marriage practices. Marriage practice in North India is governed by caste endogamy and village exogamy. A person is obliged to marry within his (or her) caste or community but outside his (or her) village; the residence pattern is patrilocal (Unnithan 1994; Seymour 1993; Waldrop 2004). Both descent and marriage are considered important group and person components of social rank and status (Dumont 1989; Unnithan 1994). These views have formed the framework for the study of kinship in South Asia.

Some claim that Indian kinship may be conceptualised in two senses. Firstly, it may relate to the way marriage and descent form inter-personal relationships. For example, in the settlement of a marriage, the issue of caste is emphasised as family background of two persons, and caste works as a foundation for the alliance between two lineages. Secondly, Indian kinship may be understood in terms of "a set of physical relations which provides a paradigm for conceptualising all other social relations" (Unnithan 1994: 95). Being a person, having social status and rank, as well as all group dynamics may be understood as the foundation of and provider for interaction with other (non-related) persons, groups or communities.¹ Adoption, understood in terms of these two senses, suggests that since the juridical relationship of adoption is based on law, like marriage, it joins persons, and create physical relations that are more than merely social.

In the first part of this chapter I intend to introduce the patriline and the joint extended family, which have significance in the process of adoption. In the second part I present some aspects of caste. In the presentation of kinship and caste throughout this chapter I also refer to my own empirical material, in order to show how persons within the field of adoption understand and experience kinship and caste. First, I wish to present two examples describing how the family's household organisation affects the childless couple's decision-

¹Following Schneider (1984) and his separation in American kinship between substance and code, where the code or code for conduct is juridical or social family relations based on substance or natural family relationships.

making process and where family jointness is an important normative value.

‘A Real Buffer ...’

By adopting an unrelated child, each family cooperates in kinship processes and kinning, where the adopted child is transformed to a kin relation (Howell 2003b, 2006). Between 75% and 80% of the families I interviewed, visited or met live as joint families, of which the majority are virilocal. The tendencies to patrilineality and virilocality must therefore be included in understanding kinning in adoption. As related below, in the interview with Mrs Bhargava, the Agarwals and the Chadhas the support of the joint, extended family is essential. According to Mrs Bhargava (in chapter two and here, later) the degree of success in adoption depends, on the joint, extended family.

The Agarwals²

Arun and Geeta Agarwal live with Arun Agarwal’s parents in a four story tall building close to Haus Khaz Village.³ In the interview Ms Mary enquires about the household organisation and Arun and Geeta Agarwal’s sibling relations. In response to Ms Mary’s inquiry, Arun Agarwal explains that his two elder brothers each own a flat in the house. He and Geeta own one too, though they have chosen to live with his parents on the ground floor and instead turned their flat into the family business’s office. This is partly because his two brothers live out of town, in other cities. The Agarwal family business has established branches there that the brothers look after. But Arun Agarwal also admits that another reason is that they find it unnecessary to keep two separate households when they are a small family.

Ms Mary asks such questions in order to establish the extent of the family relations and to what degree the extended family have been involved in the adoption decision-making process.⁴ “Did you consult your older brothers?” Ms Mary asks Arun Agarwal.

He answers: “Yes, we did. In fact, my brothers are very supportive; they fully understand our difficult situation and our desire to complete our family. My wife’s family too, is very supportive. But we have not discussed the matter with my father yet. We are unsure of how he will feel about the whole thing. When some

²I refer to the Agarwals in chapters two and three.

³Haus Khaz is an upper-middle class area in West Delhi, and Ms Mary classifies the family as upper-middle class.

⁴She confides this information later, in the YCW van on our way home. Ms Mary told me that in order to reveal how close family relations are she asks about whether the extended family was involved in the decision making process.

friends of us adopted, he gave them his support, but he also told them that he continues to pray for us every day; for us to have our own natural child."

The Chadhas⁵

Ms Mashia invited me to meet Savita and Sanjay Chadha. The Chadhas belong to the Punjabi community. They live in their own house with Sanjay Chadha's mother, who is a widow. Sanjay Chadha has an older brother and sister, whereas Savita Chadha has a younger sister. Sanjay Chadha's older brother lives on the family's ancestral property in their village, where he takes care of the family business.

Ms Mashia inquires to what degree the extended family was involved when Sanjay and Savita Chadha decided to adopt: "Did you consult your family?"

Savita Chadha answers: "Well, both yes and no. My sister [and the sister's husband's family] and my parents know, and of course my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law has been very supportive of my problems and me; she has not blamed me once, and when we first mentioned adoption [from Savita's sister] to her, she did not object to our desire to adopt.⁶ However, we have not discussed the issue of adoption with my brother-in-law. He and his family live so far away. And even though the family is close⁷ we do not often have the opportunity to be together [live] as a family. Also, because we do not intend to tell the 'fact' of adoption to our child, we think that the fewer who know of the adoption, the better. And maybe, he might not approve of our decision to adopt."

Both these examples reveal that the joint family and their support are important in the adoption decision-making process, either as 'motivator' or 'dissuader'. The family members' views are all considered and accounted for both by the couple and the social worker conducting the home study. In the case of the Agarwals and the Chadhas, the various family members do not share the same opinion; some are supportive of and some are against adoption.

Relations as 'Motivators' and 'Dissuaders'

Similarly, in an interview Mrs Bhargava described the joint family's importance whether a couple adopts or not. She supports her view with research

⁵The Chadhas are referred to in chapter three.

⁶The mother-in-law was present during the whole interview.

⁷I interpret her statement to mean emotionally and financially close. As will be shown later in this chapter, families may have a strong notion of being joint, even though they do not live together. This notion may be due to close emotional and financial ties as well as a strong sense of duty towards one's own kin.

she conducted completing her Ph.D. in the field of child development.

Me: “What role do you think the joint or extended family play in adoption, how they influence the couple who want to adopt?”

Mrs Bhargava: “You see, it can work both ways. Sometimes it is the extended family which pushes the couple to adopt. But sometimes it is the extended family which becomes the *dissuader*. You know: how can you go and adopt somebody [anybody?]; you can adopt from within the family; do not go out[side the family]; God knows what child [we will have].

But I have seen enough extended families who are the primary *motivator*. They actually say that the woman’s side of the family, especially the mother’s mother, is a very important agent. Like she will say, ‘No, no, why do you not adopt?’ because she sees her daughter’s suffering; her daughter is not happy, because she can not [conceive and have her own baby]; so she, the mother’s mother is a very important person in the area of motivation for adoption.

But I also think, which is different from other countries, is that the extended family acts as a real buffer for the child and the parents. I will give you an example. Suppose a child who is growing up finds that her parents are nagging her, telling her ‘ok, study, work hard, do this’; the child and the parents can have a conflict, but she is protected by the grandparents being around. So the grandparents, the aunts, the uncles play a very protective role. So when the child gets into conflict with the parents, the buffer family protects the child from, you know, getting low self-esteem. This is a positive thing I find, to have an extended family who participates in the whole adoption process.”

In other words, the extended family not only motivate or dissuade, they are supportive of the child in relation to the adoptive parents. In my experience, too, the joint extended family provide support to the parents in adoption, and are involved in most stages of the process of adoption. I have several times been offered sweets from a proud grandmother on the day the parents take their baby home from Palna.

Patrilineality

Patrilineal descent describes the practice where kinship links through pater are stressed (Parkin 1997: 15). ‘Pater’ is the socially defined father; ‘genitor’

is the (presumed) physical father⁸ (Keesing 1975). The relation between pater and genitor is relevant merely on a personal level; structurally it has little significance. Patrilineal descent is unilineal and emphasises same sex kin relations in a line from pater's ancestor (Parkin 1997). Property is inherited in the male line from generation to generation.

In India property was traditionally transferred from father to sons, and equally shared between the sons. When the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 came into force daughters and sons were juxtaposed, and daughters were given a legal right to inherit an equal share of the family property to that of the sons. Today the Act is little practiced (see Dhruvarajan 1989; Uberoi 1993). Some have argued that daughters rarely claim their lawful right to inheritance because such a claim would place them in a "rivalrous position with their brothers" (Seymour 1993: 48) and thus jeopardise the assumed close relationship between brothers and sisters (in the ethnography from Northern India; Uberoi 1993). Dhruvarajan (1989), Jacobson (1999) and Uberoi (1993: 225–36) relate that even after marriage there are still strong bonds of affection between a woman and her natal home. In my view, when a married woman continues having close ties to her natal family after marriage, she will most likely when faced with childlessness find support in them and be encouraged to choose unrelated adoption.

Mrs Bhargava also observed this tendency, as shown in the interview. Friends in Delhi, too, told me that sisters and brothers share close sibling relations. Furthermore, many daughters consider their dowry and the enormous expenses for their wedding to be their share of the inheritance. A friend said, "It [dowry] is not so much actual dowry as wedding presents from the bride's family to the newly married couple. After all, the parents want their daughter to have a good start in her married life. That is why they start saving for her marriage from the day she is born." To a great extent marriages are arranged, though a new pattern is evolving, mostly in urban areas: the value of love is included (Waldrop 2004).

Daughters are married off to other family lines. Since, according to Seymour, "the ideal type family in South Asia is a patrilineally extended one" (Seymour 1993: 45). Such a statement holds relevance to the majority of the families whom adopt from Palna. The ideal of patrilineality recognises that new sons must be added to the patriline in a perpetual process (Kolenda 1993: 120). Adoption must be viewed in relation to the patriline ideal, since many who approach YCW initially want a boy. When the couples are asked to consider a girl, many answer, "Maybe later, but we need a son first to

⁸'Genetrix' is the physical mother, and 'mater' is the socially defined mother (Keesing 1975).

continue the family name and take over our business. We need to complete our family.” Another important aspect is the patriline’s position in relation to the child: Mrs Bhargava described the extended family as a ‘buffer’ if conflicts should arise between adoptee and parents. The extended family is most often the patriline, due to the virilocal residence pattern.

In Indian thought a married couple must have children (sons). Only when a couple has their first child do they become a family. The marriage between a man and a woman is a union whose primary purpose is the production of children in order to continue the patriline (Bharadwaj 2003). As was suggested in chapter four, childlessness may become the motive for a husband to separate from his wife, but this is not always necessary since bigamy is accepted in some communities in India due to (female) infertility (own ethnography, see chapter four; Das 1993; Kolenda 1993; Jacobson 1999). Thus, a husband is within his rights to end a marriage due to childlessness.⁹

The Joint Family¹⁰

The ideal joint family is made up of a married couple, their married sons, their sons’ wives and children (and possibly grandsons’ wives and great-grandchildren), and unmarried daughters. (Wadley 2002: 11)

In many Hindu sacred scriptures and much anthropological literature the ideal family type is joint. The joint family consist of brothers living with their wives and children in their father’s (ancestral) house; to a greater or lesser degree they share the household.¹¹

The virilocal ideal is that brothers will live in fraternal solidarity in the parental household after marriage and share equally the family or ancestral

⁹Stephen A. Tyler writes in his book *India: An Anthropological Perspective* that “Should she (the wife) fail to produce a male child, either from barrenness or a perverse tendency to bear only females, her husband will be encouraged to take a second wife . . .” (Tyler: 1973: 132). Vanaja Dhruvarajan (1989) in her book *Hindu Women* has a similar claim: “In cases where he is not satisfied with her [the wife] for example, if she does not bear sons . . . he can discard her and marry again” (Dhruvarajan 1989: 45). Jacobson (1999) too observes this practice: “A man may seek another wife if his first wife has not given birth” (Jacobson 1999: 73).

¹⁰In two families the husband’s sister and children lived with them, due to divorce. Often the brother(s) are not present since he/they are working. On average about half of the women in a household are housewives; the other half work outside the home. The wives who work outside the home will, in some cases, take leave from work in order to be present when the social worker visits.

¹¹See Vatuk (1968) and to some extent Mandan (1993) for a further definition of types of family jointness and household in India.

property as well as the household's income and expenses (Mandelbaum 1970). Based on fraternal relations the household of brothers is assumed to constitute a long-term social and economic unit (Seymour 1993). Similarly, the virilocal ideal and fraternal solidarity describe the household of Ms Mashia and Ms Kalini. Ms Mashia and Ms Kalini, as two young, unmarried women, live in patrilineal, virilocal, joint families.

The Ideal

Both Ms Kalini and Ms Mashia's fathers share households with their brothers and live as a social and economic unit. Furthermore, both also referred to their paternal (first) cousins with sibling terminology, like "He is my brother," or "She is my sister," or "I went with my sisters and brothers," extending their sibling ties. According to Seymour this practice occurs because "The context of growing up is not just with one's siblings but also with one's patrilateral first cousins, who are generally referred to in Indian kinship terminologies as 'brothers' and sisters'" (Seymour 1993: 46).

Ms Kalini and Ms Mashia's paternal grandfathers were deceased, but their fathers and uncles had continued to live jointly. According to Seymour (1993), this pattern of living shows that the fathers are "not autonomous individuals, nor should they be" (Seymour 1993: 46, 47). Derné (1993) suggests that the joint family are at risk of dissolving at the death of a father, since there is a potential conflict between fraternal equality and age hierarchy. This means that to the father each son is equal, but when he dies the older brothers have authority over the younger brothers, and this asymmetry between brothers may cause conflicts that can sever the joint family (Derné 1993). The emphasis put on patrilineal ties also denotes brother and sister relations as a particularly affectionate, close and enduring one (Kolenda 1993; Mandelbaum 1970; Mayer 1960; Tyler 1973; Uberoi 1993). Both Ms Mashia and Ms Kalini have close and affectionate relationships with their brothers. Ms Mashia illustrated this relationship when she told me with great delight, a few months after I first met her eldest brother, "You should see my senior brother now, he is much more handsome than when you met him. He has had a hair transplant; it makes him look very good and at least ten years younger."

Deathblow?

It has been argued that industrialisation and the increase in urban lifestyle in India would be the end of the joint family. "Some researchers have incorrectly concluded from the statistical frequency of joint families that the joint family is in the process of breaking down under the pressure of modern life and urban

living” (Tyler 1973: 134). Rather, there seems to be an even and continuous percentage of nuclear or non-joint families in a given area (ibid). Contrary to expectations, increased education, consumerism, and migration have not strained the family unity (Madan 1993; Wadley 2002). Families that do not live jointly may do so temporarily due to various stages in the joint family’s life cycle. Also demographic changes, because of death, birth control and lower child mortality, work migration,¹² and adults having a longer life span, might influence whether a family lives jointly (Tyler 1973; Wadley 2002). Contrary to the suggestion that these changes and development would give the joint families their deathblow, Madan (1993) shows that these have merely strengthened the propensity to jointness.

A prominent cause for the breaking up of a joint family is often the death of a father. In such instances the sons will set up their own households, and for a short period live as a nuclear family, until their sons marry and have children. According to Tyler (1973), the change in the pattern of jointness should occur as a relative proportion of joint families versus nuclear families; however this is not the case. An argument is that the joint family are actually a product of industrialisation and growth in the family economy. Instead, poverty may force families to live as nuclear units, since they have fewer resources available for sharing than wealthier or more financially secure families have (Jacobson 1999; Wadley 2002). A majority of the couples that come to YCW to adopt seems to live in joint families. These families also tend to reside virilocally, and belong, to a certain degree, to the financially secure middle classes of Delhi.¹³

Semi-Jointness

Another aspect of jointness that prevails in the residence pattern of Northern India, and which also describes the adoptive families I met, is semi-jointness.¹⁴

¹²Wadley (2002) claims: “So while much of the time there may be two separate households, one urban and one rural, in fact there is a constant flow of people between the parts of a joint family, as workloads are redistributed around childbirth, holidays, labour needs, etc. Joint families, whether village-based or split between village and city, also benefit from having one adult male free to manage other family needs such as getting the sick proper medical care, dealing with officials, arranging marriages or being involved in village politics” (Wadley 2002: 19, 20).

¹³When the families register they have to document their savings, property and insurance as well as their monthly income.

¹⁴Similarly Frøystad (2005) describes that her acquaintances also referred to the term *semi-jointness*. Frøystad states: “The expression semi-jointness was their own and pointed to the fact that they lived under the same roof, but with each nuclear family having separate two-bedroom flats, separate kitchens, and separate household economies (2005: 54).

Semi-jointness seems to be the case with the Agarwals and the Chadhas (here, chapters two and three). Because of family loyalty, obligations, shared economy and notions of family duty, a family may still view themselves as joint even if not all the male members live in the same household. A son may live in another town and tend to the family business, whereas his wife and child may live with his parents and brothers (Seymour 1993, Tyler 1979).

Close and Enduring Bonds

Patrilineality and jointness surface in the adoption process when the social worker conducts her home study. When Mrs Bhargava argues that the extended family acts as ‘a real buffer for the child’ she also refers to the lack of social acceptance associated with adoption. According to Mrs Bhargava, as long as the child feels secure, loved, accepted, cared for and protected by a number of people (at home), then the child is also better prepared for the life outside the family home, whether it be the neighbourhood, school, leisure activities, or adult and married life. The social worker and counsellors emphasise that the more relatives the child can seek support from, the better equipped the child will be when she meets other people’s prejudices.

Mrs Bhargava also claims that even though more couples set up their own household, the incentive to adopt comes, in many cases, from their extended family, often the wife’s mother. On several of the home studies I attended, the adoptive grandparents (the husband’s parents) would state that they could not wait to hear the noises of a child playing in the house again. Yet, the adoptive grandparents who uttered such statements would often have only one son, in addition to a daughter or two. The potential grandparents would express that even though they love the children of their daughter(s), they had not established close and enduring bonds with these grandchildren as they expected they would with their son’s child(ren). “After all,” they would say, “they live with their paternal grandparents,” thus indicating the strong line of attachment and affection which is associated with the patriline. In light of such statements, it is made clear that the pattern of household organisation has significance in adoption. To many of the couples who approach the adoption agency, the opinion of the extended family and the organisation of their household influence their adoption incentive.

‘How did the child come to Palna?’

Before discussing the relationship between caste and adoption, it is essential to give a brief account of the concepts of *varna*, *jati* and *caste*. *Varna* comes from Sanskrit, and some of its many meanings are colour, quality, class, type,

kind, and race. But *varna* also denotes the four classes into which early Indo-Aryan society was divided (castes).¹⁵ *Varna* first appears in the Rig Veda. According to the Rig Veda, man is created through the sacrifice of the primeval man, Purusha, in an offering, *Purusha sukta* (Davis 1976; Fuller 1992; Tambiah 1973). Here every part of the primeval man is transformed, and, thus, constitutes a fourfold system of *varnas*: *brahmin* or the priests (from the mouth of Purusha); *kshatriya* or the warriors (the upper arms); *vaishya* or the traders (the thighs); and *shudra* or the servants (the feet); in addition there is a fifth category of people outside the *varna* system, the *avarna*.

The duty of the brahmins is to learn and teach the Vedas and to perform priestcraft. Kshatriyas have to protect the society as rulers (kings) and soldiers, but they also have a duty to sponsor rituals. Vaishyas are involved in agriculture, cattle herding and trade, whereas the Shudras have been given the duty to serve the three other *varnas* as servants (Dumont 1980; Fuller 1992; Jacobsen 2003; Kolenda 1978; Tyler 1973). The three first categories of *varna* are called the twice born castes, or *dvija*. The name refers to the initiation ritual, the Sacred Thread ceremony boys undergo at the commencement of their religious studies, which is invested with the sacred thread (Tyler 1973). The ceremony is perceived as a spiritual rebirth, hence the name twice born; until then, it is presumed that young boys are equal in status to shudras. Shudra boys are not permitted to undergo this initiation ritual (Fuller 1992; Kolenda 1978; Tyler 1973). *Avarna* literally means not of the people (*a* = not) and is outside the fourfold system of the *varnas* (Fuller 1992). Mahatma Gandhi named the *avarna* *Harijans*, meaning God's people. Lately, the group itself and its political movement have taken and prefer to use *Dalit*, the suppressed, but commonly *avarna* are known as untouchables (Frøystad 2003; Fuller 1992; Kolenda 1978).

Jati, on the other hand, are hardly mentioned in the Vedas, but are developed in *Smṛti* legal writings (Tambiah 1973). *Jati* signifies a type or category; these types or categories classify people, animals, plants and things on different levels and refer to 'kinds' (Mines & Lamb 2002: part III, 167-73). *Jati* is derived from the Hindi word for birth, and to be of the same *jati* indicates that one is of the same kind or species (Tambs-Lyche 1994). The practice was, and still is in many rural and urban areas, to marry within one's *jati*, i.e. endogamy. *Jati* may, depending on context, refer to lineage (exogamous), clan (endogamous) and *varna* (endogamous).

The origin of the word *caste* is probably the Latin or Portuguese word *casta*, which likely means race or a homogeneous group of people (Frøystad

¹⁵ *Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*.

et al. 2000; Tambs-Lyche 1994). Caste is the term the first Europeans used describing the organising system of groups of people in India; later the term became a part of the Indian vocabulary. Person’s names, previously, were caste names which often corresponded to occupational groups (Mines & Lamb 2002: 167-73). In many (urban) areas today many take a caste-neutral name due to various reasons (like sanskritisation (Srinivas’ concept) or because they oppose the hierarchical division into caste as a privilege by birth).¹⁶ Here, when I refer to varna, I mean varna in the Rig Veda’s meaning of the term. I use jati as denoting a group or a category of people, or a community. By caste I simply refer to the hierarchical system that I observed and which my acquaintances acknowledged.

‘How Can We Know?’

The issue of caste in adoption is not addressed directly by either agency or family. Such questions are in the guise of enquiry about the child’s (family) background, the circumstances of the child’s arrival to Palna and the adoptive parents’ desire for a fair-complexioned child.¹⁷ The social organisation into groups of castes is a much-studied aspect of Indian society and culture. Mayer describes castes in the rural area of Malwa as that “which deals with the mechanisms controlling their members in relations with each other and with people of other castes” (Mayer 1960: 3). According to Mayer, caste works as the “effective unit of action in many issues of which marriage and social control are the most important.” (ibid.: 3) Caste has great influence in the arrangement and settlement of marriages, which preferably must be conducted within the caste group (ibid.). Casts groups are endogamous, though the lineage is exogamous. The system accepts hypergamy, the Hindu *anuloma* unions,¹⁸ to a certain degree, though hypogamy, or *pratiloma* unions,¹⁹ are considered a socially unacceptable practice. Caste may also be understood

¹⁶The concept of sanskritisation describes how low castes imitates the life style, manners, diet and rituals of Brahmins or other high castes in order to improve their own low position in the caste hierarchy. However, their success depends on whether other castes acknowledge their new position and claim to higher rank.

¹⁷According to Frøystad (2001), many Northern Indians see a connection between fair complexion and high caste membership.

¹⁸Anuloma is the practice in which a man marries a woman from a caste, jati or varna below his own. A brahmin man may marry a woman of brahmin, kshatriya or vaishya, though rarely shudra, background. Marriage between a high caste woman and a low caste man, or pratiloma, is strongly sanctioned. For further readings see Beteille (1990), Davies (1976), and, particularly Tambiah (1973) for a thorough description.

¹⁹See previous footnote. Regarding its social unacceptability, I became acquainted with a woman of brahmin background who married a Punjab (kshatriya), who had not experienced any stigmas due to the match, though that he was from the north and she the south may

as an extension of patrilineality and the extended family; the child inherits pater's caste membership, and after marriage, the son continues to live with his parents.

On the purity-pollution scale caste membership denotes a person's substantial or built-in degree of purity (as following Dumont's (1980) ritual hierarchy). Here the brahmin is the purest and the untouchables are the most polluted. Caste also represents personal qualities, capabilities, abilities and dispositions of a person, which are called *gun* in Hindu literature. It seemed that some prospective adoptive parents perceived adoption as kinning a child who is qualitatively other than oneself. Thus, part of my inquiry in YCW evolved around how unrelated adoption was managed in terms of inter-caste relations, and families contemplate adoption as such, though on an inter-personal level.

In YCW I discovered that it is more common to refer to social category or position than actual caste membership, though issues of caste do surface, like in couple's request for a fair complexioned, newborn baby and questions about the baby's unknown background. The social workers too have to relate to caste when placing a child. One social worker told me, "Though the family we are about to visit only belongs to the middle of the middle classes [financially], they are brahmins, concerned with religious issues; they do not want a Muslim child, but how can we know? And then there is the issue of complexion. The matching of a child will be difficult, because the husband is quite dark whereas the wife is very fair."²⁰ Hence, caste matters a great deal in adoption, both to the social workers and the families, though both groups show caution in discussing the issue.²¹

Shades of Grey: Complexity in Perceiving Caste

Quite early during fieldwork the following question aroused my curiosity: How could childless Indian couples possibly adopt a child of unknown background, with parents of unknown caste? Hence, I tried to ask, politely, about what issues caste raised in adoption. However, I soon discovered that the 'polite' questions I asked were rather vague and led nowhere.²² When asking more direct questions about varna, jati or caste, the people I asked (social workers

have something to do with it.

²⁰Note that as mentioned in chapter two, though the contrary often is true, many in Northern India still associate the high castes with fair complexion as well as beauty.

²¹Frøystad (2005) had similar experiences in relation to her acquaintances dealing with and rationalising untouchability.

²²Many families or couples would give information about jati, lineage or community on their own accord, though varna was rarely brought up.

mainly) gave different answers from one time to the next. I realised that jati and caste had these various meaning due to the setting we were in or depending on subject. Wadley (1999) suggests that a person's varna matter little at most times, unless in relation to religious activity, which is determined by varna (Wadley 1999).

After the formal home study interview at the Agarwals, old Mr Agarwal joined us (having woken up from his afternoon nap).²³ While chatting about other things, Ms Mary asked about their friends, the young couple who had adopted. Mr Agarwal told Ms Mary that he was very happy on their behalf, and that he had given them his blessing. "However," he said, "I pray for Arun and Geeta to have their own natural child. If we knew about the child's natural parents, that we could be sure that he is not of *bad seed* [blood], we could consider adoption. But as it is, we will not know how he will turn out."

I see this statement in terms of the Hindu procreation metaphor where the man is seen as providing the seed (substance) and the woman as the field where the seeds will spring up (nurture). To give bad seed indicates that the man is of bad qualities, since the seed carries the substances needed in order to continue the man's qualities. Mr Agarwal showed great concern regarding the child's blood or substance. Therefore, it is possible to understand Mr Agarwal's reference to the child's unknown background as personal qualities or traits as well as caste or jati, since it is commonly asserted that personal traits or qualities are closely connected to caste or jati membership (Davies 1976; Frøystad 2005; Marriott 1976; Tambiah 1973).²⁴ The home study at the Agarwals' was the first I attended, so even at an early stage I became aware that caste is an unspoken issue. In none of the home studies I later attended, did a family member speak as openly about personal concerns regarding (caste) background as old Mr Agarwal did.

Also, in the relations between the employees in YCW and Palna it is possible to reveal some of the caste structure's properties: though never mentioned it is ever-present. Caste is communicated by whom you sit down to eat with, in the employees' work assignments, and in the reluctance of most employees to do other tasks than what they are actually employed to do. Several times at YCW I observed an office worker calling a servant from the next room to pour a glass of water from a jug that stood within

²³Arun Agarwal's father was not present during the formal interview, by request of the couple and Arun's mother, due to Mr Agarwal's concerns about adopting an unrelated child. Ms Mary accepted their wish on the condition that she could meet Mr Agarwal under a different pretext after the interview. Hence we arrived while Mr Agarwal was having his afternoon nap.

²⁴Ms Mary confirmed my understanding after the home study and mentioned it on several occasions later.

arm's reach.²⁵ Caste identity was also communicated in the surprise the office servants expressed when I did my own photocopying, instead of telling them to do it for me.

I have now treated caste, jati and varna on two levels: one to distinguish and define the categories; the other to show how I came upon ideas of caste during field study. Next I wish to examine anthropological theories regarding the hierarchical structuring of castes. The examples given below will show that it is reasonable to assume that division of labour and the axis of pure versus impure (the polluted) are interconnected and hard to distinguish in everyday practice.

Division of Labour²⁶

It is possible to theoretically separate the system of caste into division of labour and ritual hierarchy (along the axis of the pure and impure). Many argue for a relation between varna and division of labour. Fuller (1992) claims: "In theory, the caste system defines a division of labour, which reproduces in a more complicated pattern the division of functions in the *varna* system." (ibid.: 14). Nevertheless, the division of labour in relation to varna is in practise ambiguous, and the practical aspects of the labour division because of caste membership are not absolute (ibid.).

The castes or jatis of India are organised in a complex and flux structure which is often described as a hierarchical and segmentary system. Moreover, the hierarchical and segmentary system of castes has been seen as being based upon an ideal, religious model, the system of the four varnas (Dumont 1980; Fuller 1992; Jacobsen 2003). Fuller terms the caste system a 'complementary hierarchy' where each category fulfil a particular function which benefits the

²⁵Frøystad (2005) has similar experiences: one acquaintance called for the servant to switch on the fan, though the switch was within arm's reach. Such behaviour is due to the fact that socialisation reproduces "upper-caste notions of caste in a particularly 'deep' and subtle way because master-servant interaction is governed by tacit knowledge and mute practices rather than by reflexive thought and articulate statements" (Frøystad 2005: 92).

²⁶I have in this section avoided the *jajmani* system. Jajmani was seen by Wiser as mutual and symmetrical exchange in a Northern Indian village, where landholding castes exchanged grain for the service of other castes; the relations were seen as reciprocal. Later researches saw these exchanges as rather asymmetrical and coerced, where the dominance of the landowning castes unevenly distributed privileges and created dependency in the lower castes. Also, there were questions as to whether a pure form of the jajmani system had ever existed. This has no relevance in this dissertation. See Raheja (1988, 1990) for a more recent study of the relation between landholding castes and other castes, she focus on the centrality rather than the dominance in relations of exchange with the landowning castes.

society as a whole, “a unity constituted by ranked classes, each with the different functions necessary to sustain the whole.” (Fuller 1992: 12).

This notion is similar to that of Dumont, who proposes that ‘caste is a state of mind’ (Dumont 1908: 34). In *Homo Hierarchicus* Dumont argues that in order to understand the caste hierarchy it is essential to have a perception of the whole, which is not the whole as a construct consisting of several, various elements or units. Rather the whole must be understood in terms of being a system with given principles that “govern the arrangement of fluid and fluctuating elements” (Dumont 1980: 34). Fuller, however, emphasises that caste is not a set of abstract categories but is instead a social organisation which is visible in the everyday life of Indians. Accordingly, caste has a dimension which is directly connected with an individual’s social and personal identity. Though Fuller refers to rural India, I believe caste is no less visible in urban areas.

“That is Unhygienic”

While conducting fieldwork in YCW I lived in the neighbourhood, in a block of approximately twenty flats. The other residents in my building had their own servants, but everyone’s bathrooms and toilets (including mine) were cleaned by the same woman, Asa.²⁷ After a while I discovered she was of untouchable background. Unfortunately, she became ill with hepatitis in December 2002; due to her illness she could not work for about a month. However, no one was available to fill in while Asa was sick. The maids and servants who did the regular cleaning and cooking were not willing to clean the bathrooms and toilets. Some acquaintances also expressed that they would not like their servants to provide multipurpose service either, due to hygiene.²⁸ Ms Kalini told me: “The servant that cooks for you cannot clean your bathrooms; that is unhygienic.”

In other words, servants are hired because of their caste background; Asa cleaned toilets because of her untouchability. In her article “Master-Servant Relations and the Domestic Reproduction of Caste” Frøystad (2003) argues that caste is domestically reproduced in the master-servant relation in urban Northern India. Frøystad writes: “The household tasks that were

²⁷I think it is quite interesting that the services provided by the cleaning woman were included in the rent of my flat. The owner had hired her before he let the flat to me. She came to our flat and cleaned the bathrooms every day.

²⁸As following Frøystad (2003, 2005) who argues that the trend among her informants is to have several servants who perform various specialised tasks like cooking, general cleaning, cleaning bathrooms, washing, etc, instead of having live-in maid(s) or servant(s). However, both Ms Kalini and Ms Mashia’s families have live-in servants in the joint household.

most strongly circumvented all entailed contact with substances containing *tamogun* [a defiling substance]: bathroom cleaning, and laundry with human waste, dishwashing with leftover food and sweeping and garbage collecting with stale food” (Frøystad 2003: 80). In Frøystad’s case too, servants were hired not in spite of their untouchability but because of their untouchability. Frøystad recalls how acquaintances would avoid doing the dishes and would instead borrow plates and cutlery from neighbours rather than washing up themselves. Washing up is considered a polluting act, since it involves the touching of (polluted) leftovers on the dirty plates. Frøystad’s acquaintances justified their behaviour as a precaution against physical pollution by dirt or *ganda* (Frøystad 2003, 2005). Like Ms Kalini they referred to it in terms of physical hygiene rather than in spiritual terms. In other words, to do the dishes could reproduce untouchability.²⁹

Pollution versus Unrelated Adoption

According to the ritual hierarchy, the purer varnas hire the impure varna or untouchables to perform the polluting tasks in everyday life, because of the impure status of these groups. The division of labour is interconnected with and to a large degree founded on the pollution-purity scale, where the impure low castes do polluting tasks for the purer high castes. Even among the low castes there is a strong sense of which polluting task is acceptable for a given low-caste person. When Asa becomes sick, the other servants are unwilling to do her work, and the ‘masters’ unwilling to let these servants do ‘unhygienic’ tasks, due to the polluting aspect of Asa’s work that deals with ‘bodily emissions and waste’. These polluting tasks cause pollution in purer castes, but also in the impure, though these are already, to an extent, polluted. Possibly, some understand adoption along similar lines: that in adoption there exists a danger of pollution due to close and enduring contact with a child that may be of impure caste background. However, the pure-impure dimension is in my view of less importance in adoption. More prevailing concerns relate to the person, qualities and traits of the child. Next, I relate some examples.

²⁹This ritual dimension of purity and pollution is also articulated by Fuller. He claims that higher castes control pollution by hiring low caste people to perform polluting tasks for them. “Organic life . . . is the most immediate source of pollution, which is mainly controlled by a daily bath and other ablutions as required. But pollution is also controlled by allocating to specific, low-ranking castes duties like barbering, laundering, and removing nightsoil, so that the purity of Brahmans and high-caste people is preserved by others who perform the polluting tasks for them. Hence the complementary division of labour among castes has a ritual dimension and is not simply ‘economic’” (Fuller 1992: 15).

When old Mr Agarwal and Ms Mary talked about the friends that had adopted, he questioned the child’s future ability in relation to education. He said he feared the child would not be able to excel in school. Such fears also surface when Ms Mary counsels prospective adoptive parents about the possibility that the adoptee may develop learning difficulties.³⁰ These fears make sense when viewed in the light of caste as division of labour, because caste membership does not only denote a person’s traditional occupation, status and rank in the hierarchy; it also gives the individual his or her personal character, abilities, possibilities, strengths, flaws, and dispositions according to the *gun* model³¹ (Davis 1976; Frøystad 2003). A possible interpretation of learning disabilities in adopted children is that they are of the ‘kind’ that cannot complete higher education or become academics. Their abilities are directed towards serving higher castes.

This aspect has some relevance, since the adoption incentive, in many cases, is based on the need for a male heir to inherit the family business. In chapter three I related an incident where an adoptee preferred the company of the maids to the rest of the family. The family experienced this as an uncomfortable situation which created tension in the relationship between parents and child. “Castes are ascriptive social groups; there is no individual social mobility among them. Castes are normally endogamous, so that husband and wife belong to the same caste, which is also their children’s caste” (Fuller 1992: 14). The child’s preference for servants and the kitchen could thus be understood in terms of the child’s qualities, or traits, as a person revealing the low caste status to which she was born.

The *Gun* Model

[T]he several life forms recognised by Bengalis (gods, humans, demonic beings, animals, plants and objects) are all defined by the same radical material substances—the *gun* of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*—and the behavioural code (*dharma*) held appropriate to the disposition of those *gun*. Thus all life forms are viewed as essentially similar, differing only in the way their own physical nature and behavioural code approximates that of Brahma, the

³⁰Due to ‘Western’ research on adopted children it has been established (in ‘Western’ research and literature) that adopted children are more likely to develop learning disabilities than natural born children. Some claim that this is due to deprivation of parents and institutionalisation. Many agencies in India have established a policy where the social workers and counsellors are bound to discuss the possibility that the adopted child may not be very strong academically.

³¹I will return to *gun* next in this chapter.

apical being in the Bengali cosmos ... Much the same is also true of the various ‘birth-groups’ (*jati*) ... *Varna*, castes and still more highly differentiated groupings are all defined by the same radical material substances (*gun*) and the behavioural code (*dharma*) held appropriate to those *gun*. (Davis 1976: 6)

The association between *varna* and colour may be understood in relation to the *gun* model. The *gun* model is ‘the bottom line of purity and pollution in Brahminical thought’ (Frøystad 2003: 79). According to the *gun* model every being, plant and object is composed of the same ‘strands’, ‘qualities’, ‘substances’, ‘radical material substances’, i.e. the *gun* of *sattva*, *rajas* (*rajo*), and *tamas* (*tamo*) (Davis 1976; Frøystad 2003; Marriott 1999; Mines 1990). Each *gun* has a given appropriate behavioural code (code for conduct) or *dharma* (Davis 1976; Marriott 1999; Mines 1990). *Dharma* may be defined as the natural and moral code that is held appropriate for each being, for example, the *dharma* of a *shudra* is to provide service to the twice born castes. I will now describe the qualities immanent in *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, before I return to the manifestations of *gun* qualities in Hindu persons.

Sattvagun

“[*Sattvagun*] is the real, existent; it is the cause of equilibrium, manifested in light” (Tyler 1973: 70). Furthermore, “[it] is the material mode that illumines and reveals the phenomenal world for what it truly is—namely, manifestations of the one supreme principle, *Brahma*” (Davis 1976: 9). *Sattva* is associated with the colour white, essentiality, joy, goodness, the godlike. “*Sattvagun* resides in the mind ... and inspires noble virtues and actions” (Davis 1976: 9). *Sattvagun* is prominent in deities and brahmins, thus signifying the pre-eminent principle (Frøystad 2003). Having more *sattva*, typical functions of the brahmin are studying, performing rituals and sacrifices (for the kings),³² teaching and reading from the religious scriptures (Tyler 1973). *Sattva* is the active substance suppressing *rajas* and *tamas*. *Sattvagun* is also prominent in *cold* foods³³ such as *ghee* (clarified butter), milk products, and vegetables (Frøystad 2003). Many vegetables are considered cold due to the prominence of *sattvagun* in them; hence an important food prescription

³²An important quality of the priestly caste is to be the mediator between the kings and the gods. I do not intend to take up the discussion regarding the brahmin-king relation, which has been much discussed. For further reading see Heesterman (1980), Quigley (1993).

³³In Hindu-Indian thought food is divided into cold and hot foods. Whether a food is cold or hot has nothing to do with heat as in spices. Rather the cold and hot property of a food refers to the (inner) quality of the food.

for brahmins is vegetarianism. It is commonly believed that you become what you eat,³⁴ thus if a brahmin eats too much hot food, his temper will become too hot. Cold or *sattvik* food inspires self-control, forbearance, discrimination, truthfulness, contentment, to mention some traits (Davis 1976). “Different foods, constituted of different *gun* and appropriate to those *gun*, are held to have different effects on the body through the blood” (Davis 1976: 20). In other words, food is constituted in varying degrees of the three *gunas*, foods which in turn influence body and mind.

Rajasgun

“[*Rajasgun*], an active component, can move the other *gunas*. It is manifest in the force of wind” (Tyler 1973: 70). *Rajasgun* resides in life itself and is “present in all life forms”; it is the “material mode that activates the other two *gun*” (Davis 1976: 9). This substance is associated with the colour red and predominant in demons and animals, in kshatriyas and in hot food. In order for the king to be a good leader or the warrior to be a good soldier he must eat a lot of hot foods, like meat, eggs, fish, onions (and some other vegetables and fruits), which will produce the essential qualities in kings and warriors: for example, anger, violence, ambition, selfishness, physical strength, egoism, and making the person active and energetic (Davis 1976; Frøystad 2003; Mines 1999; Tyler 1973). These qualities are necessary in order for a king or a warrior to fulfil his duty or dharma to lead or defend his people (Frøystad 2003; Tyler 1973), “because a kshatriya’s duty is to fight in war and govern in peace” (Tyler 1973: 81). Also, the “five senses of perception (power to feel, see, hear, taste, smell) and five instruments of action (power to express, procreate, excrete, grasp, move)” (Tyler 1973: 71) have all evolved from *rajasgun*. These are qualities which are considered to be essential in kshatriya. The non-vegetarian diet consists of food such as meat, eggs, fish, onions, garlic, and mango, and it is considered *rajasik* or hot. The rajasik diet is considered to excite body and temperament.

Tamasgun

“[*Tamasgun*] is darkness, obstructive of the tendencies of the other two *gunas*, and has the characteristics gravity, mass, weight, and inertia” (Tyler 1973: 70). *Tamasgun* is a black substance that resides in the body; it is the “material mode that veils and suppresses the true reality of the universe and leads

³⁴This notion must be seen in relation to the idea that substances are constantly transacted and transferred between actors, action and objects. This point will be discussed at length in chapter seven. For further reading see also Marriott (1976).

humans, in ignorance, to be uncommonly attached to sensual and material desires” (Davies 1976: 9). The substance is predominant in shudras and untouchables, leftovers, scraps, spoiled food, beef, alcohol and human waste. Tamasgun invokes the sensual, the material, dumbness, ignorance laziness, crude or backward behaviour and state of mind, but also stupidity and fear—in short the base behaviours (Davis 1976; Frøystad 2003; Mines 1990). If the rajasik diet is spoiled it becomes *tamasik*, however, beef and alcohol and some other foods are always *tamasik*³⁵ (Davis 1976).

“A caste can transform its defining features, and thus its rank, then, according to the kinds of food consumed, as all foods include the *gun* of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* in greater or lesser proportion and have a corresponding effect on body, temperament, and action” (Davis 1976: 20). Following the *gun* model each varna is associated with its own set of substances. Thus, to be born within a caste does not only give you caste membership, a place in the hierarchy, an occupation; it also prescribes the actors’ person, i.e. qualities, abilities, strengths, pattern of behaviour, nature, occupation, complexion. It follows that caste is more than hierarchy and division of labour, and these are important considerations to account for when studying adoption. Every person is a composite of the three gunas, though in persons, either *sattvagun*, *rajasgun* or *tamasgun* is the dominating substance. Following Marriot (1976), persons constantly give out and absorb various substance-codes; therefore, persons are concerned with maintaining their own nature, as given by the gunas. However, in adoption, this view may not necessarily work as a dissuader, this will be discuss further in chapter seven.

The Ethnosociological Actor

In anthropological studies in India it is commonly argued that a person’s caste to a great extent determines that individual’s participation in social life and in the public sphere (Dumont 1980; Mayer 1960; Tambs-Lyche 1995). However, ethnosociological models saw persons (actors) not only in relation to caste membership, but also in relation to action and, most importantly, their “proportions of the same set of substances . . . [i.e.] the elements . . . , the humours . . . , and the three qualities of *sattvas* (goodness and light), *rajas* (action) and *tamas* (darkness or inertia)” (Mines & Lamb 2002: part III, 169). It was argued that the Hindu’s perception of himself was as a dividual and

³⁵Food also is considered to become mixed with the qualities or traits of the persons preparing or cooking the food, though some food is considered less influenced by persons’ natures, like ghee, milk and sweet food; this food is called *pakka*. Some food again is more easily mixed with persons’ natures; this is *kacca* food (Davies 1976; Mayer 1960).

not an individual (Marriott 1976; Tambs-Lyche 1995). Transactions thought to be given by the actors’ position in the caste hierarchy or rank in the kin group, were in fact transactions coloured by the actors’ person, qualities, substance, and action.

Contrasted with Western thought of persons as autonomous and holistic beings, the bounded individual that ended where the body ended, the Hindu was a dividual. This view emphasised the non-duality of actor and action (Marriott 1976). Ethnosociological models claimed that not only the person but also everything in the world consists of sets or systems of substances (Marriott 1976: substance-code). The systems of substances embrace the thought or human mind, as well as bodily and other organic substances that are part of the transaction (Marriott 1976; Parry 1989). The systems of substances are hierarchically ranked and have the properties of pollution and purity attached (Frøystad 2003; Marriott 1976).

According to Marriott (1976), every action is a transaction of a set of substances; that is their own nature or substance-code. According to the ethnosociological model unrelated adoption should be seen as a transaction, therefore adoption will influence adoptive parents and adoptees. I return to the aspect of substance-code and adoption in chapter seven.

Concluding Remark

I have shown the inter-relationships between kinship, jointness, patrilineality, caste and adoption, and further that these have attached ideas and values that influence people’s worldviews. In a sense, to adopt in Delhi is to act outside what traditionally is considered proper. The adoption practice challenges traditional Indian socio-cultural values in several ways, particularly when it comes to the child’s background and his or her ‘true nature’. Thus, in the following chapters I intend to discuss how adoption in Delhi must be seen in relation to the value of *destiny* and *kinning* in order to overcome some of the challenges posed by values immanent in the caste system, gunas and person’s ‘true nature’ and background.

Chapter 6

Born by Destiny: A Cultural Elaboration of Destiny in Adoption¹

The same individual may oscillate among different theories, searching for the one that is most satisfactory for her or him; and, within the same community, people may explain the same event with reference to different casual theories as befits their own involvement in the event. (Keyes 1983: 21)

Everyday Life and Reincarnation

In this chapter I wish to discuss unrelated adoption in relation to the value of destiny. During fieldwork I observed social workers indicate several times to childless couples that infertility, and hence the initiative to adopt as predestined. Their childlessness and the prospective adoption was a decision already made: before they were married, even before they were born themselves. It is a path they had to follow. Among my acquaintances the value of destiny is “oriented to a comprehension of everyday life” (Pugh 1983: 132). The value of destiny works as a framework that organises adoptive parents’ experiences of infertility and adoption. As Hiebert (1983) notes, karma (and I claim destiny too) is “only one of a number of explanation traditions people use to account for and respond to the experiences of life” (ibid.: 120).

In order to discuss the value of destiny it is also necessary to introduce the concepts of *karma*, *kismet* and *bhagya*. Karma can be described as person’s

¹This chapter is also the starting point for an article I have written, “Født av skjebnen: En kulturell elaborering av ikke-relatert adopsjon i Delhi” (2006).

actions, good as well as bad, in past, present and future reincarnations or rebirths (Fuller 1992). Karma is dynamic and malleable; what you do in your present life form invokes past, present and future rebirths. Contrary to karma, destiny is outside human control and given by the natural order (ibid.; S. B. Daniel 1983). Thus, my acquaintances' value of destiny must be understood similarly when they say, "it is written in the stars" or "it is written on the forehead" (headwriting).²

The concept of kismet is of Urdu origin, and is often equated with destiny, though several of my acquaintances are of the firm opinion that there is a qualitative distinction between destiny and kismet.³ Kismet describes a person's luck or fortune and misfortune that is not influenced by humans' action (like destiny, but contrary to karma). Pugh (1983) translates kismet with the English 'fate' and observes her informants' experiences of kismet as follows: "Allah, as omnipotent deity, decides the fate or 'lot' (*qism*) of each person" (Pugh 1983: 136). This view coincides with S. B. Daniel's (1983) observation of the workings of fate in Tamil Nadu, where Siva (similarly omnipotent) is thought to write on everybody's forehead his or her fate, according to previous deeds.

The Hindi *bhagya* is also commonly translated to English as fate (Wadley 1983, 1990, and own data). According to Wadley (1983) *bhagya* is derived from 'share' or 'portion' and suggests that luck, chance or fate is a potential, where the notion of past conduct and deeds are excluded (Wadley 1983: 161). Furthermore, Wadley observes, "fortune may not be allied to karma: in some contexts, *bhagya* appears to reflect a different system" (Wadley 1983: 160). Likewise, my acquaintances do not ally destiny with karma; destiny makes up a qualitatively different system in adoption than karma does. This notion is revealed in examples later in this chapter.

Some translate karma to the English destiny or fate; however, according to my acquaintances' usage of destiny this is a rather imprecise and incorrect translation. O'Flaherty, too, has captured this imprecision.

Like *bhakti* [devotion], the forces of time and fate appear in

²Here they refer to the predestined aspect. This statement also works as an indirect reference to horoscopes, since most parents will approach a pandit in order to have a horoscope made for their newborn. For further reading see J. F. Pugh (1983), but also S. B. Daniel (1983), E. V. Daniel (1983) and D. Jacobson (1999).

³Note that in this thesis I do not distinguish between the religious beliefs of my social worker acquaintances, though they are Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Jain. Their religious beliefs seem to intercept with the value of destiny, particularly since it is often related as God's will. For a comparison between Hindu and Muslim belief regarding destiny or fate and God's will see Pugh (1983). Unfortunately, I have found no similar research relating to Christian and Hindu belief.

the *Mahabharata* as ‘non-karmic’ elements . . . As is apparent from the Puranic materials, too, karma and fate . . . are sometimes equated and sometimes explicitly contrasted. The conflict may be viewed in terms of free will: according to karma, the individual is responsible for what happens to him; with fate, he is not responsible. (O’Flaherty 1980: xxiii)

Here, fate and destiny must be equated. Many of my acquaintances, too, are in accord with the aspect of destiny as God’s will or headwriting. The person is not responsible when it comes to his given destiny; however, in relation to karma, he is seen as responsible.

Having Dogs is Not in Her Destiny⁴

Ms Mary and I are going on a home study. When we arrive at the family’s home we are quite late, since we had some trouble finding their house. The family lives in Tri Nagar,⁵ a big and congested market area in West Delhi with many small alleys. Finally, Ms Mary was about to give up finding the right house and just go home, but then, last minute, ‘our’ driver located the address. The family belongs to a ‘business community’ (*vaishya*), and Ms Mary classifies the family as a middle middle-class family. The childless couple lives as a joint family with the husband’s parents, his three brothers and their wives and children. However, the couple have their own bedroom and kitchen.

Ms Mary and I are taken in to the couple’s room. Present are the potential adoptive mother, Cesta, her mother-in-law, Mrs Arora, and her younger sister-in-law, Parviti. Ms Mary asks Cesta where her husband is. Mrs Arora tells Ms Mary that he is not home. She explains, “Since he has his own business, a shop, it is impossible for him to close it in the middle of the day.” Ms Mary utters her disapproval and stresses the importance of the husband’s participating in the interview and counselling during the home study. She says: “You see, I need to know his attitude towards the adoption so that I can be certain he has a positive view: that he agrees to adopt and is ready mentally.”

Mrs Arora, his mother, replies, “My son has not quite come to terms with the infertility problem; he is still a bit unsure about the whole thing [adoption].

⁴This home study was conducted on the 19th of February 2003, towards the end of my fieldwork. During this home study mainly Hindi was spoken. However, Ms Mary translated for me during the interview, though I understood a lot of what was said (after almost six months in the field I became quite good at catching things said in Hindi that were adoption-related). The things that I did not understand I asked the family about after the home study interview, Ms Mary translated. Finally, I interviewed Ms Mary about this home study in the YCW van afterwards, on our way home.

⁵The name is made up.

All the pains and suffering; not conceiving; and then the pains and the cost of the infertility treatments. So we began to think about adoption. We have tried the family, but nobody is willing [to give the couple a child]; we have tried the hospitals, but there were only girls; you are their last resort; you must give them a son!" While talking tears appear in her eyes. "The rest of us [the joint family] are fine with the idea of adopting. My other three sons all have their own sons, but not Anil. Anil and Cesta have been married since 1989, and now they are in their mid-to-late thirties, their time is running out."

The husband's mother hesitates, then touches Ms Mary on her knee and looks her in the eyes and begs: "Please, give us a son! You must give us a boy!" Ms Mary smiles back at the old lady and says: "It is very difficult to adopt a son because there are so few baby boys available. Your son and his wife will have to be on the waiting list for several years. A girl on the other hand is no problem, we have a lot of beautiful girls that they can adopt, and later they can have a boy if they desire."⁶ But Mrs Arora is very insistent: "It has to be a boy. Give us a boy. The waiting doesn't matter, as long as you give us a boy."

Ms Mary looks at Cesta, the wife, and asks: "What is your preference?"

Cesta replies in a low voice and looks at her hands: "There is no difference in my mind; my child is there [in her heart]. If it is a boy or a girl doesn't matter, *kuch nahi*."⁷

Her mother-in-law interrupts and says to Ms Mary: "She needs a boy; our family needs a boy."

Ms Mary, still turned to Cesta says: "You must be *thora*⁸ strong. If you think a daughter will suit you better, then say that, you have to consider your own feelings as well. Old traditions and views on daughters have changed, it is not good to focus on these things; such views are *ganda*."⁹

Again the old woman interrupts, but this time she talks about [Cesta's] destiny. When I hear the word destiny, it almost makes me jump, this is what I been waiting for all along. "A woman in our neighbourhood lets stray dogs inside her house. One after the other she takes the dogs home; she feeds them, cares for them, but one after the other the dogs die. Why does that happen? The answer is destiny, having dogs is not in her destiny. The same goes for Cesta. Cesta and

⁶In YCW they did not register any couples who wanted a boy during the time I was there. Instead they advised the childless couples to first adopt a girl, though their preference was a boy, since at any given time in Palna there are girls available for adoption. This also because of HAMA, which states that a couple is only allowed to adopt one child of each sex; thus, if you have already adopted a girl and want to adopt again, it has to be a boy, and the couples do not have to be on the waiting list.

⁷*Kuch nahi* is Hindi and means nothing. Here it refers to not having a preference.

⁸*Thora* is Hindi and means little. Here it is used in the meaning, 'be a little strong'.

⁹*Ganda* is Hindi and means bad, impure or dirty/dirt. Here it means 'bad views'.

five other women went through the infertility treatment together. All of the five other women conceived and gave birth to healthy children, but not our Cesta. Why did Cesta not conceive? The only logical answer is kismet; it is not in her destiny to conceive her own natural child, because if it were she would already have a baby. She must adopt; that is her kismet, that is Cesta's destiny."

Parviti picks up the thread. "My sister's sister¹⁰ adopted, and the builder who laid the marble in my brother's house also adopted. Actually he told my brother that his business did not go well at all before they adopted, when they still were thinking about adoption, but were reluctant. Finally they went for adoption, and soon after the child was taken home the business really flourished; in no time the business doubled. After the adoption everything changed; everything started going really well, and he said it was kismet. They had resisted their destiny, but as soon as they accepted their destiny, the kismet changed."

This example reveals that when childless couples in Delhi decide to adopt an unrelated child, it is possible to understand the act of adoption as the childless couple's destiny. The adoption is predestined and cannot be altered by persons' actions; it is a path that one has to follow; it is impossible to turn around. After five months in the field I was becoming quite sure that destiny is the explanatory model that is accommodated when there is no other good reason for infertility. This explanatory model shares similarities with Evans-Pritchard (1973) describing witchcraft among the Azande: What can better explain why a branch from a termite-ridden tree falls on one's head? Why just when one is there, not sooner or later? It is no coincidence; it is witchcraft, likewise with adoption. It is no coincidence that one cannot conceive; it is destiny.

The Transcendental and Pragmatic Complex

I attempt to combine two systems. The first is a simple system describing everyday practice, the other is a philosophical system. The former is utilised by adoptive parents when they apply destiny in order to legitimise the act of adoption in relation to existing cultural and social norms, particularly those concerning infertility and adoption. The philosophical system indicates that though one might desire it, one cannot escape one's destiny; destiny is the path one follows. Furthermore, that one follows this particular path is not accidental. Adoption is predestined; it is not a decision to make. This reference is often made when social workers and prospective adoptive parents say 'it is your/my *destiny* to adopt'.

¹⁰She means her sister's husband's sister.

These two systems are similar to Mandelbaum's (1966) proposal of the transcendental and pragmatic complex. In my view the transcendental complex does not necessarily limit itself to priestly activities. The transcendental complex seems to be present in Mrs Raja Gupta's elaboration on karma, later in this chapter, as well as in others' relating the impact of karma on people's lives. The pragmatic complex is possibly best seen in relation to the value of destiny. To Mandelbaum (1966) the philosophical system would also relate infertility and adoption as reaping the fruits of past rebirths, i.e. bad actions and deeds. However, I abstain from similar reference since my acquaintances suggest no such chain of action. Destiny functions as placing childlessness within a framework that provides meaning to these couples.

Karma

Karma may be conceptualised on two levels. One is karma as a religious phenomenon as described in classical Hinduism (Sanskrit texts). Fuller (1992) describes karma as the fruit of all past actions, conscious and subconscious alike, in which karma evokes *samsara* (the cycle of rebirth). The ultimate aim for a Hindu is to achieve *moksha*¹¹ (release or revelation) and, hence, escape *samsara*. In order to reach *moksha* the Hindu has to renounce the material world: complete release from the material (Fuller 1992; Jacobsen 2003). Karma is seen as inseparable from *dharma*, the moral code in Hindu philosophy or code for conduct.¹² Every person has a range of duties¹³ that should be upheld, and all actions, good as bad, are considered according to *dharma* (Fuller 1992). This view is mainly negative, because persons have a low degree of impact on their present position in life, since punishment for past actions and the cycle of reincarnation is ascribed hardship in one's present rebirth. A person is merely able to influence future rebirths by fulfilling present duties.

The second level is located within the social anthropological study and

¹¹Kolenda (1964) defines *moksha* as the complete release of the self from the cycle of rebirth. Contrary to *moksha*, karma also carries a connotation of attachment.

¹²*Dharma* or the Hindu moral code is closely associated with persons' rightful duty (Marriott 1976). *Dharma* is equalised with duty. Wadley (1994) defines *dharma* as doing one's prescribed duty; it is merit. Wadley also mentions *adharma*, which is to go against the proper order of things, i.e. non-duty or demerit. Sharma (1973) notes that *dharma* only concerns humans. Both Marriott (1976, 1990) and Nicholas & Inden (1977) define *dharma* as code for conduct.

¹³These duties are given according only to persons' role and status. See Ralph Lindton's (1964) article "Status and Role" which gives a general definition of individuals' status and role.

popular Hinduism (myths, fairy tales, Bollywood films). This approach to the concept of karma is constructed according to the views and concepts Hindus themselves utilise when discussing karma's impact on their lives. In my view, this level or popular Hinduism has much of its anthropological research rooted within ethnosociological models. Hence, it is providing a framework of interpretation that may account for the value of destiny.

Good and Bad Deeds

[T]heories of *karma*, in explaining present condition by past conduct, seem to exclude the possibility of remedial measures, since what has been done cannot be undone . . . Partly because no one ever knows the full record of their own past conduct . . . Thus the chain of *karma* cannot be completely known. (Fuller 1992: 248)

The meaning of the term karma is 'action' (*Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*). My acquaintances include all action or deeds, good or bad, that have inevitable consequences for ones reincarnation or rebirth. Wadley (1994) proposes that karma is operative on two levels: it accounts for persons' present life condition and it depends on action and deeds in present rebirth. Similarly Tyler (1973) suggests that karma can relate theologically to the outcome of previous actions and accounts for every person's present position in the world. Karma and rebirth justify persons' present situation in life, i.e. one's fulfilment of duty is rewarded, whereas failing to fulfil one's duty is punished in the reincarnation cycle or samsara (Tyler 1973).¹⁴ In terms of caste ideology, persons' present caste membership may be understood as the outcome of past action. Good karma indicates that a person had done good deeds and actions and fulfilled his duties; he is rewarded in the cycle of rebirth. Bad karma indicates bad actions and deeds, as well as a poor ability to fulfil one's duty; in other words the person is punished in the cycle of rebirth. However, everybody has, by means of his actions, an ability to fulfil his duty, the potential to evoke the cycle of rebirth (ibid). However, as Fuller relates above, nobody can entirely breach the karmic chain, since nobody possesses absolute information about past reincarnations, which is also referred to as the problem of amnesia (Babb 1983; S. B. Daniel 1983; Hiebert 1983).

¹⁴For a more detailed discussion of karma and rebirth see O'Flaherty (ed.) (1980) and Neufeldt (ed.) (1995), since I refrain from discussing theories of karma and rebirth. Here I merely relate to my informants experiences and how they utilise karma versus destiny in relation to adoption.

The Karmic Substance

By Indian modes of thought, what goes on *between* actors are the same connected processes of mixing and separation that go on *within* actors. Actors' particular natures are thought to be results as well as causes of their particular actions (*karma*). Varied codes of action or codes for conduct (*dharma*) are thought to be naturally embodied in actors and otherwise substantiated in the flow of things that pass among actors. (Marriott 1976: 109-110)

In other words, karma is not merely an abstraction. Karma as action in Hindu thought both refers to substantiveness as well as non-substantiveness. It is at the same time both material and non-material. Hence, karma may be transmitted through bodily substances, in particular, but also more generally via other substances that easily transport various qualities, like the three *gunas*, *sattva*, *tamas* and *rajas*.

Wadley & Derr (1990), after a fire in Karimpur, observed their informants relating the fire and subsequent losses as a matter of the village, in general, but of some families in particular, reaping the fruits of sin (*pap*). Wadley & Derr state: "The fire was seen as just retribution, for worse than sinning is eating the earnings of sin" (ibid.: 139). Thus, the Karimpur villagers implied that, though some of the families suffering severe losses in the fire themselves had not sinned, close relatives had. These families had no personal responsibility for their relations' sins; still they were 'eating the sins' due to transfers of karma.¹⁵ Wadley (2002) links individual sin to having an effect on both personal, family, lineage, caste, village and country karma (fate), since "an individual is not a unique entity but shares substance and moral codes with all of those with whom he or she is related, in ever larger circles" (ibid.: 18). In 'eating the sins' the Karimpur residents revealed an understanding of karma as material and substantive, which is transmitted between actors due to the divisibility of the Hindu person (as following Marriott 1976: 111). Individual sin affects the whole community because the person is not an individual, but has dividualistic qualities. The value of destiny should be seen in similar ways, since the theory of destiny is by some (Babb 1983; Wadley 1983; Pugh 1983 and more) accorded as part of the karmic doctrine within popular Hinduism.

Furthermore, destiny, unlike classical karmic ideology, does not stress moral responsibility in relation to suffering and misfortune. Karma is perceived as good and bad action that influences one's reincarnation and its consequences,

¹⁵Note that Wadley does not distinguish between karma and destiny as I do. However, I refrain from discussing her shortcomings in defining karma.

and my acquaintances do not name karma as the cause of their infertility and subsequent initiative to adopt. These are ascribed to destiny. In my view, the value of destiny is utilised because, as Babb (1983) and Sharma (1973) note, to stress karma implicates wilful action and moral responsibility, which in turn may induce religious anxiety.¹⁶ Hence, infertility is seen as self-inflicted. The value of destiny enables the couples to cope better with their present life condition. Below, I give an account of destiny.

Destiny: It is Like a Bank Account

In North India a common perception of Hindu persons is that they are “wooden puppets who are ‘propelled by the Lord’ to their several destinies” (Long 1980: 46-47). The Indian author Rohinton Mistry, too, in his novel *Family Matters*, makes a similar association: “‘An actor without awareness is a wooden puppet,’ declared Gautam grandly . . . ‘In a culture where destiny is embraced as the paramount force, we are all puppets,’ said Bhaskar with equal grandness” (Mistry 2002: 331). Here I use the word ‘destiny’ since it is utilised by my acquaintances within the field of adoption in Delhi. It describes the situation of involuntary childlessness in healthy, young, married couples. ‘Destiny’ is a term used by my acquaintances, which I apply in this analysis.

According to Fuller destiny (fate) is an idea more or less detached from the cycle of reincarnation. Furthermore, misfortune and suffering occur without a meaningful or known reason, are hard to predict, and written on persons’ foreheads.

Fate is a basic concept in popular Hinduism and although it is sometimes marked out by distinctive terms—like the Muslims’ word *kismet* widely used in north India—it is often equated with karma, taking the sense of an uncontrollable, impersonal force determining destiny in relation to past lives for which nobody can be held responsible. Although fate is uncontrollable, however, it is said to be written on the forehead at birth in accordance with the balance of karma accumulated through previous existence. To that extent, everybody’s preordained fate is ultimately determined by past conduct—even though no one knows how—so that popular theories of karma, despite partial detachment from the idea of

¹⁶For further reading on the relationship between theological karma, moral responsibility and religious anxiety see R. P. Goldman (1985), U. Sharma (1973), P. M. Kolenda (1964), S. B. Daniel (1983) and L. A. Babb (1983).

rebirth, constantly tend to qualify the explanation of blind fate. Rarely, therefore, is fate as karma an absolutely null explanation of misfortune. (Fuller 1992: 251)

Nor did my acquaintances view destiny as a 'null explanation of misfortune'; childlessness was never explained as being caused by bad actions or deeds in past rebirths, but was seen as predestined or headwritten.¹⁷ Childlessness is juxtaposed with suffering and misfortune: both childless couples and social workers talk about the 'pains of childlessness' and utilise suffering in direct relation to infertile (married) women. One woman said, "all the suffering . . . because I cannot conceive." Wadley (1990, 1994) too observes fortune and misfortune as closely connected to destiny. In this manner, destiny provides a framework of meaning to suffering and misfortune, as religion gives people an image of ordering the world meaningfully (as following Geertz 1966: 23), since it is perceived as uncontrollable.

God's Will

In adoption, destiny must not be identified as karmic theology, since karma is associated negatively, as malleable and dynamic (by force of actions). This is not the case with destiny. One acquaintance told me, "Destiny may be something bad that turns into something good. You cannot escape your destiny." This statement indicates that destiny is much less malleable than karma. Another acquaintance described destiny in the following way: "Destiny is written on your forehead, predicted by the stars and is God's will. Destiny is what comes about for any single individual. Destiny is God-sent and outside the action constellation of karma." To resist destiny is futile; it is inescapable and outside human control. Is it destiny to adopt, one should merely accept one's fate; it is predestined. To act against destiny is to resist God's will.

However, my acquaintances are ambiguous in their perception of destiny. Some say that destiny is a positive interpretation of karma. Others say that destiny has nothing to do with karma at all, since karma is more removed from the real world. In my view, destiny is a pragmatic and less theological notion of predestination than karma and describes more generally persons' life course. Fuller, too, in *The Camphor Flame* sees destiny as the unchangeable (invariable), and karma as the changeable (variable or malleable). I recognise Fuller's explanatory model from my acquaintances' statements regarding adoption as persons' destiny and 'written in the stars' or 'on one's forehead', or quite simply as 'God's will'. Kolenda (1964) observed a similar justification

¹⁷For further readings on headwriting see S. B. Daniel (1983), Hiebert (1983) and Babb (1983).

in relation to having children. Kolenda records the Sweeper woman's response to her questions on whether karma has an influence on her life: "My fate wasn't so good ... I feel that if it were in my fate to have children, my other children would have lived. God would have made them live" (Kolenda 1964: 73). Kolenda here translates karma with the English fate, though what is noteworthy is that the Sweeper woman talks about her fate as given by God, in a similar manner to my acquaintances. I suggest that the Sweeper woman is not talking about her karma; rather she relates her destiny.

Religious Anxiety and Moral Responsibility

If destiny is 'written in the stars' or 'God's will', one has no direct, personal responsibility as prescribed by karma. Adoption as inevitable, predestined, and divine is ascribed by the value of destiny when my social worker acquaintances counsel prospective adoptive parents on adoption. It is the couple's destiny not to have their own natural children, but to adopt a particular unrelated though predestined child. Likewise, it is the child's destiny to be orphaned or abandoned by his or her natural parents; the child is destined to be adopted by a given childless couple. They have destinies that come together. This is a cultural elaboration of unrelated adoption.

Similarly, Keyes (1983) suggests that "it is precisely in such circumstances, when one's efforts fail to rectify misfortunes presumably caused by forces that are part of ordinary mundane existence ... that one turns to an explanation in terms of an ultimate, absolute, irrevocable force, a force that is conceived of as karmic destiny" (ibid.: 17). I propose that a couple's condition of childlessness will evoke explanations in terms of destiny; as Babb (1983) suggests, "theories of destiny that indicate human responsibility are not just rationalisations of the present; they are recipes for human response to destiny as well" (ibid.: 173). To cope with infertility in terms of karma implies moral responsibility and religious anxiety. Popular theories of destiny, according to Babb (1983), that rule out the fatalistic aspect might invoke the person to "feel actively engaged with his situation, able to alter his lot by means of activity. Theories of misfortune that stress responsibility, of which the karma doctrine is one example, express and sanction this disposition" (ibid.: 173). When already in a situation loaded with stigmas, suffering, misfortune and such additional responsibility and anxiety may create too much strain on the childless couple. Hence, it seems like destiny provides a cultural space that gives rise to a new way of coping with the childlessness.

Cultural System

After the fire in Karimpur in 1984 Wadley & Derr describe how the villagers constructed meaningful explanations concerning the losses of every family during the fire. Wadley & Derr connect these explanations with the villagers' own 'cultural system'.

The fire's path was erratic: it demolished some houses, jumped another, while stopping on the doorsteps of yet others. Through the pathways of their own cultural system explaining sorrow and disaster, Karimpur's residents sought and found explanations for this erratic path. (Wadley & Derr 1990: 133)

Likewise my acquaintances in YCW make their 'pathways of their own cultural system'. When the value of destiny is utilised to explain childlessness and the same time to legitimise the adoption of an unrelated child, destiny becomes such a 'cultural system' (in which karma theology is omitted). In my view, destiny is a 'cultural system' that both describes and prescribes the childless couple's present life situation (as following Geertz (1993a: 93-95) in relation to *models of* and *models for*). On one hand, the value of destiny describes the prospective adoptive parents' childlessness that is its cause; it is part of a *model of* the reality. On the other, hand destiny also functions prescriptively; it becomes part of a *model for* reality; since destiny makes sense, it provides meaning to an otherwise meaningless condition and takes the form of being objective. It explains why the childless couples cannot have their own natural children. The value of destiny is a local theory of causality. It is an explanatory model that justifies why things did not turn out as they (the childless couples) had hoped for.

'You Can be Born a King and Die Poor'

In course of the first two to three months of my field study I asked several of the people working in the field of adoption, as well as neighbours, whether there was a connection between karma, destiny and adoption. During the three first months the boundaries between karma, destiny and adoption seemed quite blurred to me, and I must have asked some rather vague and confusing questions. Questions regarding karma and destiny were often met with quite conflicting answers regarding adoption, childlessness and the adoptee. During this period I learnt that there are as many views and perceptions of destiny

(and karma) as there are Indians. The examples below will show that some differentiate between karma and destiny quite firmly, whereas others do not. I relate to three acquaintances and their understandings of destiny and karma in relation to adoption.

To Interfere with Fate

I am in the Palna office, in the secretary's corner. It is Saturday, and I have just been to a three-day VCA workshop aimed at Indian social workers and counsellors, from all over India, working in the field of adoption. As I am looking through the window in the secretary's office (its view is the other employees in Palna, the waiting area and the door to Mrs Mehta's office), my mind wanders to the workshop that I have just been attending. Standing there, daydreaming, I spot Mrs Raja Gupta,¹⁸ a participant at the workshop, entering YCW. She asks for Mrs Mehta; Manjo, the servant, asks her to sit down and wait, since Mrs Mehta is still in Palna on her regular morning visit. However Mrs Raja Gupta spots me, and instead comes to the office where I am.

Mrs Raja Gupta: "I have an appointment with Mrs Mehta, but as I understand it she is doing her round in Palna. While I am waiting I thought I would see you; you had a few questions at the workshop, about karma. What is it you wonder about?"

Me: "Well, somebody told me that karma is an important aspect of in-country [unrelated] adoption; what do you think? Do you experience that potential adoptive parents ask about the child's karma?" While I talk a frown appears on her face, when she replies, I think I detect a slightly annoyed tone in her voice.

Mrs Raja Gupta: "You must understand that karma in general is mostly a negative force. When you talk about karma you offer people a negative understanding of the circumstances around abandoned children, infertility and in-country adoption. I believe that one should not bring karma into these matters. I do not think *you* need to worry so much about it."

Mrs Raja Gupta pauses, then continues, "A few of the prospective adoptive parents who come to our organisation ask about the child's karma; is the child's karma bad? I tell them what a friend of mine, who runs an *ashram*,¹⁹ told me: There are two modes of understanding karma. Unfortunately, most of the time people here [in India] think of karma as a negative force. But that is not right, karma has also positive qualities. The negative view of karma says, since we cannot have our own natural children then we should not adopt an orphaned or

¹⁸The name is a pseudonym. Mrs Raja Gupta is the General Secretary of an adoption agency (NGO) in the state of Maharashtra.

¹⁹A (religious) centre aiming at persons' (individual) spiritual development.

abandoned child; that is to interfere with fate. We are destined to be childless, and the child is destined to be orphaned, or left by his or her parents. Some people will say that these children have bad karma; what else can explain their ill fortune. Some believe that one does not have the right to influence karma, and abandoned children should not be adopted. They believe that there is definitely no duty to do so, since the circumstances that left the children in the care of the orphanage are due to karma. Personally, I think such views can be compared to when Hindus say, 'We should not do charity work, because it is poor people's karma to be poor.'

On the other hand, according to my friend, karma is a dynamic relation. Like, you can be born a king and die poor, or you can be born poor and die a king. If you understand karma in such way, you have a positive view of karma. And this is what I explain prospective adoptive parents who ask about karma in relation to in-country adoption. So instead of saying a child has a bad karma, it is essential to see it in a different light; the child has *good* karma, the child was abandoned to be adopted. And regarding the adoptive parents it is *their* karma to adopt a child, not have biological children."

During the interview above I experienced that Mrs Raja Gupta became quite annoyed, because I introduced the karmic ideology to adoption, it seemed to be quite inappropriate. Mrs Raja Gupta says karma is a dynamic relation if you interpret it positively. As I read through my field notes from this conversation and compared them with literature on this subject as well as other data that I collected, it seemed to me that she talked about destiny. Further, that which may make you die a king or adopt an unrelated child seems to be the same as kismet. Particularly I see this in relation to Mrs Arora when she describes Cesta's destiny and how kismet intervened.

Mrs Raja Gupta also reveals scepticism regarding karma, though she does not entirely reject the idea. Explicitly, she only rejects the karmic reasoning relating misfortune (bad fortune) in terms of past bad actions or deeds. Babb (1983) observes the same reaction among villagers in Lewis' (1965: 253–255) *Village Life in Northern India*.

In the wake of the conversation with Mrs Raja Gupta I discovered that I made a huge mistake by not distinguishing between karma and destiny. I discovered too that conflicting answers were given depending on whether I asked about karma or destiny's impact on adoption. After some time, conducting fieldwork in YCW and returning to the conversation with Mrs Raja Gupta, I discovered that my inquiries as to whether there was a connection between karma and adoption reflected a negative attitude in my acquaintances' replies. Karma explained that a child had been left in the basket outside YCW as a result of bad reincarnation due to bad deeds in past rebirths. The child was punished by being left by his or her natural parents.

Questions relating to destiny and adoption were met with a positive attitude by my acquaintances. Destiny is viewed as a positive force, and it is stressed that the child is left by his or her natural parents, in order for him or her to be adopted by one particular family. The social workers and the counsellors associated with YCW and VCA continuously utilise such value of destiny, during counselling with adoptive parents and their families. The social workers and counsellors never refer to karma. Some couples and families may introduce karma in the conversation, but in such instances the social worker or counsellor avoids karma. The social worker or counsellor instead angles the conversation in the direction of destiny and adoption.

Two Interviews That Illustrate Karma

Next, I wish to relate two interviews I had with my neighbours Mrs Kapur and Mrs Sita Kapur. Both are widows, distantly related,²⁰ in their seventies and known by their relatives to be 'highly spiritual'. The same relatives encouraged me to talk to the two widows, in order for me to "better understand the Indian scene and its problems with adoption."

Achieving Good Karma²¹

Mrs Santushi Kapur is a neighbour and a member of the YCW board, in her late thirties to early forties. She invited me to come to her family's bungalow and meet her mother-in-law, Mrs Kapur, due to my many questions about karma and destiny. Mrs Santushi Kapur arranged for me to come after my duties in Palna today. Apparently her mother-in-law knows a lot about karma and spirituality, and can maybe relieve some of my curiosity. However, Mrs Santushi Kapur had forgotten about our appointment, but her mother-in-law was free at home and willing to meet me. This is how it went.

Me: "What is karma really?"

Mrs Kapur: "Personally, I believe firmly in karma. What else can explain the differences between people? Karma explains why some people have good lives and are well off, whereas others are poor and suffering. It explains the great differences between people. Karma is about action, as good or bad deeds in your past lives that are punished or rewarded in present life; it throws light on present life condition. But, karma also encourages you to do good deeds, like help the poor by giving alms such as food and clothes, do charity amongst the sick or abandoned children. By doing good deeds, living a good life and fulfilling your duty you achieve good karma."

²⁰The late husbands of Mrs Kapur and Mrs Sita Kapur had the same paternal grandfather.

²¹Extract from my field notebook, the 12/11/2002. The interview is conducted in English.

Me: "Some of the couples who come to Palna ask if it is their karma to be childless. They question if adoption is an alternative they should consider. They are concerned that if they adopt then they are also acting against their karma. Some couples question whether it is also the child's karma to be orphaned, and is it then good action to adopt a child whose karma is to grow up an orphan? However, the social workers tell these couples that; 'It is your destiny to adopt and it is the child's destiny to be adopted'. What do you think about such interpretation? Is it a correct interpretation of karmic ideology?"

Mrs Kapur: "Yes, I think it is a good interpretation. You know, before, when I was younger, I used to do some charity work for the Church of Charity,²² and there the nuns would give shelter to abandoned children. These children would later be adopted by Danish or German families. These children were given an incredible opportunity to a new and better start in life, to a much brighter future. I see no other explanation to such a turn in life than it being due to the child's karma. Karma includes both bad and good deeds, the child did something bad in past lives [in order to be abandoned], but he or she also did something very good [since adopted by a 'rich' European family] in order for such a turn in life."

Mrs Kapur seems not to distinguish between karma and destiny, though her understanding of karma seems to intercept with destiny and is similar to that of the social workers in VCA and YCW. To Mrs Kapur karma seems mostly like a positive force, though the aspect of retribution does not quite escape her interpretation. I connect Mrs Kapur's view with that of Keyes (1983):

Popular doctrines of karma, like their theological counterparts, serve to explain certain dimensions of one's present existential circumstances in terms of a predetermined destiny *and also* serve to define the nature of the responsibility that one should assume for one's actions in order to attain positive ends. (Keyes 1983: 12)

Mrs Kapur, too, utilises karma when explaining the childrens' abandonment. And, I would like to add, in order for the childless couple to accept an abandoned child in adoption, without being weighed down by moral responsibility and religious anxiety encapsulated in theological karma, the value of destiny is utilised.

'They Have Karma that Comes Together'²³

²²Pseudonym.

²³Extract from my field notebook the 19/11/2002. The interview is conducted in English.

A couple of days ago I called Mrs Sita Kapur and arranged to come over to her flat for an interview. I told her that I was interested in learning about spiritual matters such as karma. Mrs Sita Kapur lives two blocks of flats down the road from me. She told me to come around eight p.m. on Tuesday the 19th.

At eight I ring her doorbell and a male servant²⁴ opens the door. I tell him that Mrs Sita Kapur is expecting me. He shows me into the living room, he motions for me to sit down on one of the sofas, then he leaves me in order to fetch Mrs Sita Kapur. The living room is quite grand. It is furnished with two sofa sitting groups and several Persian rugs on the floor. Around the room there are various miniatures on the walls, family portraits on the side tables and a large glass cupboard with china.

After a few minutes Mrs Sita Kapur enters the living room, supporting herself on a polished walking stick in dark wood with a silver handle. She sits down on the chair next to me and greets me, then she asks the servant to bring some tea. A little later he returns with a silver tray holding a silver teapot, a creamer and sugar bowl (also in silver), and two porcelain teacups (manufactured by Johnson). There is also a small tray with biscuits, and I realise that they are stale when I nibble one. The servant pours the tea; he serves Mrs Sita Kapur first, then me. We have a sip each, before Mrs Sita Kapur turns to me.

Mrs Sita Kapur: "So what do you want to know?"

Me: "What can you tell me about karma? I find it quite difficult to understand how it works; in particular, how it works in adoption. I have asked people in Palna and Mrs Santushi Kapur, she told me to see you. I do not quite get it. The children in Palna; what is their karma, good or bad? Since they are orphaned or abandoned by their parents, I mean."

Mrs Sita Kapur: "I do not think it is right to say that a child has bad karma because he or she is orphaned or abandoned and left in an orphanage like Palna. You see, whether it is biological parents or adoptive parents, they and the child have karma that *comes together*. It is the parents' karma to have this particular child, and the child's karma to have exactly these parents. If parents have a good or a bad child, then it is the parents' karma. If it is a bad child, then maybe the child is bad because the parents in some past lives mistreated just this child. Therefore, their karma has been tied together by actions in past lives.

But you must understand, bad karma in this life does not necessarily mean that you did bad deeds or actions in your past life. Bad karma now means bad actions in any of your previous lives. In order to do good deeds or actions it is important that thought [mind] and action go together. Like, you do good deeds, but without your heart or thought in that action it matters little; and likewise, if

²⁴I am later told that he is the brother of Rita, the maid who cleans and cooks in my flat.

you do bad deeds without wanting to, it does not necessarily affect your karma. And it is at this point I find it difficult to understand Christianity, how can you sin if it is unintentional? [Mrs Sita Kapur sidetracks]. You have probably heard about destiny and kismet or luck?" I nod, and Mrs Sita Kapur continues, "Destiny and action [indicating code or dharma] belong together in karma. You cannot have destiny and karma without action; you cannot live without acting, and you cannot act without destiny and karma."

Again Mrs Sita Kapur trails off the issue of karma in adoption by returning to how little sense the notion of hell and sin in Christianity makes to her. Soon after I end the interview and bid Mrs Sita Kapur farewell.

In the interview Mrs Sita Kapur refers to both destiny and karma, though only towards the end of the interview. When she distinguishes between destiny and karma, karma seems malleable. However, it is not entirely clear to me whether destiny is static or not, though her statements seem to indicate such a perception. But, most importantly, Mrs Sita Kapur utilises the same 'positive force' that Mrs Raja Gupta relates earlier, when she says that the adoptee and the adoptive parents have 'karma that comes together'.

This latter view, among Hindus, is also observed by Hiebert (1987) in relation to the village myth of the ascetic, the butcher and the cow who are tied together in new rebirth (ibid.: 126): "The cow was reborn a woman. It came to pass that the merchant [who in past rebirth was the butcher who killed the cow] married the woman, and the couple became known for their hospitality to passing beggars and ascetics. One day the ascetic [who in past rebirth was the ascetic helping the butcher to find the cow, so the butcher could kill her] passed through the village and stopped at their home to eat (so the three were *joined together again*)."

Hiebert refers to this as the corporate nature of karma. Mrs Sita Kapur expresses the same corporate nature of the (adoptive) family's karma; parents and children belong together because of joined actions and deeds in past rebirths.

"If one believed in reincarnation, one saw one's place in the caste system as reflective of one's character in a previous life. If one was reborn an untouchable, one had, obviously, been more sinful than if one was reborn a Brahman" (Kolenda 1978: 32). Both Mrs Raja Gupta and Mrs Kapur express similar views. According to Mrs Raja Gupta one can be 'born a king and die poor', as past sinful life may cause a downfall in present reincarnation. Likewise, Mrs Kapur relates that a pious past rebirth may improve a Palna child's life situation thus cared for and raised by wealthy adoptive parents. Both Mrs Raja Gupta and Mrs Kapur relate the interconnection between past action and present life situation and to the malleable aspect of karma. Wadley (1983) too notes that "karma, ones' past deeds, can be altered through new deeds."

Ms Kalini expresses a similar notion that karma is malleable and may be altered, when replying my question regarding prospective adoptive parents' view of the Palna children's karma or destiny:

You know, karma says something about past actions; therefore it will determine who one is and what one does tomorrow. A child who has been abandoned by his or her natural parents has been left because of actions [both good and bad] in previous lives. This is a construction of the self where karma and family matters a great deal. On the other hand, luck, or kismet, can interfere, and one [the child] is rewarded with adoption. Some prospective adoptive parents may assume that a child in an institution has bad karma; what other reasons are there for these children to end up in the institution in the first place. Then you must turn it around and say: the child had good kismet; he or she is to be adopted.

Ms Kalini relates karma to action and destiny to an intervention in a person's present life condition that is given by karma and is outside human control. This view is also found other places in India (Keyes & Daniel 1983), though it does not converge with textual material on theological theory of karma.²⁵

Concluding Remarks

I have shown in this chapter that local perceptions of destiny and karma are highly variable and may change from one person to the next, from one anthropologist to another. Though, in my view, a general assumption must be that theological theory of karma sees it as malleable and invoked by persons' actions in past, present and future reincarnations. Destiny, on the other hand, seems to be a notion of karma within popular Hinduism. Unlike theological karma, persons' actions do not easily influence destiny's chain of action. Destiny is God's will, headwriting or written in the stars; it is outside human control, and thus not malleable to the same extent as karma. However, kismet or luck may come about in order to turn around one's destiny, the path is altered.

According to Fuller there exist several views of karma, particularly in popular Hindu theories. Popular Hinduism focuses more on misfortune and suffering, and less on good and bad deeds in past rebirths. In my view, the value of destiny may be understood in terms of such a perception of karma

²⁵For further reading see O'Flaherty (1980).

within popular Hinduism. The value of destiny as it occurs in adoption is pragmatic when it comes to explaining misfortune and suffering. Rather than explaining infertility and childlessness in terms of persons' past actions in past rebirths (like karma), destiny functions as a norm or value, i.e. a cultural elaboration, which explains infertility and why childless couples should adopt an unrelated child (note Mrs Raja Gupta's view). It is my belief that to interpret one's infertility in terms of karma evokes far greater consequences and implications, indicating moral responsibility and religious anxiety for one's present position in life. These consequences are to a greater degree escaped when ascribing one's infertility and following adoption incentive as part of one's destiny.

In adoption the value of destiny is a 'paramount force'. However, instead of turning the childless couples to 'wooden puppets', destiny makes room for (new) action. By relating to destiny, the opportunity to act outside the existing cultural and social structures, that men and women generally pertain to regarding marital infertility, is generated. Furthermore, the value of destiny also functions to legitimise the adoption of a child with an unknown background.

The value of destiny provides an explanatory model rationalising and justifying a childless marriage in a manner that does not induce a degree of responsibility, anxiety and fatalism. These in turn may render persons totally helpless and unable to deal with their present life situation. In my view, to understand the adoption in terms of destiny does not place the person in a position where he believes he may 'alter his lot by means of activity'; rather the value of destiny undermines moral responsibility and religious anxiety by presenting the adoption alternative as headwriting or God's will.

In this chapter I also touched briefly the aspect of destiny as a substance. Marriott's ethnosociology and substantialist theory hold that in the Hindu universe destiny [karma] too is substance. This I intend to investigate further in the next and final chapter as well as discussing the incorporation or kinning of the adoptee into the adoptive family.

Chapter 7

Born of My Heart¹

In the end, it is clear that not only what we mean by terms such as substance and biology is much richer and more diverse than we thought but also that what counts as the substantial-coding of kinship has undergone significant historical transformation. As understandings of the “substances of kinship” change—from the Bible’s transubstantiation of divinity through Abraham’s seed, to Morgan’s transubstantiated kinship across rivers of water and blood, to modern biology’s definition of human nature and kinship in terms of genetic codes—so too is the capacity to make and unmake kinship out of them transformed. (Franklin & McKinnon 2001:11)

In this chapter I intend to show how adoption in Delhi makes sense when understood in terms of Marriott’s concept of *substance-code*. This concept attempts to describe Indian ideas regarding the “identity of actor and action and of the divisibility of the person” (Marriott 1976: 109). In India, according to Marriott, codes for conduct, or *dharma*,² are considered as embodied in persons (actors), and are thus “substantialised in the flow of things that pass among actors” (ibid.: 110). The practice of adopting from an agency challenges common Indian notions about kinship and the person, and thus the cultural understanding of what constitutes a person. This is so because, in terms of Marriott’s transaction model, the unrelated child and its substance-code will be incorporated by the family. I intend to show how

¹This chapter is also the starting point for an article I have written; “Divine Adoption” (2004)

²Nicholas & Inden (1977) elaborate a little on *dharma* being the same as code for conduct. They say: “Differently defined sets of people have different codes for conduct . . . These two features, shared body and a particular code for conduct, define the *jñati* class of one’s own people and distinguish it from the *kutumba* class” (ibid.: 14).

Indian perceptions of substance (-code) (which include persons' nature and composition of *gunas*) and destiny enable the adoptive parents to incorporate the child as sharing their own substance through processes of nurture and family life, a process that covers several stages and over the course of many years. My attempt is to demonstrate that the inseparability of substance and code proposed by the ethnosociological school and later criticised, actually makes sense of unrelated adoption in Delhi. In the Indian context, the concept of substance-code has proved itself to be a useful analytical tool in understanding kinning.

'The Obvious Trap of Adoption ...'

Aditya Bharadwaj (2003) says:

Adoption continues to remain an undesirable option because the links between an adopted child and the social parent become a public, vocal and visible admission of infertility that cannot be subsumed, like donated gamete conception, under a conspiracy of silence. (Bharadwaj 2003: 1867)

In my view Bharadwaj is quite right to assume that infertility is an admission that few wish to state or reveal publicly. However, he does not take into account the transaction of substances that is involved in persons' interactions. Here I am primarily thinking of the transmission of substances (of various qualities), from parents to child and from child to parents that takes place due to nurture, living, eating, sleeping, caring and loving each other. The ethnosociological model argues that persons in India make a great effort, in personal interaction, "to maintaining one's own 'nature' ... by not mixing with things, places, or persons that might alter you in an disagreeable manner, and, conversely, by seeking out transactions ... that might at least temporarily enhance your qualities, or 'polish' them" (Mines & Lamb, Introduction, Part III 2002: 169). It is my belief that some prospective adoptive parents view the prospective intimate family life with the adoptee as an act where exchange between themselves and the child will take place. Both their own and the adoptee's 'bodily nature' will be affected. Nature here means more than the biological; personal qualities, traits, abilities and dispositions are included. Bharadwaj does not consider that some may bear in mind that the adopted or destitute child is burdened with (bad) kismet, or that the adoptee and the childless couple share destiny. It is my belief that, to the adoptive parents, these are aspects of concern equal to making infertility public. Hence, the desire in many potential adoptive parents to perform secret adoption must

also be viewed in relation to these ideas, as well as if the child is very young, it will be more influenced by the parents, and have less influence on them.

Substance-Code

In his study of American kinship Schneider (1984) utilises substance and code for conduct in order to describe American kinship. He defines substance as shared blood or shared biogenetic substance, and code for conduct or code is defined as “a pattern for how interpersonal relations should proceed” (Schneider 1984: 26). Code is pattern for behaviour, which may occur alone or in combination with substance. According to Schneider American kinship is constructed on the *order of nature* and the *order of law*. He says: “Relatives *in nature* share heredity. Relatives *in law* are bound by law or custom, by the code for conduct and by the pattern for behaviour” (Schneider 1984: 27). Schneider, attempts to organise kinship as a system of symbols and meaning, in other words, a cultural system. Thus, Schneider does not attempt to *describe* kinship, as the functional approach to kinship tended to do.

The various substance transactions a person participates in invoke the person. Marriott (1976) discusses transactions of varied substances between different caste groups. Inspired by Schneider’s study *American Kinship* (1984), Marriott introduces the concept of substance-code, in “Hindu Transactions: Diversity Without Dualism” (1976). Here he discusses how the person is influenced by different transactions, in particular food transactions. He combines substance and code in order to understand the Hindu person and social interactions. He claims: “Actions enjoined by these embodied codes are thought of as transforming the substances in which they are embodied” (Marriott & Inden 1977: 228). In other words, action must not be separated from the actor, and the actor must not be separated from action. Further action and actor “constantly change through recombinations of their parts ... they change together” (Marriot 1976: 112). In order to describe these transactions Marriott states:

They must also give out from themselves particles of their own coded substances—essences, residues or other active influences—that may then reproduce in others something of the nature of the persons in whom they have originated. Persons engage in transfers of bodily substance-code through parentage, through marriage and other interpersonal contacts. (ibid.: 111)

Marriott holds that persons engaged in transactions do not distinguish between actor and action. Thus, the person does not exist as an individual *per se*, rather as a dividual or as divisible. By virtue of existence the Hindu

person is continually influenced by various material impulses. Persons engage in transactions of substances that are coded. Who transacts, how and what is transacted flow among actors; action is inseparable from actor, it is substance-code (Marriott 1976). Following Marriott's argument substance-code is everything; it is in biogenetic substance, persons, destiny, karma, food, water, family, to mention a but few, and transfers of substance-code most frequently occur through marriage, parentage, services and interpersonal contacts.

Kinning in adoption must be seen in the light of the various transactions that take place within a family, i.e. persons share substances in commensality and in sharing environment (following Lambert (2000a), (2000b)). The adoptive family do not share biogenetic substance since the child is adopted, however, the family may perceive itself to share nature (substance-code) by virtue of the predetermination encapsulated in the value of destiny.

Scholars of anthropology have discussed whether code and substance are inseparable categories both in Indian and American kinship (Béteille 1990).³ Code and substance have been considered important elements in understanding kinship systems as well as transactions in India (Béteille 1990; Inden & Nicholas 1977; Marriott 1976). Some find that substance and code are inseparable categories (Inden & Nicholas 1977), whereas others question how this may be possible (Béteille 1990; Parry 1989).⁴

³Parry proposes that the Indian's perception of himself clearly is dualistic, "the soul is immortal and is reborn; the body particles a person shares with his kinsmen endure in their bodies. The person is never entirely new when born, never entirely gone when dead. Both his body and soul extend into past and future persons" (Parry 1989: 505). Hence, Parry shows how the Indian thinks of the person both in terms of the soul and the body, and thus emphasises the dualistic aspects of Indian thought. Carsten agrees with Parry that 'systematic monism', i.e. the non-duality of actor and action, is too rigid when she considers substance in transactions between persons. If code and substance are inseparable, all actions will alter substance; therefore the interpersonal interaction or transactions will invoke the physical and moral aspects of everybody and everything involved, that is the qualities of the substance of the persons (actors; receiver and donor) and the gift involved in the interaction or transaction (Carsten 2001, 2004). "Gift giving not only transmits these qualities of the person from donor to recipient but also the physical aspects of gifts. In other words, there is no radical disjunction between physical and moral properties of persons, or between body and soul." (Carsten 2001: 35). However, I do not intend to consider this criticism further, since in analysing adoption my focus is not the Indian person *per se* but the relation between persons created in the act. In order to explain how adoption can actually take place the concept of substance-code has proved quite useful as an analytical tool. Further, many adoptive families seem not to distinguish between the child's body and soul, as is the case with Mr Agarwal senior. Another point of interest is that Parry and Carsten look at inter-caste relations *per se*, not inter-caste relations in families as may be the case in adoption (see Lambert 2000a).

⁴Béteille refers to Mayer's ethnography from Central India in the 1950's where Mayer describes how classificatory kinship ties, on the one hand, may cut across caste membership,

However, most anthropologists seem reluctant to study adoption in relation to Indian kinship.⁵ B  teille (1990) assumes, to some extent quite rightly, that adoption, traditionally, was only acceptable within the caste group, due to the idea that alien substances might pose a danger to certain groups; Nicholas and Inden (1977) agree. The transaction of any kind of substance from outside the caste group was in many instances considered unfortunate, in particular for the higher castes. Nonetheless, adoption practice has changed a lot in the past thirty years. In my view, it is precisely in the study of adoption that Marriott's substance-code and persons' divisibility make sense. Adoption is a practise outside the accepted cultural and social norms. And as it has been claimed, it is the studies that have their focus outside the accepted norms and values that give new and valuable insight to what is accepted and normal within any given society.

'The Presence of Gunas in All Life Forms'

In Brahma (objective world or 'pure principle without material properties') the three gunas were in a 'state of active but stable equilibrium' (Davis 1976: 8). However, the gunas became disturbed, and distinct from each other, which caused the three gunas to combine and recombine producing a great variation of entities (Mines 1990). Thus, the three substances are present in everything. However, one—either sattva, rajas, or tamas—always predominates (Davis 1976; Tyler 1973). Like Davis (1976), Mines (1990) suggests that Hindu rank is defined by the gunas and, further, that "Hindu ranking defines ... the qualities of substance [*gunas*]" (Mines 1990: 113). Thus Mines implies that the gunas are in a state of flux, actively influencing beings' proportions due to the gunas' relation; where one dominates, the other two are suppressed. Davis suggests that "All life forms share the same *gun* with each other and with Brahman. Yet each has a distinct nature, and all stand in contradistinction to Brahma, because these common *gun* are present in the various life forms in different proportions and in different sets of relation to one another" (1976: 9). In sum, the proportion of the gunas in any given being may change, due to the presumption that "dividual persons absorb heterogeneous material influences. They ... give out from themselves particles of their own coded substances ... that may then reproduce in others something of the nature of the person in whom they have originated" (Marriott 1976: 111).

but, on the other, not the sphere of commensality and food transactions (Mayer 1960). Thus, B  teille asks how this is possible if code and substance are inseparable. Unfortunately B  teille does not venture further, but leaves the question open (B  teille 1990).

⁵B  teille quite cleverly states, "I shall avoid the obvious trap of adoption" (B  teille 1990: 497).

The suppression of rajas and tamas may alter to the suppression of sattva and tamas; by changing habits the Hindu person can change his proportions of sattva, rajas and tamas. In other words, persons' qualities are not fixed. They are altered by action and activity. Persons' qualities are altered through transactions of substances. Mines (1990) claims: "Hindu transactions thus generally bring about and model the same three-dimensional quality-space that is anticipated by the *gun* theory of substantive qualities and the triad of aims" (ibid.: 116). But more importantly, Mines asserts that persons are not merely related by biology or blood: "A substance-transactional theory based on such Hindu realities also challenges the notion that persons are related solely through common ancestral bodily substance . . . among living relatives [are] require[d] continued intensive (*rajasik*) exchanges of the other substances that are necessary for bodily existence" (ibid.: 117). Kin is created through a lifelong process where family members take and give of their own substance-code; through co-residence and commensality persons share one another's substance-code, through direct and indirect exchanges. In my view, the act of taking a child with an unknown background in adoption must be viewed at the analytical level in terms of substance-code and transaction, *gunas* and transaction. The *gunas* and the concept of substance-code give a meaningful analytical framework when investigating the process of kinning in adoption. Although I doubt that my acquaintances are familiar with the transactional theory of Marriott, I would hesitate to make a similar claim when it comes to the *gun* model.

'That is Who I am'

Through a process of kinning . . . a transubstantiation of the children's essence, adoptive parents enrol their adopted children into a kinned trajectory that overlaps their own. Issues pertaining to time and place become central in this process; and it is a process which, in most cases, is fraught with tensions, ambiguities, ambivalences and contradictions, not least because the parents are faced with a dilemma of incorporating the child into their own kin group at the same time as they must acknowledge the existence of unknown biological relatives. (Howell 2003a: 2)

Substance

I understand the process of making a relative or kin of the adopted child in terms of Howell's concept of kinning. In relation to kinning in adoption, what

is important is not what substance is, rather what substance actually does (following Carsten 2001). Substance is, to use Levi-Strauss' words, 'good to think' and illuminates well the malleability of Indian persons. The concept of substance has its strength in that it implies an ability to transform and invoke those involved in a transaction, relation or interaction. Carsten proposes:

To again return to the dictionary definitions . . . it is notable that the meanings of substance, although they include corporeal matter and the consistency of a fluid, do not specify malleability, transformability, or relationality as inherent properties of substance. Yet these properties have been important aspects of the analytical work achieved by substance in the non-Western examples I have cited. (Carsten 2001: 49)

Substance as an analytical term has its own flexibility which partly is due to its several meanings in English (Carsten 2001). Carsten stress 'focus on how substance has been employed in the analysis of kinship, rather than on what it means within any one particular culture' (Carsten 2001: 30). The following question is thus: What does substance do to Indian adoptive parents? How is it possible for Indian adoptive families to attain a common substance between themselves and the adopted child? In order to answer the first question it is essential to investigate what is culturally perceived as substance; hence substance-code and the three gunas must necessarily be referred to. The answer to the second question must in my view be located within the value of destiny.

Who I am is my Family Name

Adoption is an action that has consequences for the adoptive parents' as well as the adoptee's substance-code. A person's substance-code describes his or her personal qualities or traits, it is that which one shares with one's kin through both nature and nurture. In order to be a member of a family and a kin group, substance-code is present. The three gunas—sattva, tamas and rajas—make up, in various compositions, the Indian person. The gunas determine the qualities and properties of a person, both as human and kin, since they predispose membership in a family, group, caste and community. I have shown that a person is determined by his or her substance-code; therefore I link the gunas and Marriott's substance-code.

Social substance may be seen as marking socio-economic differences and classificatory kinship; it is often found in food taboos and, I argue, in the value of destiny. Biogenetic substance signifies common genetic ancestry or blood and refers to biological or natural kinship. Common substance-code through

nature is signified by shared biogenetic substance, conceptualised as genes or blood. Common substance through nurture suggests shared substance socially and culturally, like place of origin, ancestral property, commensality, celebration of rituals and religious festivals. In adoption, social and biogenetic substance cannot be perceived as different categories. The *gunas* (substance-code), in adoption, become shared in the value of destiny and kinning; these become superior to persons' engagement in varied substance-codes. One of my acquaintances illustrated the notion of her being a person the following way: 'Who I am is mostly determined by my family name. When I meet a person for the first time, he is not interested in my qualifications, like my university degree and such; rather he wants to know my family name and where my family is from. That is who I am.' In other words, family and place of origin is a reference to her substance-code. Food is another substance-code, since food and food taboos or prescriptions in Hindu context describe, to a great extent, the composition of persons' *gunas*. I intend to elaborate further on the aspect of food below.

This Untouchable Woman ...

In India there exist food restrictions and taboos between the various communities and castes. Food restrictions acknowledge food as a transporter of substance-code, i.e. food may transfer polluting and potentially dangerous substance-code. Mayer (1960) in *Caste and Kinship in Central India*, describes food restrictions between different caste groups and finds that food is organised in two categories, *kacca* or *pakka*. *Kacca* is raw or water-based foods, like steamed rice, salads or vegetables boiled in water. *Pakka* is food cooked in ghee or oil and sweet food. Oil, ghee and sugar are perceived as purifying substances; thus these are considered not to transport polluting substances easily. Concerns regarding purity, impurity and pollution indicate that to accept *kacca* food one is ranked similarly or lower than the donor. Likewise, not to accept *kacca* food implies that one ranks higher than the donor in the caste hierarchy. *Pakka* does not express these hierarchical differences as clearly since it is considered to have a purer constitution; it is *sattvik* food.

***Kacca* Food: Whether to Accept or Decline**

During field study I experienced food restrictions between various persons. In VCA and YCW the employees shared or ate lunch in groups, at their desks. I remember telling Ms Mary that in Norway the employees would have lunch in a room designated for eating lunch, and that the staff would all eat together.

She replied that it is different in India. My acquaintances told me that it was considered lonely and unpleasant to eat lunch by oneself. The pattern of the employees' commensality was to eat in small groups, where some would share their food with the others, but not eat the others' food, or all would share each other's food. In order to sit down with a group to eat, one had to be invited. The pattern of lunch commensality in VCA and YCW reveals that most of the employees have, at some level, conscious or not, concerns when it comes to sharing and eating food with others. My observations regarding lunch commensality in VCA and YCW are quite contrary to recent claims that in urban India food restrictions and taboos are disappearing. Rather, in my experience, commensality and food restrictions and taboos take new forms; further, people are still concerned with *kacca* and *pakka* food, which, I believe, in turn may be seen as persons' *gunas* and at an analytical level as substance-code.

In 2004 I stayed with Raj Kapur and his family, a branch of the Kapurs, for a month of follow-up field study.⁶ Raj Kapur's family have a low caste woman cooking for them, though she is only allowed to prepare curries made of ghee or oil and *parata*.⁷ I never observed her preparing any water-based or *kacca* food, like *chapati*⁸ or simple chutneys⁹ and pickles.

One Sunday at Raj Kapur's residence I sat outside enjoying the warmth of the February sun and chatting to old Raj Kapur. I had my water bottle next to me. But because it was such a beautiful and sunny spring morning, I had to move into the shade, leaving the bottle behind in the sun. Raj Kapur began to read his *Times of India*, so I decided to make an entry in my field diary. I had left my pen in my bedroom, so I stood up and went to fetch it. When I returned shortly after, Raj Kapur asked me, "What are you going to do now?" Pointing at Yosita, his servant, he continued, "This untouchable woman picked up your water bottle and moved it. She touched your water. What are you going to do? Will you drink your water?"

His question took me by surprise, but I managed a reply: "By asking me this question I suppose you have in mind ideas concerning pollution and purity. You ask whether I am going to drink from the bottle since Yosita is untouchable and therefore impure." The old man nodded in agreement.

These examples may be seen as expressing notions that are encapsulated in the ethnosociological substance-code and, in particular, how *gunas* (nature) are perceived in inter-personal action. Marriott (1976) suggests that in transactions it is not so much whether giver loses his or her substance-code;

⁶The family consists of five members spanning three generations.

⁷Bread fried in ghee.

⁸Bread.

⁹Hot and sweet conserve served with curries.

rather the essential issue is what the giver's substance-code does to the recipient's. In my view, these examples also reveal an aspect where Indian persons see themselves as giving out and taking in qualities or nature (*gunas*) of other persons, i.e. a perception of themselves as divisible or dividual.

‘What We Do Not Know ...’

When a child is adopted the social worker stresses the impact of nurture given by the adoptive parents when answering questions concerning the child's person. In my view, this focus on nurture may be viewed as an attempt to evade questions regarding the child's background, i.e. his or her *gunas* (nature). An acquaintance, who is quite influential in both the legislative and the mandatory aspects of the field of adoption in Delhi addressed the issue of the adoptee's background to me in the following manner:

I do not think that you should ever speculate or write about the child's background, as you know we do not know anything about the adopted or institutionalised child. For all we know the child's parents can come from any social class; what do we know? What we do not know we should not speculate about. In particular, I do not want you to say that the children come from a poor background. I think it is best that you do not use the term poor at all in relation to our [institutionalised, adopted, abandoned or orphaned] children.

After this talk I asked Ms Kalini what she thought worried prospective adoptive parents most regarding the child's background. She said that many prospective adoptive parents were reluctant to adopt a child whose parents might be a rickshaw walla or a servant. I interpret this concern as the adoptive parents expressing that the child's *gunas* (nature) differ qualitatively from their own *gunas* (nature). The child will, in turn, give out of his or her nature (substance-code), “that may then reproduce in others something of the nature of the persons in whom they have originated”(Marriott 1976: 111). Likewise, the parents' nature (substance-code) may reproduce something of their own nature in the adoptee.

When adopting, the parents give nurturance to the child. Implicit in nurture is the sharing of substances. Actors involved in transactions do not lose substance-code; rather the substance-code involved—i.e. that of the giver, recipient, the action and what is transacted—*does* something to those involved. In Marriott's (1976) proposal of the non-duality between actor and action, seen in relation to the *gun* model, the adoptive parents and the adopted child, *gunas* will be transacted. Thus, the act of adoption must be seen both as

giving out and taking in ‘particles of their own coded substances’ (ibid.: 111). Therefore, in my view the adoption agency’s avoidance of the issue of the child’s background must be seen in terms of the *gunas* and substance-code. The social workers, instead of relating to the child’s background, focus on the value of destiny, thus creating a bond of predestination and common nature between the adoptee and the parents.

Another way the adoption agency addresses the issue of the child’s unknown nature is by giving the child a background. The adoption agency claims that the child’s background begins on his or her first day in Palna. YCW gives the child an identity, a name and a date of birth. In this manner YCW promotes a less conventional approach in dealing with issues regarding their children’s unknown background. Though the agency chooses an untraditional approach to the issues regarding background, it by no means ignores the fact that the issue of background holds great importance to the prospective adoptive parents and their families. Therefore, when the adoptee’s correct date and time of birth are requested, YCW will give the adoptive parents all the information they have on the child.

According to Marriott (1976), transactions are important because they do something both to the giver and the recipient. Adoption is, within the Indian context, a transaction. The adoption of an unrelated child initiates a close and continuing contact with alien and unknown substance-code, *gunas*, or nature. In relation to adoption, an important question is therefore: How are Hindu ideas concerning *gunas* or substance-code expressed? Possible answers are located in the adoptive parents’ and the social workers’ view of adoption as predestined. I believe that the value of destiny plays an important role in inaugurating the *kinning* of the adopted child.¹⁰ However, Indian ideas regarding nurture and sharing of substances also are central to this process.

Born of my Heart

The imagination that ordinary people put to work when they participate in new forms of kinship . . . invokes a subtle and sophisticated articulation of the many factors that may create kinship (Carsten 2004: 183)

My Gia

When the social worker places a child with the adoptive parents, the placement is an outcome of a matching of the child and adoptive parents. The social

¹⁰Howell and Marre (2006) state that in the *kinning* of children by Norwegian and Spanish families too destiny matters to the parents.

worker looks at the parents' profile and preferences (regarding the child) in order to compare them with the children available in the institution, in order to find a suitable child. Nevertheless, there is also a divine property and an image of mystery attached to this matching. Such an image is encouraged partly by the social workers' silence regarding how they match a child with a family, and partly by their frequent references to the work of the divine forces or God's will and the value of destiny.

Next I wish to present a home study on which I accompanied Ms Mashia. The adoptive parent is a single¹¹ woman, Ragini.

We are in Ragini's small one-bedroom flat. The room has an altar by one of the walls; the rest of the room is simple, but quite beautifully decorated, in my eyes. A book shelf covers another wall, and I recognise many of the titles. Ragini also has a manservant to cook and clean for her. Her flat is at the back of the house of an old couple; they are friends of her parents, and part of her staying there has to do with looking after the old couple. Ragini's servant serves us some refreshments.

Ms Mashia began the interview in the car on our way here. Ragini picked us up in her Tata, her servant driving. Because of the heavy traffic most of the questions were asked and answered in the car, so what is left of the home study is merely viewing the flat and some small talk. We drink some herbal tea and Ragini asks Ms Mashia how social workers match a child with her adoptive parents, but she does not wait for the answer. Instead she says, turned towards me: "I find it so fascinating how a child is matched with the adoptive parents; it is like social workers are playing gods. I have asked Ms Mashia about it, I want to know her secret. How she goes about when matching? What her approach is in finding the right child? What she looks for in order to have a good match between the parents and the child?"

Ragini turns to Ms Mashia and says: "Tell your secret! How do you match?"

Ms Mashia seems a bit reluctant to answer Ragini's questions, though she tilts her head and says: "It is very important to have enough information about the prospective adoptive parents as well as the child. It is essential to meet the prospective adoptive parents at home; that is why this home study has to take place."

Ragini turns to me again and says: "Ms Mashia is my guardian angel, she is the one who will find my daughter, my *Gia*. I know Ms Mashia will find her and give me a sign." Ragini pauses.

I tilt my head, then I ask Ragini about *Gia*: "Who is *Gia*? What does she mean to you?"

Ragini: "*Gia* is my daughter. I have given her the name *Gia*. The word *Gia* is related to the word Jain, and it means *from the heart; by the heart; created*

¹¹According to HAMA single parents can adopt a child of their own sex only.

by the heart. And that is exactly what she, my daughter, is. She is *born of my heart.* One day I decided that I needed to meditate [pray] in order to establish whether I should adopt or not. I could not start the process of adoption before I had meditated and got some answers. The meditation made me aware that I was to adopt a child, Gia. My daughter Gia is born from another woman's uterus, but she is born of my heart. That is why she is Gia. When I see the child chosen for me by Ms Mashia, I will receive a sign, and I will know that she has found Gia."

Here Ragini emphasises that Gia is born from her heart; hence, they share nature, *gunas* or substance-code. Gia's existence is given by Ragini's heart. Both Ragini's dictum 'born of my heart' and old Mrs Arora's value judgement of Cesta's destiny (see chapter six) can be seen in relation to nature and substance-code. As mentioned, transactions do something to the recipient. In my view, Ragini's notion of Gia as born by her heart is a cultural elaboration of nature (substance-code); it is a reference that indicates that, since Gia is from Ragini's heart, Gia shares Ragini's nature.¹² According to old Mrs Arora, one may, in Cesta's destiny, discern her nature or substance-code. My interpretation is that present in Cesta's nature (substance-code) is infertility and, hence, adoption. Therefore, one may assume that Cesta's natural child is the child she adopts.

'She has My Chin ...'

The social worker will place nurture over nature (blood) when asked by prospective adoptive parents. Thus, in adoption nurture is given a similar meaning to that of blood/nature. In my view, the social worker and the adoptive parents must at some level perceive nurture as a transaction. This transaction commences when the adoptee is brought from the institution to the family home, and the family care for him or her as a natural born child through nurture, love and care. Unfortunately, though the social worker and the adoptive parents view adoption this way, many others, 'outsiders', rarely do.

Nurture Kinship

In the interview with Mrs Bhargava (chapter three), she talks about the child in the collectivistic family versus the child in the individualistic family. According to Mrs Bhargava, the former family type accepts the child as he

¹²In chapter three, when Ms Mary describes the creation story, the adoptive mother also perceives her daughter as born of her heart. This story too must be seen in terms of the mother and daughter sharing nature or *gunas*.

is. I interpret Mrs Bhargava's proposition of the child in the collectivistic family as an articulation of the Indian person as being *dividual* or *divisible* (as following Marriott 1976: 111). To accept the adopted child is aligned with existence, "since dividual persons absorb heterogeneous material influences" (ibid.: 111). Once, when I asked an adoptive mother why she had not revealed to her eight-year-old son that he was adopted, she answered: "The fact of adoption is not an issue; he is like my natural child." I believe that her reply must be understood in light of Marriott's proposal of non-duality between actor and action due to substance-code, and persons' divisibility. The mother has come to see the child as sharing the same *gunas* or nature (substance-code) as the rest of the family. Family life involves sharing environment, thus, in turn, also sharing various substance-codes through nurture, commensality and co-habitation, to mention a few aspects of Indian family life (Lambert 2000: 94).

Unlike the traditional Western understanding of kinship that kin is created through birth alone, I understand unrelated adoption in terms of Meigs' proposition in "Blood kin and food kin". Meigs suggests that "people may be related not only through birth but through food, not only through sex but through eating [together], not only through prenatal but also through postnatal acts" (Meigs 1987: 120). To kin strangers among the Hua community in the New Guinea Highlands, according to Meigs, is a co-related process. It is a process where, for example in marriages, the in-married woman exchanges her *nu* with her in-laws, the in-laws with the new wife. *Nu* is a person's 'vital essence' (ibid.: 121); furthermore, "in Hua thinking, food contains the *nu* 'vital essence' of both its producer and preparer . . . Thus, when you eat a food you are . . . eating some of the *nu* 'vital essence' of another person" (ibid.: 121) I suggest that *nu* must be seen in relation to the Hindu *gunas* or Marriott's substance-code, since, according to Meigs, eating makes persons into kin, due to the mixing of their *nu*. The same happens when Hindus share meals and food; they give of their own nature, *gunas* or substance-code in the act of eating and food transaction.

Returning to the Agarwals

The home study at the Agarwals' (chapters two and three) reveals concerns regarding the child's traits and qualities. Old Mr Agarwal is deeply concerned with the child's background. He openly admits believing (bad) qualities are transmitted to the child by the parents' blood. If the child's natural parents have 'bad seed', i.e. are criminals, servants, rickshaw wallas etc, these qualities will be transmitted to the child by common blood.

The concerns of old Mr Agarwal led Ms Mary and the family to discuss

nature¹³ versus nurture in relation to bringing up an adopted child and the child's person. The Agarwals confessed that they did not quite know what to think about it all, whether nurture really is a more important influence on the child. Ms Mary, on the other hand, showed no doubt; she referred to her twenty years of experience in the field of adoption and told the Agarwals that most important in adoption is the love and the care given the child by the adoptive parents. It is the nurture given that matters: not blood or nature, but the adoptive parents' influence, their love and upbringing.

When Ms Mary discusses nurture versus nature with the Agarwals, she emphasises the influence of nurture. I see this emphasis in relation to the systematic monism that Marriott detects in Hindu thinking. In natural reproduction and kinship, nature is the initial substance, but nature is also continuously reproduced through nurture. Hence, substance-code is also produced through processes of nurture. Kinship is not only produced in virtue of reproduction, but also in terms of nurture, commensality, transactions, co-habitation, interaction, relations, i.e. through sharing substances and environment. In adoption nurture should also be understood with regard to *gunas* and substance-code. To understand adoption in terms of the *gunas* or substance-code implies that both the parents' and the child's *gunas* or substance-code are malleable and continuously in flux. The incorporation or *kinning* of the child in the family commences when parents and adoptee share substance-code due to sharing environment, in the act of commensality and in taking part in rituals. As related by Ms Mary, above, nurture seems to precede the biological substance in adoption.

To some extent, nature is seen pre-adoption as the biological substance of the child due to reproduction. However, after adoption nurture is stressed to a much larger extent, as the child is *kinned* by the family, hence the child's nature post-adoption must alter in the minds of the family. The border between nature and nurture is negotiated in acts of eating, living together, in *kinning* the child and by accepting the adoption of the unrelated child as destiny. According to Meigs, in Hua society, kinship continues after birth by virtue of what she calls *nurture kinship*. Reproduction must be seen as continuing even after birth, through postnatal exchanges. These are exchanges which include all kinds of substances, particularly bodily ones that take place in family life. In my view, the *kinning* of a child in adoption in Delhi involves 'postnatal exchanges'; thus, adoption is 'nurture kinship'.

Howell (2003b) shows how Norwegian adoptive parents mark sameness and difference in relation to their adopted child depending on context. An example

¹³As mentioned at the start of this chapter, nature must be understood as being more than merely the biological.

marking difference is the family's return-visits to the child's country of origin, whereas an imagined sameness is created by including the child into their own 'personal domain of resemblances' (Howell & Marre 2006). In my experience, though, it seems that when adoptive parents in Delhi place too much emphasis on the child's nature as the biological, the difference is so marked that kinning may not take place. Mrs Bhargava marks her daughter's difference in praising her skills when it comes to singing and dancing (see chapters two and three), since these are talents in her daughter's nature and not learnt (as opposed to education). However, in her recognition of her daughter's nature, Mrs Bhargava does not de-kin her child; rather her aim is to accept her daughter for whom she is. However, de-kinning seems to be the case with the family mentioned in chapter three, who, upon telling their child she was adopted, also told her that her mother was poor. By connecting the child to a poor origin, they experienced that the child alienated herself from the family by spending time in the kitchen and with the maids. In my view, in the Indian case, the kinning of the adoptee seems more likely to be successful when sameness is marked either through the value of destiny, physical resemblance (as shown later) or nurture. To successfully mark difference in adoption seems highly risky in the Indian case.

'... and My Husband's Eyes'

During the home study at Ragini's she told me about her first visit to YCW and VCA:

The day I registered at Palna I met a family there, parents with their daughter. I was convinced that the girl was their natural child, but Ms Mashia told me that they had adopted the child from Palna. I could not believe my own eyes. The child looked so much like the parents that it was impossible to see that the child was adopted.

I had similar a experience with the Sarkas when Ms Mary was on leave during Christmas. Mrs Mehta allowed me to do a post-placement interview with the Sarkas who had adopted from Palna the year before.

Today Mrs Mehta asked me to conduct the follow-up interview of an adoptive family, the Sarkases. One year had passed since they brought home their daughter. Mrs Mehta told me that the interview should be an evaluation of their family relation as well as a conversation where the adoptive parents should tell me about their experiences as adoptive parents and family over the past year. During the interview Mrs Sarkas stressed how well the child matched the family: "In our family our daughter is like our natural born child." The mother also emphasised

that the grandparents, too, spent a lot of time with the little girl, since, the grandparents look after the girl when the parents are at work.

I asked Mr and Mrs Sarkas what kind of reaction they received from family, friends, neighbours and colleagues at the time of adoption and thereafter. Mrs Sarkas answered: "Everybody has given us a lot of support and been very positive to the adoption. Both family and friends have accepted our daughter as if she is our natural born child. And I will tell you that strangers and acquaintances, people who do not know of the adoption, often remark she looks exactly like us. They say that she has my chin and my husband's eyes. When she was younger people used to comment on how much she resembled my husband. Basically, we and everybody in our family are very happy and pleased with how well our daughter fits our family. Ms Mary did a very good job, because when people see our daughter they think she is our natural child, the fact of adoption does not stand out."

The statements of Ragini and Mrs Sarkas above relate how the adopted child has become like her parents. Through adoption the child has become part of the family; they live together and have come to share nature and environment. In my view, the 'fact' that the child looks like the parents reveals that an aspect of adoption deals with the non-duality between actor and action. Like Marriott suggests, "actor and their interaction are never to be separated from each other, they change together" (ibid.: 112). In biological kinship likeness confirms the 'reality of relatedness' (Howell & Marre 2006); in adoptive kinship this biological resemblance is absent. As the case with Mrs Sarkas above, Howell and Marre too observe that adoptive parents in Norway and Spain create 'narratives of resemblance', where the parents (as well as friends and family) search for similarities and resemblances that function to 'naturalise' the adoptive relationship (ibid.). Howell and Marre's findings echo the attempts of my adoptive parents acquaintances in creating resemblance between themselves and the adoptee, as related above.

Non-Duality: The Inseparable Nature of Parents and Adoptee

In Northern Indian thought body fluids play a fundamental part in constituting kinship relations. Significantly, this notion is placed in a wider understanding of body fluids, not merely as the union of egg and sperm. According to Lambert (2000b) at the level of the household, kinship is produced and sustained through "the sharing of bodily substance and other forms of sustenance" (ibid.: 94). Lambert claims that "the household constitutes an intimate micro-environment within which persons are related through the sharing of

food as well as bodily substance [blood and milk]" (ibid.: 94). Commensality and the sharing of substances, sustenance and nurture are important aspects of family life. The kinning of the adopted child by her family must be seen in relation to these aspects, as well as the non-duality of action and actor.

The *gunas* seen in relation to the presumed nature of the child and the inseparability of the actor and action (as following Marriott 1976), the child through nurturance (or sustenance) and the sharing of substances will, over time, absorb the nature of the adoptive parents. The child will be transformed by his or her adoptive family by mixing his or her substance-code (*gunas/nature*) with the parents' substance-code (*gunas/nature*); thus the child will become more like the adoptive family. Davis proposes: "Through activities in accord with [new] *dharma* [code for conduct] and through mixing one's own physical nature with that of *sattvik* substances, for example, the defining features of a birth-group are transformed positively and its rank elevated" (Davis 1976: 16). Thus, it is quite within Hindu thought to assume that the child's substance-code may become like that of the adoptive family, through a process of changing his or her birth-group's defining features. This process shares many striking similarities with Srinivas' (1952, 1962) study of the Coorgs in Tamil Nadu, which gave rise to his concept of *sanskritisation*.¹⁴ It follows that for a community or group to succeed they are dependent upon others to recognise their new 'defining features'. In some ways, adoption may be seen in relation to *sanskritisation*, since the adoptee, by being adopted, changes his or her birth-group's 'defining features'.

The Value of Destiny

Adoption is described as being part of the adoptive parents' and child's destiny. Is destiny, then, an incentive for the growth of common *gunas* or nature (substance-code) between adoptees and adoptive parents, since, in order to have code, substance must be present? In chapter six I showed that, in the Indian context, it is possible to understand destiny as shared substance that is transferred between persons, particularly in families. Furthermore, the substantialist hypothesis entailed in Marriott's ethnosociology holds that in the Hindu universe destiny too is substance-code. I will therefore refer to a conversation which underlines this aspect. One acquaintance in Delhi, a woman in her thirties holding a Ph.D. in anthropology, gave me her opinion regarding substance- and coded-relationships after she had read an early draft of this thesis:

I do not quite understand how the people who come to Palna

¹⁴See footnote in chapter five concerning *sanskritisation*.

bring themselves to adopt. After all, the child reflects on you as a parent. When I married my husband, he wanted us to wait with children. But I told him that he can not expect me to produce children late in marriage, and that we then might have to adopt. But he did not like the idea of adoption. He did not want to take that kind of risk. So we had our own children. You know, the problem with adoption is the unknown substance. How they can bring up a child, you know, have the code, and not be related naturally, to be without the [biological] substance. You write about substance; therefore you must remember that everything is coded. All behaviour and substance is coded. Where does code for conduct draw its legitimacy for the relationship between parents and children? From substance! Coded relationships are based on nurture, affinity and destiny. Code for conduct is circumscribed by biology. In adoption, when there is no biological substance, the legitimacy of the relation draws on other things, like when the parents are looking for physical resemblance, and are thus trying to establish substance where there is none. I think that destiny is the only thing that makes adoption possible in this country.

I agree with my acquaintance that Indian kinship must be understood in terms of substance-code, that substance and code form an inseparable category. The idea of substance-code as presented by Marriott is not alien to her. She even admits that she and her husband did not postpone having children at time of marriage, since they dared not take the risk of having to adopt.¹⁵ So if you cannot have substance without code and with code you must have substance, it follows that in adoption biological substance-code is not present. Hence, the social worker and the parents have to look for other kinds

¹⁵Janet Carsten criticises Marriott's theory regarding the non-duality of actor and action. She claims that if every interaction involves transubstantiation due to the dividual aspect of a person, everything and everybody become malleable, fluctuating and in flux and thus is impossible to actually act and to distinguish actual action and actor (Carsten 2001, 2004). Parry establishes a twofold understanding of the Hindu-Indian person, as both individual and dividual. When my acquaintance exclaimed: 'Without substance there is no code,' she emphasised that substance and code are inseparable in family and kinship relationships. According to Parry, though, substance and code may also be perceived as meaningful categories when separated. The concept of substance and code in terms of Parry are in flux: substance is mainly relational (Parry 1985, 1986, 1989). In many ways it seems that my acquaintances, like Parry's informants, "inhabit a markedly dualistic universe" (Parry 1989: 511), since they refer to nature and nurture, the soul (destiny) and the body (substance). However, Parry's dualism does not help to explain the importance of the child's background (substance) nor the use of destiny as an explanatory model for adoption.

of substance-codes in order to establish the parent-and-child relationships which commence the process of kinning. My acquaintance assumes that the notion of substance-code is true in the Indian case, and when she questions how adoption possibly can happen, her answer is located within the value of destiny. And I agree that the value of destiny in adoption is so powerful that it actually renders non-shared substances, like biogenetics, less important.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have utilised Marriott's concept of substance-code in order to describe the kinning of children in adoption in Delhi. I have shown that a person's substance-code describes his or her nature, i.e. personal traits and qualities, and linked this with the composition of the person's gunas. This must in turn be seen in relation to how some of my acquaintances discuss the personal nature of the adoptee in terms of biological nature versus nurture. It is my belief that in order for kinning to commence, nurture must be stressed and nature ignored. In order to kin the unrelated child, the parents must mark sameness by virtue of physical resemblance and/or in the recognition of a shared destiny or heart. When too much difference is marked, the child is alienated, and instead of being kinned the child is dekinning. I have here used the concept of substance-code analytically in order to describe inter-personal relationships amongst kin. In the study of adoption in Delhi I do not utilise substance-code in relation to the individual's experience of herself (where it has received much criticism). Nor do I discuss inter-personal relationship on a purity-pollution scale; rather nurturance and the person's nature or gunas are the points of reference in my analysis. I have showed (in chapter five) that different castes or jatis are thought to prescribe different natures in the persons. Still, some have shown that relatedness may be created between different jatis through commensality, the sharing of substances and environment, and furthermore that these reveal the degree of relatedness between persons. In my view, whether a couple adopt or not depends on their perception of their personal destiny and whether the nurture they give is a stronger force than the adoptee's biological parent's nature.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have discussed various aspects of the process of unrelated adoption in Delhi. In part one I analyse the role of the social worker. In my view the social worker must be seen as an agent for social and cultural change by virtue of her work in the field of adoption in Delhi. Furthermore, in counselling childless couples, the social worker encourages the couple to adopt a child of unknown background and parentage. Hence, she takes no heed of existing social stigmas concerning infertility and adoption. Traditionally in India one adopted within the family or community. Most couples are insecure about 'the whole thing', though when they meet the social worker for a counselling session, her counselling will often have a positive outcome, and they will adopt an unrelated child. However, when placing a child with a family, the social worker tries to make sure that the act of adoption is in the 'best interest' of the child. And continuously, from the first day the couple come to YCW to receive information about the adoption process and perhaps file their registration, she pays close attention to whether they are suitable as adoptive parents or not. Hence, I see her role and profession as a social worker in terms of Foucault's governmentality and Rose's psy-expertise, though she links her professional training with traditional values and norms; she is, in other words, a psy-expert.

In part one I also describe several of the expectations the prospective adoptive parents hold regarding the child. I mention three such expectations: the child's age, complexion and sex. In part two I see these expectations in relation to the child's background and nature, hence, the process of kinning the child. If the child is perceived as being qualitatively different from the parents, or having too much luggage (i.e. considered an older child by the couple), the kinning of the child may in turn be more trying.

In part two I first presented various ways of looking at caste, in order to shed some light on the concerns the adoptive parents sometimes show in relation to the adoptee's background. However, though the child is born 'by another woman's uterus' the social worker and the prospective adoptive parents refer to the child as born by the adoptive mother's heart, and further-

more an aspect of predestination is also applied. I see these two ideas as a framework for legitimising unrelated adoption as well as an explanatory model for childlessness and abandonment. The couple is destined to be infertile, hence they must adopt, and the child is predestined to be adopted; adoption is God's will.

In my view, the kinning of the child by the adoptive parents must also be seen in relation to the *gun* model and persons' 'true nature'. Persons' qualities are determined by the composition of the three gunas—sattvagun, rajasgun and tamasgun—each community or family having its specific composition and hence its code for conduct. Hence, I apply Marriott's concept of substance-code in order to describe the process of kinning, and to better illustrate how the adoptee is turned into kin by the sharing of substances in love, nurture, and commensality, sharing environment and locality, taking part in the same rituals and living according to the same code or dharma as the adoptive family and their community. In many ways it seems that common nature is created in the act of nurturance. Though the social worker and prospective adoptive parents seem to refer to nature and nurture as opposites, in my view these go together. In nurturing the adoptee the parents transfer some of their nature or gunas or substance-code.

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Appendix

A summary of YCW's programmes and services

- Angawadi Worker's Training Centres (1976)
 - Community training programme
 - 3 units, 10 049 trainees to date
- Creche Programme (1976)
 - 50 units in 18 centres
 - Day care
 - Hot midday meals
 - Medical care
 - Recreational informal preschool education
- Palna—a home for abandoned children (1978)
 - Adoption services
 - Temporary foster-care services
 - Informal education
 - Hot midday meals
 - Medical care
 - Counselling
 - Recreation
- Sponsorship programme (1982)
 - Working children's programme (100 children)

- Educational sponsorship (950 children)
- Disabled sponsorship (400 children)
- Vocational training

Adoption Data from Palna

Year	Restored to parents	Indian adoption			Foreign adoption		
		M	F	Total	M	F	Total
1978	1	4	2	6	4	8	12
1979	3	5	3	8	9	39	48
1980	5	8	2	10	13	41	54
1981	4	6	6	12	10	44	54
1982	5	4	5	9	6	37	43
1983	4	10	5	15	11	27	38
1984	9	10	16	26	9	23	32
1985	12	4	14	18	9	24	33
1986	14	8	13	21	3	39	42
1987	6	15	18	33	5	22	27
1988	5	13	15	28	6	17	23
1989	9	10	29	39	5	18	23
1990	13	15	28	43	2	25	27
1991	13	16	36	52	3	25	28
1992	18	8	47	55	1	25	26
1993	20	22	46	68	7	33	40
1994	34	28	47	75	10	49	59
1995	45	17	49	66	13	52	65
1996	71	21	36	57	17	36	53
1997	92	27	51	78	9	38	47
1998	94	23	52	75	15	55	70
1999	110	16	49	65	18	62	80
2000	72	45	30	75	32	46	78
2001	45	15	41	56	19	38	57
2002	35	26	44	70	13	28	31
Totals:	739	378	695	1070	249	851	1102

Total children: 3745

Total adopted children: 2172

Newspaper Clippings

Girls at adoption centers have reason to smile

Sunday magazine Times of India

By Bonita Baruah
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Whether its Hyderabad or Delhi, it's always the male child who is swapped for the female. Couples would rather wait 4-5 years for a boy than get a girl in 2 weeks to three months.

But now the girl child has reason to feel wanted.

At Palna, the centre run by the [redacted], at least 25-30 per cent of the requests are now for girls. At the Society for Indian Children's Welfare, Kolkata, waiting list for girls is longer. "It means more people are opting for girls," says founder Swaran Chowdhury. Says [redacted] adoption officer at Palna. "If the younger lot ask for boys, it's because they already have a girl," she says.

Mostly, professionals and younger couples in nuclear families and foreigners want girls. "For them, the sex does not matter," says [redacted] Business communities and the lower-middle class still prefer boys "to run their businesses".

"In a list of 40 parents, 10

Three cheers



- About 30 per cent want a girl, 5 years ago this was not the case
- In Karnataka, eight out of 10 couples prefer to adopt a girl
- In Delhi, of 284 children adopted last year, 160 were girls

want girls. Earlier, there would be none, maybe 1," says Vijay Raina of Asharan orphanage, Vivek Vihar.

Agrees Dr Aloma Lobo, chairperson, Voluntary Co-ordination Agency, Karnataka, the official coordinating agency for adoption in the state: "Eight out of 10 couples who want to adopt prefer a girl. People have begun to believe they are more affectionate and easier to raise."

Tania and her husband, a

Delhi-based architect couple, have a 4-year-old adopted daughter. "Girls are more fun to bring up," she says. "Both of us wanted only a girl."

Vivek and Vinita, a Kolkata couple decided to adopt a girl after 12 years of marriage. "I think we were blessed that we didn't have a biological child. We couldn't have chosen the sex then," says Vivek.

Another reassuring trend: Even couples with a girl child wanting to adopt a second child, are opting for girls. There are certain formalities which make this process difficult as second adoptions have to be a child of the opposite sex.

Another Kolkata couple, who already have a 4-year-old girl has adopted a second girl. "The sex was the toss up but after Srijita, the issue was settled. It would be another girl," they say.

Chowdhury feels. "Now, people feel the girl is emotionally more responsive."

But even now more girls are being abandoned.

(With inputs from Seethalakshmi S, Chitra Siddhartha)

Counselling Reports

COUNSELLING REPORT

Date : 13th Nov '02
Session No. : 1

Name of referring Organisation : [REDACTED]

Reason for referral Pre-adoptive counselling

Name of Father : [REDACTED] Name of Mother : [REDACTED]

Date of Birth : 25.6.63 (39) Date of Birth : 18.6.70 (32)

Educational Qualifications : BA, BEd Educational Qualifications : Matric

Profession/Occupation Office Subdr. Public School Profession/Occupation Housewife

Date of Marriage : 1992

Permanent Address : [REDACTED]

Telephone Numbers : [REDACTED]

Biological Children, if any : —

Adopted Children, if any : —

Other family members residing together Nuclear - Extended family in [REDACTED] village - Haryana; wife's family in Delhi

Reasons for adoption : Uterus swelling & hormonal imbalance
- Treatments unsuccessful.
- W also has thyroid probs - Hypothy. & Obesity.
Regd. for male infant

Observations :- The [redacted] are from a village in Haryana. The husband seems smart and city-bred though wheatish in complexion, but the wife seems dull very obese and darkish. She either nodded at every sentence without seeming to understand or she answered with "whatever my husband says". If pressurised to state her own views, she answered in monosyllables or even completely off-the-track. The husband explained it as being due to a village background, but vehemently expressed that the two are devoted to each other though they hail from a village, their families are supportive of their decision to adopt. But they are firm on their preference for a male child despite detailed discussions.

The counselling session focussed on psychological implications of adoption. It was pointed out that the wife's hormonal imbalance & obesity needs to be worked on before adoption. The husband stated that she is active despite the obesity & that since the last 2-3 years she had been very upset over childlessness. She is medically fit now. The couple was in favor of disclosure to the child.

The wife needs to work upon her obesity, dullness & probable depression. Otherwise the couple is suitable for adoptive parenting.

Home Study Reports

HOME STUDY REPORT
OF PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS

General Information

	HUSBAND	WIFE
1 a) Name	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
b) Date of Birth	2.6.55	20.1.60
c) Place of Birth	Kalai Konda, Distt Midhapur, West Bengal	Delhi
d) Religion	Hindu	Hindu
e) Complexion	Dark	Wheatish to fair
f) Profession	P.A. to Principal	Assistant clerk
g) Official Address:	[REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED]	[REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED]
2. Date of Marriage :	8.5.89	
Place of Marriage:	Delhi	
Earlier marriage of Husband/wife if any:	Not Applicable	
Children born in wedlock :	Nil	
Adopted children if any	None	
3. Place of Assessment:	Delhi	
4. Residential Address:	[REDACTED], New Delhi-2	
Telephone No.	[REDACTED]	

5. Particulars of child desired:

Age	Sex	Complexion	Health Status
2-3 yrs	F	Fairish	Healthy

Other Family members staying together: They live in a joint family which comprises of husband's parents, families of his two younger brothers and the couple.

Reason/Motivation for Adoption: The couple got married in 1989 and till date the infertility has not been explained and no clear-cut diagnosis has been arrived at for the same. So now, finally the couple decided to adopt considering their growing age and suggestions from their family members and colleagues. They themselves also feel that their lives are incomplete without a child.

View/Attitude towards adoption and disclosure: The couple has a very positive attitude towards adoption and early disclosure. They are emotionally and psychologically prepared for adoption.

Status of adoptive child relating to inheritance: The child will be treated as their own natural born child with no discrimination what so ever in terms of treatment, care or in matters of inheritance.

Education and Employment History:

Husband: He did his schooling from a Govt. School, Delhi (71), and graduation from Delhi University through correspondence. Alongside this he joined a job in a private company as a steno, worked there for 6-7 months, then joined a publishing firm as a steno, worked there for two years and then finally joined [redacted] School, [redacted] New Delhi as a Private assistant to the principal and has been working there ever since. His post in School has remained the same but his income grades have increased in course of time.

Wife: [redacted] did her schooling from a Govt. School, Delhi and graduation from Shyama Prasad Mukerji College, Delhi University, Delhi in 1980. She then joined Ministry of Information and Broadcasting as a Lower divisional clerk, worked there till 1984 and then joined [redacted] Council for Medical [redacted] as a LDC. She has been working there ever since, earlier as a LDC, then got promoted to a UDC and recently got promoted to an assistant clerk.

Financial Condition

- Monthly income: 30,000/mth (Husband and Wife)
- Saving: Fixed deposits worth 58,000 and 20,000 in Bank
- Insurance: ICICI bonds worth 1lakh, Pension scheme worth 10,000, ULIPS worth 7500.
- Retirement benefits if any: For wife, as per the rules of Govt. of India (pension+ gratuity), Husband has PF worth 4lakhs presently.
- Property: Husband is one of the shareholders in a 110sqft. plot jointly owned by himself and his two brothers located near [redacted] on which they are in the process of building

a three storey house, one floor for each brother's family. They also own a Maruti 800 in the husband's name.

Dwelling Conditions:

Size and condition of the residence: The couple is staying in 100sq.ft. three bedroom flat on a rented basis. The flat is similar in structure to Govt. type IV category flats. The family has all means of comfort to provide for a good standard of living. Wife would soon be allotted a flat by the Govt.; the family would then shift there till the time their own house is ready.

General impression of the residence and its care:

The house was well kept and hygienically maintained. The environment within and outside their house is clean, hygienic and conducive for the healthy growth and development of a child. There is enough space for the child to play around the house premises in a safe and secure environment.

Interest and Hobbies:

Mr. [REDACTED] used to enjoy playing cricket and chess, but now due to a work schedule and other family responsibilities, he hardly gets time to pursue these interests. Now he mainly enjoys T.V. as a means of relaxation as well as entertainment.

Mr. [REDACTED] likes to spend time watching T.V. or else keeps herself busy with household work. Earlier she used to do painting and embroidery, but has left doing these since her marriage.

Health status: Both husband and wife have a sound state of mental and physical health.

Family Background:

Husband: Mr. [REDACTED] father retired from Army as an assistant architect in 1979 and had been practicing Homeopathy as an amateur for some time after his retirement. Presently he is 75 yrs old and is leading a retired life. Mr. [REDACTED] mother has been a housewife all through her life. In all, they are four siblings, Mr. [REDACTED] being the eldest.

He has a younger sister who is married to a Software Engineer (self employed + private job) in Delhi and has two daughters.

His younger brother works in the Indian Institute of Agricultural Research as a Technical assistant in the Department of Biotechnology, is married and has one son. His wife works with a private company.

His youngest brother has his own business of Computer's jobwork, is married and has one son. All of them live together as a joint family.

Wife: Her father retired from Ministry of Finance in 1990 as Under Secretary while her mother has been a housewife all through her life. Her father then worked for a private company for another ten years, and is presently leading a retired life. She has a younger brother who is a qualified engineer and works with a private company. He is married, has one son and one daughter and his wife is a homemaker. He lives separately from his parents. Mr. [REDACTED] parents live in Paschim Vihar while his brother lives in Dwarka in Delhi.

The couple shares a very good relationship with their family members and their decision to adopt is wholeheartedly supported by all the members of their immediate family.

Spousal relationship:

The couple had an arranged marriage; their parents made the match through matrimonial ads in the Newspaper. Among the two, husband is more talkative and expressive but the two share a comfortable and loving relationship. They have a well adjusted and compatible married life. They are companions to each other and share a mutual understanding and sense of respect for each other's opinions. They are eagerly waiting to bring a child to their home and enjoy their adopted child's growing years showering on her all the love and care that they desire. Both have an open attitude and believe that a balance in bringing up their child would certainly be important for them. They want to provide all opportunities to their child and to be there for her whenever she needs them.

Child care arrangement: Since both are working they have thought over this issue at length. Madhu plans to take 4-5 mths leave from her job and concentrate fully and wholeheartedly in bringing up her child. Also her mother-in-law is willing to spend time taking care of her grandchild especially on occasions when both [redacted] would have to be away. It appears that any child adopted by them would be loved wholesomely and well taken care of in all aspects.

Social Worker's Impression/Recommendation :

The Social worker found the couple as cordial and likeable. They enjoy a comfortable and compatible married life. They are devoted to each other and seem to have a relaxed and close relationship with each other as well as with their family members. They have given thought to adoption and are emotionally and psychologically well prepared for the same. The Social worker feels they have the capacity to absorb, care for and nurture an adopted child who will be an integral part of not only their family unit but also the extended family on both sides.

Their financial position is sound and they would certainly provide the best of opportunities to their adopted child. The social worker recommends the couple for adoption. Any child adopted by them is bound to receive abundant love, care and warmth and would certainly bloom into a healthy individual.

Date: 2.01.2003

[redacted]
Programme Coordinator, [redacted]
(Name and Designation of the investigator)

Photographs







