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## An Ethnography of Love in a Tamil Family

Trawick, Margaret, *Notes on Love in a Tamil Family*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. 320 pp. ISBN 0-520-07894-2 (pbk).

If you visit Dr. Margaret Trawick's home page at the University of Massey, New Zealand, there are two photographs on display. One is of Trawick herself. The other is a photograph of one of the primary respondents in her study on love in a Tamil family. The inscription below that photograph reads 'In Memory of Pullavar S.R. Themozhiyar, 1938-1998'. Trawick lived with Themozhiyar's family and used them as sources for her book *Notes on Love in a Tamil Family*. The book was researched in three phases, in 1975, 1980 and then in 1984. First published in 1990, the book was awarded the 1992 Coomaraswamy award for significant scholarly work on South Asia. Oxford University Press, India brought out an Indian edition in 1996.

Trawick's meeting with Themozhiyar, or Ayya, as he is also known in the book, was a serendipitous one. She was in Tamil Nadu researching concepts of the human body in South India. Ayya was introduced to her as a 'Tamil scholar who made his living by lecturing at religious gatherings about Saiva literature' (p. 41). Ayya introduced Trawick to the epic poem *Tirukkovaiyar* by Manikkavacakar. This was a love poem, which talked of the love of a man and a woman, and also spoke of the

various exploits of Lord Siva. The poem was replete with metonymy and metaphor. It was in the course of translating the epic that Trawick met the various members of Ayya's extended family. The translation of the poem gave Trawick access to the linkages between the worlds of divinity, poetry and real life. She recognized that there could be no one translation of the poem; the degree of metaphor and metonymy allowed for a plurality of meanings, which echoed real life.

### **Trawick's Method**

When Trawick visited Tamil Nadu and lived with Ayya's family, it was not with the intention of studying love and its diverse expressions in India. Her primary interest was Tamil poetry and how it related to everyday life. By her own account, Trawick visited India three times. She lived with Ayya's family for extended periods of time, along with her husband and sons. In addition, she carried out open-ended interviews with 150 other respondents to supplement the findings from Ayya's family

Trawick was not dependent on an interpreter to translate the responses of her respondents. It is possible that this was one of the factors that allowed for the integration of Trawick into the family. Her familiarity with Tamil would also have helped her understand the nuances emerging from the discourse that she observed and was involved in. As Trawick says (speaking of Ayya's inability to communicate with others when he visited America, so that she acted as interpreter), 'I learned the powers of an interpreter, then, and was glad I never had one in India. The temptation to edit things people said to each other was sometimes very great' (p. 21). It is precisely this feature that produces the consciously dialogical framework.

Trawick is not an impartial observer; she is very much a part of what is happening around her.

When you are trying to understand a story in India it becomes important to consider the life of the person telling the story, and when you are trying to understand a person it becomes important to listen to the stories that that person tells. It is also important to recognise the ways in which one may lead to alterations in the interpretation or enactment of the other. The story may change to fit the life; the life may change to fit the story. (p. 24)

This deliberate stance as a researcher is what sets Trawick's ethnography apart from other ethnographies such as Minturn's *Sita's Daughters* (1993). Minturn, unlike Trawick, does not enter into a dialogical relationship with her subjects; her subjects are informants, not people on an equal footing from whom it is possible to learn. It is not clear

whether Minturn was familiar with the dialect spoken in Khalapur. Her account of Khalapur is a more factual listing of events and occurrences, in keeping with the requirements of a scientific study. In contrast, Trawick enters into the lives of her respondents, using the skills afforded by a narrative framework to illustrate the principles by which everyday life is transacted.

In the introduction to *Divine Passions: On the Social Construction of Emotion in India*, Lynch (1990) refers to Trawick's work as being 'a doubled dialogue' (p. 25; see Trawick, 1990). At one level, an ongoing dialogue with the family is taking place. At a more crucial level, Trawick is in dialogue with herself, trying to explicate, analyse and elucidate the dialogues with the family. It is possible to discern yet another level of communication in the book: that with the reader as she guides her audience to accompany her in the search for the reality as it unfolds before her. This dialogue is carried through till the end with skill and openness. Trawick does not set herself up to judge the people whom she lives with and becomes a part of.

Love in itself is assumed to be a pan-cultural emotion. However, the expressions of love vary widely primarily because behaviour is often used to define emotions. The Western idiom for understanding either the expression or the importance of love fails to hold true in the Tamil or the Indian way of life. The display rules for the expression of affection also vary across cultures, bringing about crucial differences. The theoretical framework for the book extends from the postmodern need to de-construct existing theoretical claims. There is a desire to understand the context, and thereby seek meaning for plurality of self and culture, through the idiom of love.

### **The Dramatis Personae**

Themozhayar, also known as Ayya, and his family were the primary sources of information for Trawick. This was not Ayya's natal family. The family were upper-caste Hindus coming from the Reddiar caste. They were impoverished landowners, barely able to scrape a subsistence living from the land they owned, from a village near the city of Chennai.

The head of the family was called Annan (elder brother). He was married to Anni (a Tamil kinship term that means elder brother's wife). Anni's sister Padmini was married to Ayya. Anni and Padmini were cross-cousins of Annan; Annan's mother was in the kin position of Attai, or father's sister, to Anni and Padmini. Various other cross-cousins to Anni and Padmini resided in the household for periods of time; among these were Mohana and Vishvanathan. Then there were

the children, a crucial part of the family. Annan and Anni had a grown-up daughter called Anuradha; they also had an 8-year-old daughter and a 6-year-old son. Padmini had an 8-year-old daughter, a 6-year-old daughter and a 2-year-old son. Mohana had a 2-year-old son. In the family, Ayya and Anni formed the emotional core from which the rest of the family took their cue.

When Trawick introduces the family to the readers, she also includes her son and herself in the introduction, a subtle inclusion but a significant stance in the political implication of doing research in the field. This is another thread that is woven in the rendering of her story: the balancing of her position as an obvious outsider who has chosen to mediate the social distance between herself and her field to become closer to the people whose lives she unpackages for the world. This invisible distance that exists between a researcher and the researched has received far less attention than it deserves. Trawick opens up this debate with courage and conviction, making her decisions, both professional and personal, available for others to read and reflect upon. In every research endeavour, such arguments are thrown up, to be included, ignored or abandoned, but rarely does the reader or the reviewer have access to the tedious dynamics behind such processes.

The family described above is characterized by the kinds of kin networks assumed to be typical of Southern India. In many South Indian families, cross-cousin marriage is desirable. This further means that the position of the bride on entry into the family is not as a stranger, as occurs in North Indian families, where this form of marriage is not permitted. Thus, relationships within a marriage are likely to carry the resonance of earlier, comfortable relationships within the natal family. While there is social sanction for cross-cousin marriage, data from actual marriages show that the incidence of such marriages is low (Trautman, 1981).

This has implications on the issue of the Oedipus complex. The relationships that Trawick emphasizes are between father and son, mother and daughter, and brother and sister. The incestuous longing of the son for his mother is not a feature that emerges in the text. If we go by what Kurtz (1992) says,

... the main barrier between the child and his mother ... is not the father but the in-law mothers. These women, moreover, are not primarily rivals of the child for the love of the mother. Rather, they are rivals of the mother for the love of the child. (p. 235)

In the context of the Tamil family, the 'in-law mothers' are not strangers to the mother, but in many cases are kin to her through the practice of

cross-cousin marriage, perhaps deeply changing the underlying affiliations within the family.

## The Dominant Themes

The title indicates that emotional love is the primary theme to be explored in the book. However, the book provides insights into kinship patterns and kin bonding prevalent in South India about how 'relational' love is an enduring feature of filial interactions, an emotion that, when scrutinized, seems fundamentally different from the surge of affections so integral to the Western notion of love. Trawick illustrates the lives of women and children in the everyday context of life. The theme of 'intentional ambiguity' (pp. 40–41) as a means of understanding how multiple strands are woven into everyday life, drawing from experience, mythology, poetry and, most importantly, relationships with others, is drawn up and elaborated upon. Issues of relationships between caste groups, which are an integral part of Indian life, are also dealt with in the association between the members of the family and their servants, who belong to a lower caste.

### Love or *Anpu*

*Anpu*, as seen by Trawick, is a way of living. It is a way of transacting life. It is expressed, but not spoken of, as love. *Anpu* has certain inherent characteristics. While Trawick sees the characteristics of *anpu* as being Tamil in nature, one can find many similarities with family relationships in other parts of India as well. *Anpu* grows in hiding; it needs to be contained (*adakkam*). The most crucial love, mother love, needs to be contained most. It is this containment that does not permit the expression of fondness and affection for one's own child, something that finds expression in folk expressions all over the country. It is believed that a mother's close regard of her own child can carry potential harm, and the open display of affection is certainly believed to bring on misfortune, either directly, or indirectly through the evil glance of another.

This theme has been explored by Das (1976) in her study of Punjabi families, where it is felt that other members of the family are there to express love for the child. The child is not just the child of the mother, but, more importantly, is the child of the entire family. Mother love should be kept within limits at all times. Too much love, an overflowing of love, can hurt both the giver and the recipient. It would probably lead to a development of solipsism, at the cost of living as a part of a large group such as a family. Seymour (1999), in her ethnographic work

on families in Orissa, observed the same tendency to keep mother love under control.

In a similar vein, affection between spouses is to be avoided at all costs, Trawick discovers. In public, there is an avoidance of mentioning the spouse's name. (This custom is prevalent in many parts of India, where it is seen as a form of disrespect to call the husband by name. Husbands are named on the teknonymy principle rather than by their given name. To summon a husband, an equivalent of 'please listen' [*sunte ho ji*, in Hindi; *parengo* in Tamil] is used.) Intimacy between husband and wife can serve to jeopardize the collective well-being of the family; similarly, the relationship between a mother and child must be controlled. Containment is expressed sometimes by downgrading the loved one either through a nickname (e.g. naming a child '*kupai*' or rubbish, which serves to devalue the child) or through a black spot put on the cheek to ward off evil.

Love grows by habit (*parakkam*). In their dealings with children, adults invoke the concept of *parakkam* often. Once a habit is formed, the person would feel uncomfortable without it, and would actively seek it out if deprived of it. 'What you looked like and what you did showed to others what your *parakkam* was, and hence, what *you* were' (p. 98). Being exposed to elements in the atmosphere can also absorb *parakkam*; it will be integrated into the personality, such that, at a particular point, the *parakkam* becomes the personality. Through repeated practice, a habit can become a quality of the person.

*Parakkam* leads to an ease of functioning with another, and consequently allows for the expression of love. *Parakkam* with a person means having that person as a part of the system. Hence it is necessary for love; and *parakkam* continues because of love. It is possible to discern how deeply different these beliefs are from the prevailing notions of the love expressions in public culture, even within India.

### **Harshness and Cruelty (*Kadumaai, Kodumai*)**

Just as love is tender, love is also cruel and forceful. Just as growth and change are painful, so also is maturity. Physical affection for children is expressed more often than not by slaps, pinches and tweaks. A child will sometimes be punished for a mistake made by another. Or sometimes a child will be punished by one and comforted by another, maybe even punished by one *to be* comforted by the other. 'The punisher was always the mother, and the comforter somebody else' (p. 77). Adults often play at a game of reprimanding and comforting a child alternately till the child begins to weep. When the child weeps, he will be cuddled and comforted or distracted with something else.

In interactions with adults, the harshness of *anpu* is seen in the intense interactions in the form of loud arguments interspersed with laughter. The feeling was that 'intense love required intense interaction. The true sign of love's absence might be the absence of any interaction at all' (p.101).

The association of harshness and cruelty with love is related to the belief that it is better to get the punishment over and done with. If hardship were to become a habit, then the fruits, as and when they came, would be that much sweeter. The world is a place of deception, being full of *maya*. Making children cry in games of playful affection makes one tough, capable of enduring a lot, of absorbing insults with equanimity. Just as you have to learn to do without, the need for sharing is taught. Mothers deliberately ignore, tease and are cruel to their children to push the affection outward away from the closest blood-tie between mother and child. This limiting of pleasure is a very Indian phenomenon. Idiomatic sayings talk about how laughter and tears go hand in hand, and how too much laughter will bring only tears. As children grow older, a firm disciplining hand is required to provide the necessary succour to allow the child to grow strong and self-reliant. It is this harshness that Trawick finds most difficult to understand and detach herself from.

Seymour (1999) observes that teasing behaviour seen between caregivers and children serves the purpose of 'keeping young children actively engaged in dependent seeking activity with others until they are old enough to reverse roles and become the teasers/givers. In this manner, an active form of interdependence among family members is inculcated' (p. 83). This socialization for interdependence results in affect being diffused among family members.

### **Personal Relationships and Love**

In Trawick's work, an association is built between love and poverty and simplicity (*erumai, elimai*). The negation of the symbols of wealth is positively linked with expressions of *anpu* in Ayya's family. Doing without luxuries is seen as a form of being grown up, of being adult, and as a matter of expressing love. It may be preferable to see it as love being related to unity in the face of adversity. *Anpu* means going without if your nearest and dearest are unable to have access to an item of luxury. Luxury is for children (not that they are indulged with luxury either), for the immature. *Anpu* here implies solidarity of family forms in the face of social criticism.

*Anpu* is further characterized by servitude (*adimai*). Just as love entails containment, thereby binding an individual, the reciprocal of

containment, servitude, is seen as a powerful expression of love. *Adimai* implies 'having nothing of one's own' (p. 111). Feeding habits of women in India (not just in Tamil Nadu) are expressions of love and servitude. In the name of love, food is served to guests and children; often without considering whether the person wants the food or not. A refusal of food thus offered in love could be read as a rejection of love. Children are often coaxed to eat 'just one more mouthful, for my sake. If you love me, you will eat some more'; these are messages from childhood that resonate in many Indian homes, especially when children return home after long intervals of time, or where grandparents are present. This particular linkage of food with the expression of love in childhood was one of the most enduring memories people had of growing up in Indian families (Chaudhary & Keller, 2003).

Love mixes you up, causes confusion (*kalattal* and *mayakkam*). Love is considered to be intoxicating, a state when the mind is dizzy and unable to think clearly. This is probably the closest to the infatuation that is spoken of in Western romantic literature. With age, the confusion of love is supposed to lessen as a resistance develops. Love has the effect of reversing and erasing distinctions, of mixing up. Distinctions between what is mine vs what is yours are erased in the context of *anpu*. To draw distinctions implies a lack of love:

... a concept of love that is based upon familial interdependence and a sense of duty (dharma) to one's relatives is encouraged. Initially, it is communicated to the child by various persons through constant physical contact—holding, feeding, carrying and co-sleeping. Later it will be communicated in other ways, but always with set limits. 'Love' and concepts of dominance and submission are inextricably connected. ... 'love' is not so much an emotion generated by a specific individual, as it is a deep sense of emotional connectedness associated with members of one's extended family. (Seymour, 1999, pp. 84–85)

## Intentional Ambiguity

In the introduction to the book, Trawick develops a theory of the importance of ambiguity in the life of the Indian and the Tamil in particular. In Trawick's estimation, ambiguity is a fundamental quality of the Asian psyche. It is assumed to be an inherent part of the belief of the sacred, and is an integral part of the communication system. In this is the recognition that signs and their meanings are different things; they may have different names. The knowing and simultaneous attribution by the same person of mutually exclusive meanings to a single sign is a part of the ambiguity that is accepted and even encouraged within the system. In the context of communication, the informational

content of the communication is not as important as the personal relationship that is established during the social interchange, thereby greatly diminishing the strength of semantic meaning as it is understood in the conventional study of language.

An understanding of ambiguity is crucial to the understanding of the cultural system. Every event and communication has more than one meaning. Just as poetic ambiguity resonates in Tamil poetry, psychological ambiguity is also inherent in the individual. It is what allows for a unification of varied, disparate emotional patterns and personalities.

The patterns of ambiguity define the relationships between self and others. As life progresses, what happens to the self is neither individuation (i.e. increasing differentiation of self from others) nor internal integration (i.e. crystallization of a stable sense of self), but rather a continuous *decrystallization* and *deindividuation* of the self, a continuous effort to *break down* separation, isolation, purity, as though these states, left unopposed, would form of their own accord and freeze up life into death. (pp. 242–243)

The distinction between self and others is essentially a Western phenomenon. The self as seen as a system of isolation, with boundaries clearly drawn, does not fit into the cultural context of the Tamil and, further, the cosmos of the Indian collectivity. The individualist self can never find anything sacred in a relationship, because relationships are means to ends; and relationships are the essence of *anpu*.

## How Cultural Unity is Maintained

The principles that maintain cultural unity and sameness can also function to sustain the self as defence mechanisms. Trawick discusses some of the operating principles functioning towards the solidarity of the family.

### Mirroring/Twinning

The phenomenon of mirroring or twinning is seen in how 'repeatedly . . . a pair of children or adults would be linked with each other by themselves or by others and defined as balanced and equivalent: equal in some ways, opposite in others, a matched set, mirror images, twins' (p. 243; e.g. *perivaar* vs *cinnavan* or big man vs small man when referring to Annan and Ayya together). Often the names of the two matched individuals are merged into a compound word. Matched nicknames also abound in such cases. In the case of children, such twins are dressed alike.

In Ayya's family, among the children, Trawick speaks of how Arulmori, Ayya's daughter, in the absence of a same-sex age-mate and

human mirror, has to embody her own opposite. In contrast, both her older sister and younger brother with their human mirrors are moulded into mutual complementarity. The children are seen as balancing partners for each other. This concept may be of utility for maintaining and creating the harmony of the family, with one complementing the other; but the utility for the definition of the psyche of each child is questionable. Twinning is seen as similar to the concept of 'splitting' as given by Anna Freud, 'wherein a person experiences in mixed form, two attributes that she would rather keep separate, and so assigns them in fantasy, to two different persons or entities' (p. 245). In the Tamil family, 'two initially separate people were rendered complementary and then merged. The most-merged personalities (and so the least autonomous) were therefore the adults' (p. 245). This phenomenon is perhaps responsible for the lack of individuality seen in the Indian context. The person who is different is seen as bucking the system, and straining the regular weave of the family and society in general. Individuality is acceptable only for the person recognized as being gifted or imbued with powers that set him or her apart from others, such as Ayya, who is seen as a scholar, a learned man, with special powers and dispensation.

### **Complementarity/Dynamic Union**

Patterns of complementarity are seen in the interactions when, as a response to an act, instead of the desired response, its opposite occurs. Rather than changing patterns of behaviour, the same action is repeated, and elicits the same negative response as earlier. It is the engagement, the association between individuals, that is seen as the reward, rather than the goal. The association of individuals is often such that balance is never reached. Trawick gives the example of money-lending etiquette, wherein in repayment, accounts are never settled completely; an extra rupee is added, as a reason for the two parties to meet and do business again. In another instance, Ayya deliberately stops short of completing the translation of a poem at the penultimate stanza.

Dynamic union is an integral part of the Dravidian cosmos as reflected in the kinship system and the conscious seeking for affinity as belonging. A man marries his cross-cousin (Mother's Brother's Daughter), thereby

... giving it momentum, there also burns longing between actual human individuals, longing aroused in part by the experiences of childhood and in part by mythic and ideal patterns that people seek to live out but which in their actual lives, they can never fulfill. (p. 247)

In kinship terminology in South India, the same kin term is used for Mother's Brother and Father-in-law (*mama*). Dynamic union and complementarity is seen abundantly in poetry and linguistic usage in Tamil. All these devices are seen as attempts to maintain tension rather than bringing resolution.

### **Sequential Contrast**

Trawick makes connections between Tamil myths and everyday life. Just as in myths, events are viewed in sequence, never being seen at the same time to give a complete picture. The sequential contrast can be seen in the dealings with children, wherein they are alternately punished and comforted. Emotions tend to swing pendulum-like. Each opposite is the seed for its obverse; the opposites cannot be kept separate: 'all rhythms are transformations and reverse transformations of states into opposite states and then back again, repeatedly' (p. 250). Tamil poetry, with an abundance of this swing between point and counter-point, may be an extension of the contrasts that exist in everyday dealings in the family context; hence its importance.

### **Projection/Introjection**

The phenomenon of projection is seen as a means of allowing personalities to develop interdependently, such that they shape one another. Just as traits of personality can be handed down through generations, they can be transferred laterally. The traits of the father can be seen eventually in the son. Two individuals sharing a kinship term are considered as having traits in common. 'A son was expected in some way to embody his father, a daughter to embody her mother' (p. 251). This pattern of projection can be seen very commonly all over India. Another projection is from one's name. Bearing the name of a mythic character implies possessing some characteristics in common with that character. The implication is that what is borne in the blood will eventually be revealed as the truth.

### **Internal Contradiction/Category Mediation**

Unlike the Western belief that a thing cannot simultaneously be *A* and not *A*, Indian approaches to such absolutes are more blurred. If we consider the boundaries of the sexes, male vs female, the Indian cultural context allows for a proliferation of androgynous forms even in divine depictions. It is possible to express distinctly different ways of relating to people in a seemingly contradictory fashion. There would appear to be a greater range of possible relations into which one can

enter, and a greater range of possible modes of being that can be assumed without worrying about consistency.

We would hesitate to generalize this statement of Trawick's. The scope of possible behaviours and ways of functioning may be wider in India; but this may be more true for men than women. In the case of women, it is age and marriage that may provide a channel for experimenting with differentials in culturally prescribed ways of behaviour. Cultural prescriptions for gender-appropriate behaviour are endorsed through socialization, and escaping the hidden internal tyranny that Trawick speaks of may be more wishful thinking than wish-fulfilment. Trawick herself comes around to discussing these complexities in her later publication (Trawick, 2003).

### **Hiddenness**

Meaning is often hidden, not clear to the visible eye. There is a play of illusion, where many different things seem to be said. There are many acts of deliberate irony, when feelings are hidden by their opposites, where the hiding of the feeling is what communicates its presence. Trawick draws a parallel here between poetry and real life in that, as in poetry, there is a deliberate play with words, often resorting to subtlety, metonymy, metaphor and other nuances in the use of language. This sort of obliqueness finds an important place in the lives of people and the relationships that they construct around themselves.

Trawick assumes that feelings are hidden not as a means of cutting off communication, but to allow the relationships to exist in a dynamic mode, without clear articulation. A certain tension develops, which serves to bind the self to others. 'To those whom one loves, one gives without limits, and one expects their demands to be limitless. The giving is not done to end the taking but to start and keep going an endless, dynamic bond' (p. 256). Just as giving increases desire, hiding increases further seeking. Love is to be hidden, expressed through actions, and not spoken in words. Love is hidden in the harshness and the teasing. It is to be inferred and understood, and does not need to be spoken out loud. The echoes of some of these strategies for sustaining long-term relationships are displayed, in far more exaggerated and melodramatic terms, in Indian cinema.

### **Plurality and Mixture, Boundlessness and Reversal**

Love means mixture and confusion. The boundaries between individuals and relationships are blurred and constantly reversed. Love goes beyond paired bonds. It encompasses everybody. Identity of the self and the identity of the loved one are lost in the crowd.

## What Trawick Has Not Done

Trawick paints a very rosy picture of the family. There is very little evidence from the readings of any kind of family strife and tension. This is a little difficult to believe. The other issue may be that the family reveals its best face to the stranger in their midst, however much she may feel a part of the family in question.

In a later piece on the Indian family, Trawick (2003) is more critical when she discusses her doubts about whether this social collective will survive in its present form because of the different pressures that are exerted on the individual members for the survival of the collective. Perhaps she was able to see through some of the apparent patterns of collective harmony and apprehend the difficulty that can ensue from a life-long commitment to a difficult relationship with so much intensity and expectation.

There is no evidence whatsoever of any sibling rivalry. This could of course be because of the twinning/mirroring concepts given by Trawick. However, between Siva and Oli, the children of the household, we would expect some sibling rivalry, given that the adults, all of whom favor Oli, discriminate against Siva. Trawick herself describes Siva as the fall guy, constantly undervalued against Oli. Perhaps some of this absence of rivalry could also be linked to the social value placed on the child, the motivation to create a hierarchy that seems quite basic to the Indian psyche, wherein Siva just cannot even think of manifesting rivalry against Oli. Trawick provides no speculation about why such rivalry should be absent—if, indeed, it is.

The consequence of *not* having an age-mate of the same sex also has not been sufficiently analysed by Trawick. In the family whom Trawick studies, two of the children, Arulmori and Umapati, do not have an age-mate of the same sex.

While Trawick has examined kinship terminology, a more in-depth discussion of this needs to be undertaken. In the case of Anni and Padmini, the term they use for their mother-in-law is Attai. In kinship terms, *attai* refers to Father's Sister, and it is this kinship relationship that both Anni and Padmini are responding to. As shown by Raheja and Gold (1996), women tend to use kin terms from the natal family in preference to kin terms defined by marriage. The acceptable kin terms for mother-in-law in Tamil are *maamiyar*, *attai* or *mami*, as identified by Karve (1953, p. 200).

The issue of sexual love and relationships is inadequately brought about in the book. Sex features in a big way in Tamil popular culture, music, poetry, dance and film. Much of it relates to the relationship

(usually sexual) between men and women. There is a lot of metaphor in popular Tamil music, which is sexual in nature. Trawick makes a passing reference to the sexual interactions, but there is no embellishment. The sleeping patterns existing are not elaborated on. Perhaps this is due to the fact that sexuality may not have been displayed in the talk and she may not have been able to gather the non-verbal cues that are often employed in the 'discussion' of sexuality. There is also a very large body of jokes and innuendoes in Tamil, which are accessible only through colloquial use, and it would take far more than the knowledge of Tamil vocabulary to gain access to the meaning system. The implications of the gulf between the classical and the colloquial use of language have to be understood.

Trawick has combined classical Tamil poetry with her ethnography to analyse emotions and relationships in the Tamil context. It may be interesting to reflect on what she would have found if she had tried to investigate love using the context of the popular culture of Tamil Nadu, although this has been attempted by other scholars (e.g. Thomas, 1995). Analysis of women's folk songs extrapolating to women's psyche and kin relationships has also been attempted by studies in a North Indian cultural context (e.g. Raheja & Gold, 1996).

Is Trawick's fieldwork comprehensive enough? The purists are likely to pick holes in her method, especially with regard to sample size and procedures. Trawick interviewed 150 respondents in an attempt to generalize her findings from Ayya's family. In contrast, if we examine Seymour's (1999) longitudinal study in Orissa, she followed 24 households over a period of 30 years. The detail that is there in her ethnography is distinctly lacking in Trawick's work. The effects of features such as education for women and changes due to urbanization that have effects on concepts of familism and self are not reflected in Trawick's work. And this is despite her visiting the same family and area over a period of 20 years. Did she see no effect of social change on the men, women and children of the family?

The ethics of Trawick's methodology may also be questioned by some. She has used actual names and photographs of the members of the family. This was probably done with the permission of the family. The photographs of the family that are there in the book are also available on-line on Trawick's web page, along with photographs from her recent study in Sri Lanka. In Trawick's defence, however, she has attempted to paint an accurate rendering of the family with an eye for detail and honesty. It is Trawick's honesty that strikes the reader most. She records with great detail her transactions with Ayya and other family members.

Trawick's relationship with Ayya is that of a student and a teacher. It is the connection that Trawick has with the family that serves to captivate the reader. Her emotions are there, at the surface, dealt with openly as she dialogues with the reader, herself and her family.

Many of the things Trawick speaks of will strike a resonant chord with Indians all over the world. The simplicity of her style spans a depth of information that can be uncovered only on re-reading the book. We have read the entire book three times over, and parts of it more than that, and every re-reading gives more to think about. There are many Indians who find it difficult to say the three little words 'I love you' that the West depends on so strongly. Love is not spoken about; it is expressed through actions and deeds. It is easier to define love through what it signifies. It is *parakkam* that grows with association, like Trawick does.

### **General Conclusion: What Can Cultural Psychology Learn from South India?**

Though Trawick's book is not new, her methods, which can be seen as unconventional by some, can be of use in the study of families in a cultural context. She has used a certain amount of licence in extrapolating from her observations to linkages in classical literature, and applying her findings to everyday life. Intuition has played a part in her analysis. It requires courage and a great deal of conviction to use this method of studying a culture and, more importantly, of reporting that allows the reader to enter into a dialogical frame with the researcher and the respondents. The seeming simplicity of the reporting is what may be in actuality difficult to approximate. Training in research methodology with its formal methods and processes does not allow for seemingly dangerous extrapolation and intuitive concluding. It is most difficult to be non-judgemental about a culture with which one is familiar from the periphery. Trawick has succeeded in encouraging the development of an indigenous theory of emotional expression that allows movement away from reductionist approaches.

Trawick, with her examination of love, may be coming partway towards explaining the reluctance to sever a relationship, even a bad one, in the Indian context. In her explanation of love in this family, she comes close to understanding the endurance of relationships in the Indian context; even relationships that are unpleasant survive due to the reluctance to sever an association. Western psychology has tended to assume that the individual strives for autonomy from others, seeking urgently towards individuation during development.

Successful socialization moves a child away from an intense emotional, symbiotic bond with a single caretaker towards an individuated selfhood. In the Tamil context (and the wider Indian context), the ideal self is *not* an autonomous individual, but a person bound to a group—someone who will subordinate his or her personal desires to the collective interests of the group. Renunciation of personal desires is culturally lauded and elaborated in the Indian context. The developmental eventuality of the lonely ascetic, seeking salvation through the conscious abandonment of physical desires, materials and relationships, seems like a theoretical play with the reversal of an intensely social early experience where even the differentiation between people becomes clouded. Ironically, the person who has been through all this intensity is expected to distance the self from others with age, rather than become more used to it. Perhaps this is another example of the constant moderation, balancing and complementarity that Trawick was able to discern in the family relationships and affective interactions.

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