INTRODUCTION

The modernization of families, it is often assumed, implies a dual transformation from extended kinship to nuclear structures and from matrimonial agreements negotiated between families to marriage contracts between individuals. This book contests this prevalent understanding. By focusing on marriage, specifically the arranged marriage in Bengal, I demonstrate that during the late colonial period marriage practices underwent some specific changes and reforms that led, not to the nuclear family as such, but to the valorization of a particular idea of the joint family, a structure with an older male or female head and usually three or more generations living together. I further claim that this change occurred in tandem with the development of a form of arranged marriage that reflected the reality of an emerging marriage market, and together they were constitutive of what was and is modern about marriages in India.

One central theme reiterated in the following pages is that it would be erroneous to regard arranged marriage as a traditional practice. However, those who hold this view — numerous colonial and Western observers, some Indian nationalists, and many Indians even today — are not mistaken in any simple sense. Modern marriages do indeed play out themes of freedom and unfreedom. What becomes problematic is the tendency to equate unfreedom with something called "tradition." Arranged marriage in India and the family form that buttressed this kind of matrimony is very much a part of Indian modernity and modernization. In what follows, I map the processes by which the institution of the arranged marriage came into being and solidified into a practice that is juxtaposed against matches described as "love marriages." After all, marriages in India were arranged in a variety of ways for a long time. But the nomenclature *arranged marriage* signals a standardization of certain practices, marking them as new and distinct. In a certain sense, this book is a refusal to periodize arrangement itself as archaic. Instead, by focusing on the developments in marital practices and the marriage market in one particular region of colonial India—Bengal, with special attention to the erstwhile colonial capital, Calcutta—I chart the historical processes through which the institution of arranged marriage was reconstituted and rearranged under modern conditions.

The book is organized around three broad ideas that speak of the modernity of arranged marriage: the idea of a marriage market, how market-related developments gave rise to debates about consumption and vulgarity in the conduct of weddings, and legal regulation of family property and marriages. While there are undoubtedly regional differences in how marriages are ritually performed in different parts of India, there are some commonalities in the feature of arrangement.[1] Thus I use the expression *arranged marriage* at a level of generality. At a minimum, I take this expression to refer to marriages that are negotiated by families, on the basis of information circulating in a market for marriages, with or without the consent of the individuals getting married. The practice is not without a past, but I call it modern because its performance from the late nineteenth century onward involves the use of institutions and ideas central to any understanding of modernity: urban life, Western education, the print media (the publishing of matrimonial advertisements seeking brides and grooms), monetization of relationships (the escalation in the practice of dowry), cultivation of distinction and cultural capital (debates about what constitutes a tasteful wedding), and law (certain legal reforms to do with property and ideas of rights and personhood). The fact that Bengali Hindu marriage underwent these changes was the result, I argue, of certain changes in family values during the late colonial period. It amounted to the creation of a new patriarchy under colonial rule. Exploring the links between marriage and family values that produced this patriarchal imagination and practice is the main aim of this book.

The study is framed by two significant developments whose impact seems unequal at first glance. It begins in the early 1870s, around the time that the first matrimonial advertisement appeared in a Calcutta periodical. It ends with the Hindu Code bill, focusing especially on the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, which gave Hindu women some inheritance rights in their paternal property. The act, despite its many shortcomings, was at least a symbolic acknowledgment that women continued to have significant claims to their patrimony even after they had ritually moved to another network of kinship. The two chronological points are also significant in flagging some of the most important factors — marketplace practices, ideas about cultural capital, and the law — that transformed Hindu marriage in modern times. Rather than casting these changes as progressive or retrograde, I am committed to understanding what constellation of forces prompted these transformations in the marriage form and to what effect. Finally, the two dates cover a time span during which marriage was, in a manner of speaking, nationalized. That is, although I begin with a history of Bengali marriage, I end at the national stage, with the central government attempting to create an Indian Hindu marriage form with regional and customary variations. However, when the new leadership of postcolonial India sought to change with one stroke of the pen the conditions governing marriage and family among Hindus, what they neglected to consider was precisely the ways marriage and the extended family had undergone critical transformations in past decades.

A few clarifications about certain expressions used throughout the book are in order. First, the discussion of arranged marriage as a modern practice is not a repetition of the argument made influential by Hobsbawm and Ranger in the 1980s about the "invention of tradition." In that classic formulation, the "peculiarity of 'invented' traditions" was that their claims to continuity with the past were largely factitious; this is what makes them invented in the first place. My argument is not about the arranged marriage being a piece of an invented tradition whose claims of continuity with the past were established by "quasi-obligatory repetition."[2] Arranged marriages were not novel to the late nineteenth century. To argue that they were would be to deny their pre-British history. What I do claim is that there were some striking changes in the practice brought about by the exigencies of British colonial rule in India. In that respect we are not dealing with a history of an invented practice where previously there was none. Furthermore, the practices under consideration were not age-old "traditional" ones that were put to new use to suit the conditions of modern times. In that sense, I do not reproduce the framework of the "modernity of tradition" that was proposed by Rudolph and Rudolph in 1967 in their seminal analysis of political development in India.[3] What I document is a process of change in the history of a practice that drew on past and contemporary resources in order to be a functioning element of Indian modernity. It is thus an analysis of the encrustation of meanings encapsulated in descriptive words such as *arranged marriage* and *the joint family*, terms which actually camouflage a whole series of transformations.

My second clarification is therefore about the expressions *joint family* or *extended family* and *arranged marriage*. There is now a general consensus among historians that the ideological separation of the family from the state came into being around 1858, with India's formal inclusion in the British Empire. No doubt, the British state's demarcation of the limits of "personal laws" had a lot to do with this modern construction of the family.[4] By the time period under consideration, the familial space had emerged as quite distinct and separate from the political and administrative space of the state. There is, in addition to the works mentioned earlier, a rich and diverse body of sociological work on the family in modern India.[5] And there is a good deal of difference between scholars on whether the joint family should be treated as a legal entity (such as the coparcenary) or as an economic one (functioning as a household) or as an entity that traces its roots back to a common ancestor (in the sense of lineage). My usage of the idea of the joint family draws on this diverse literature, since by joint or extended family I refer to several "households" (what scholars would call an "elementary" family, complete or incomplete) either actually living together under the same roof or sharing the idea of the joint family as a normative ideal. This norm of togetherness extends to cooperation in economic pursuits, joint management and ownership of property, helping each unit of the family in times of crisis, and celebrating festivals, rituals, and birth, death, and marriage ceremonies. As it is used in this book, the idea of the joint family may be imagined as separate households, people either living together or separately, that still identify as one family. But one key difference in my use of the category of the extended family is that I am interested in mapping the changes within this institution. While the notion of familial togetherness is held out as an aspiration and as a norm in Bengali and Indian debates and practices, its actualization in reality was something far more contingent.

I deploy the expression *arranged marriage* at a level of generality in part because the book elaborates on the practices that make up this institution, but also because the idea of arrangement itself is something that was actively contested during the period I study. For example, although marriages were arranged between people belonging to the same caste, subcaste, or sub-subcaste in an earlier period, we find that beginning in the early part of the twentieth century subcaste commonality became a less desired requirement in negotiating matches. Likewise, the rituals of a wedding that resulted from such matchmaking were a matter of active contestation. An arranged marriage, broadly speaking, refers in this work to virilocal marriages negotiated by the families (patrilineal) of men and women with or without the consent of those getting married and celebrated at a wedding in accordance with certain communally sanctioned rules and rituals. Within this expansive framework, there are, as recently noted by Sudhir Kakar, "a wide variety of marriages that fall under the rubric of 'arranged' depending on how much a young girl or boy participates in, or even guides the process of selecting a mate. At one extreme is an arrangement where the young people never meet and are merely informed about the coming nuptials. The other extreme is the self-arranged marriage where the young people who fall in love unconsciously make sure that the potential mate fulfils all the criteria the family expects of the marriage partner."[6] The institution of arranged marriage I invoke is therefore not the same as that discussed by such anthropologists as Nicole Constable, Sonja Luehrmann, Jennifer Cole, and Karen Kelsky, who are keen to contest the depiction of such marriages or the phenomenon of "mail-order brides" in the popular media as strictly instrumental.[7] This body of work is important in highlighting how unproductive it is to employ the tradition versus modernity or progressive versus retrograde dichotomy to any analysis of such matches and in the insights the authors offer into the character of the so-called marriage market, especially complicating ideas of the "commodification" of women within such a market. However, the arranged marriage in these scholars' treatment of it is by and large unhitched from the family. In the Indian case, the arranged marriage is unimaginable, both historically and currently, without also locating it within the dynamics of the family. Looking at the two institutions, the arranged marriage and the joint family, together allows us to reach conclusions which are otherwise lost or are not invoked when arrangement itself is made to stand in for tradition.

THE EQUATION OF ARRANGED MARRIAGE WITH TRADITION

Marriage rituals have been a preeminent site inspiring cross-cultural commentary in a variety of texts in modern times. Whether we look at travel literature or early anthropology, marital practices in foreign lands have long tantalized outside observers with their apparent promise to unlock the secret of an "oriental" culture. It is not surprising that nineteenth-century European writings on Indian civilization should focus on marriage-related customs as one of their primary areas of interest. Consider an 1843 travelogue by George Johnson. Johnson opens his account of Hindu marriage customs by noting certain similarities between the Hindus and the ancient Romans: "The Hindoos like the ancient Romans have a custom among them to depute certain persons, before the matrimonial alliance is formed, to see the bridegroom and bride alternately in their respective houses." So fascinated was Johnson with his discovery of this civilizational parallel that for the next thirty pages he provides a meticulous report of Hindu marriage practices in the land of Bengal. However, what Johnson saw as "ancient" in "Hindoo" Bengali practices was already marked by the changes brought about by British rule in India. Consider the factors that, in Johnson's account, made prospective bridegrooms and brides eligible. For the "boy," wrote Johnson, "a knowledge of the English language is now-a-days considered by the Hindoos a high qualification." The "girl" "must be light complexioned; have a face like the full moon; a nose smooth as a flute; eyes like the lotus flower; a neck like that of a pigeon; and a voice . . . like that of a cuckoo." If in addition to these qualities she also possessed "engaging manners," "she is esteemed a paragon."[8] The qualifications needed in a groom were clearly marked by colonial origins, while those sought in a bride sound traditional. But this very tendency to expect a young woman to embody tradition itself foreshadowed a relatively modern development under British rule.

Writing some fifty years after Johnson, when anthropology had already been pressed into the service of colonial administration, the director for ethnography for the Government of India, Sir Herbert Risley, persisted with the civilizational argument, but this time to create and sustain a sense of hierarchy between civilizations. Risley contrasted marriage practices in India and Europe, arguing that these were among the primary forces responsible for the degeneracy of the Indian races. According to Risley, in the West "sentiment and prudence" held "divided sway" in matrimonial matters, and "the field from which a man can choose his wife is practically unlimited." By contrast, among the "stationary" races of India "throughout the ever widening area dominated by Hindu tradition or influence, one set of rules contracts the circle within which a man must marry; another set artificially expands the circle within which he may not marry; a third series of conventions imposes special disabilities on the marriage of women." Add to these the customs of child marriage, polygamy (even though polygamy was, on Risley's own admission, "tending to disappear under the influence of popular disapproval"), and the ban on widow remarriage, and the "series of contrasts between Indian and European marriage customs" would seem complete.[9]

Once colonial rule was firmly established in India, native marriages began to be treated by foreign observers as a shibboleth of Indian tradition. Marriages negotiated and performed according to custom came to be seen as belonging to ancient Hindu practices that had persisted into the modern period and that caused the "backwardness" of Indians in social matters. Saturated with all that made up the essence of India—caste, patriarchy, meaningless rituals, rules of the extended family—arranged marriages were seen as necessarily marked by a certain lack of agency and individual choice on the part of the betrothed. While European domination had not a little to do with such impressions, the impressions themselves outlived formal colonial rule. They survive even into popular literature and films of the past two decades.[10]

The association of arranged marriage with antiquated ideas of gender relations and cultural backwardness is a byproduct of the coupling of love marriage with progress, choice, agency, and modernity. Whether we look at classical liberal theory or at continental philosophy, love and conscious choice as the originary impulses of conjugal life were ideas elaborated at length by many European thinkers of the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century.[11] Notwithstanding feminist and other critiques of gender relations in the West, consent, choice, and equality are still the most frequently cited (theoretical) bases of marital unions in post-Enlightenment Europe. Their absence from marital unions in other cultures is still perceived as a sign of backwardness. Indeed, if (the myth of) Europe was associated with the idea of romantic love, then arranged marriage stood for the timeless phenomenon of an "Indian tradition."[12] Historians, novelists, and other women and men of letters have added to the weight of these philosophical observations by their own findings. There is a general consensus that "love . . . has become synonymous with marriage in the western world."[13] While there is considerable debate about the issue, for some historians love came to dominate the quotidian boundaries of marriage in the West from as early as the sixteenth century.[14]

This is not to argue that there were no other considerations—namely, the status of the family, the monetary position of the bride and bridegroom, and issues of property—that featured in the minds of the couple getting married. But as argued by Frances Gies and Joseph Gies, "In the developed countries today only two parties are closely concerned in the marriage process: the bride and the groom." The preeminence of the marrying couple distinguishes matrimony in the so-called developed regions of the world by making all else—parental consent, the Church—secondary players in the wedding. Consonant with the centrality of the two human actors is the role of the state. Most scholars would agree that the role of the state is a purely public one confined to the issuing of licenses and imposing conditions of property ownership and inheritance.[15] Edward Shorter's classic statement—"When we encounter young men passing up fat dowries to wed their heart's desire, we shall know that we're standing before romance"—comes at the end of a long history of such an idealization of marriage and family in Europe. It would not be wrong to say that for a long time, the history of marriage and family in Europe was a history of "sentimentalization."[16] This was predicated on a transformation in the idea of Romance, which was chivalrous and confined to a handful of people, to romance that was quotidian and became an aspiration for every couple. It is almost as if

Europeans discovered romantic love and companionate marriage at the same time as they transitioned from feudalism to capitalism, from the Middle Ages into modernity. One can read off the preeminence assigned to romantic love in these narratives of the history of European Enlightenment and progress. So pervasive was this notion that marriage and family in the putative West was a realm of sentiment, affection, companionship, and romance that historians and anthropologists have had to reinsert nonaffective elements, such as material interests, into family history and kinship studies.[17] Lest we assume that such marriages were prevalent only among the upper and middle classes, the reader would do well to remember E. P. Thompson's landmark essay, "The Sale of Wives."[18] While Thompson upheld love and affect as the basis of marriage among the "proto-industrial working classes," Frederick Engels argued that authentic love marriage could flourish *only* among the proletariat.[19]

Feminist scholarship of the past three decades has gone a long way toward establishing that not all was rosy in gender relationships in the West.[20] The roots of patriarchy, it has been argued, go deep into classical antiquity, while its branches are spread widely in modern disciplinary practices (such as psychoanalysis). Still others, influenced by Edward Said, have critiqued these trends in European scholarship by arguing that the "idea that love flourishes more naturally among proletariats can be seen as a political romanticization," whereas its confinement "to the . . . upper classes reflects a general trend of attributing to the lower classes, Southern Europeans, and North Africans a lesser refinement of character that prevents the experiencing of anything more sophisticated than lust." Scholars have begun to note that such theories about the European provenance of love "constitute data about long-standing prejudices."[21] Notwithstanding these critiques, the idea that the emergence of the modern West is coterminous with an elaboration, theoretically at least, of consensual marriage and conjugal equality still enjoys a wide currency. It is against such a background that a historian can offer the following: "The interdependence of spouses offers a more likely paradigm today than the earlier dependence of wife on husband. As world leaders Americans and Europeans are creating a model of shared conjugal authority, which may seem foreign to much of the globe, but that much of the globe will probably come to emulate."[22]

The pervasiveness of the notion that arranged marriages are a source of divisiveness in Indian society and a prime reason for Indian backwardness is something we notice in more recent academic work and social commentary. Let me illustrate this with two examples from works whose intellectual trajectories otherwise share very few commonalities. In the introduction to a book that came out of the proceedings of a 1983 conference on marriage systems in India, the editors cite some passages from the inaugural address by Justice A. A. Ginwala of the Bombay High Court. Noting that marriage in India "has always been interlinked with religion" Justice Ginwala went on to say, "Ours is a heterogeneous society. Religious groups are divided into sects, castes and sub-castes. They are further divided religionwise. The nation cannot progress with such diverse elements. We are wasting our energies in pointless bickering rather than utilizing them for building a strong and united nation. National integration is the need of the hour. Inter-caste and inter-communal marriage can bring about this much desired change."[23] He proposed the adoption of a uniform civil code to govern matrimonial affairs for all communities in India, a stated goal in the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution. Marriages arranged on the basis of religion, community, and caste are thus seen as contributing to India's political divisiveness. In the view of a scholar writing on a completely different theme, Hindi cinema, marriage and the couple form in India are a site of more intimate repressions. In his brilliant analysis of the prohibition (until very recently) of on-screen kissing in Hindi films, M. Madhava Prasad wrote, "In the dominant filmic narrative the drive towards the affirmation of conjugality is reined in by the restoration of the clan to its position of splendour and power; the couple, in other words, is repeatedly reabsorbed into the parental patriarchal family and is committed to its maintenance. The modern family romance occurs in popular Hindi film only in an embedded form, under the aegis of the compound authority of a feudal and a modern patriarchy."[24]

THE MODERNITY OF ARRANGED MARRIAGE

At its core, this book questions the linking of arranged marriage and the idea of the family that stood firmly behind this marriage form with the feudal or nonmodern. There is an increasing recognition that nineteenth-

and twentieth-century thinking about family and marriage reform in India derived from many different schools of thought. While many Indians were influenced by the classical liberal ideas of Mill or Maine, others returned to the world of precolonial Indian texts to rethink ideas of domesticity and familial relations.[25] Still others, most prominently the lower-caste self-respect movement activists in Tamil Nadu and the Brahmos in Bengal, sought to deploy new models of family and marriage as part of their discussions of ethicopolitical personhood.[26] From these works one can argue that the history of marriage and the family in India was the site of confluence as well as a tussle of multiple visions. Marriage and the family at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth present a hybrid picture, a product of Indian society's encounter with colonial rule as well as struggles internal to that society. This hybridity accounts for events which at first glance appear anomalous, especially when we measure them against notions of progress understood in classical liberal terms.

In the particular case of colonial Bengal, it was not as if the colonized Bengali middle class suddenly saw the light of romanticism and started celebrating the couple form as it was known in the West as soon as they were exposed to Western education and new cultural mores. As in many other cases of the Indo-British cultural encounter, the colonial Bengali family was a hybrid and unevenly developed formation. As some scholars have recently shown, Western ideas of domestic management were combined with Indian ideals of hierarchy and devotion to produce the dyadic couple form at the beginning of the twentieth century in urban Indian life.[27] Other marriage-related practices did not remain untouched by Western influences, nor were they mechanical reproductions of those models.

There is a staggering array of archival and other historical evidence that confronts the historian studying marriage in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth in colonial Bengal. On the one hand we see the rise of matrimonial advertisements published first in journals printed by caste associations, and then becoming a routine feature in daily newspapers. The advertisements contain capsule descriptions of eligible brides and bridegrooms and are a feature of Indian weddings to this day. If these data point to the widening of a marriage market in which marriageable candidates could be selected on the basis of certain qualifications thanks to the spread of a commercial print culture, other artifacts, such as innumerable photographs of the wedding couple, suggest that the idea of a romantic duo had gained acceptance in Bengali social life. In direct contradiction to the idea of the romantic couple, however, is a vast amount of literature that discusses the relentless baiting of bridal families by the families of eligible bridegrooms through their demands for dowry. The criticism of dowry reached a fevered pitch around 1914, when a young Bengali girl, Snehalata Mukhopadhyay, committed suicide, allegedly to save her father from impending financial ruin that would have resulted from his efforts to cobble together her marriage dowry. As dowry demands escalated we also have writings that criticized its deleterious impact on Bengali social life. These writers asserted that the modern marriage market that had spawned the practice of dowry led to an erosion of spirituality in Bengali marriages. Written by both men and women, these works include a large number of novels, plays, short stories, poetry, and nonfiction. The authors are intent on erasing the vulgarity that they felt had come to dominate Bengali weddings, embodied in the rise of dowry and other forms of excess. Such works gave shape to a new rhetoric about what constituted good taste in social and cultural affairs, of which weddings were a key event. Finally, there is a massive and ongoing literature on marriage-related laws and the role of rituals in Bengali weddings. Many contemporaries viewed law as an instrument of the state and were opposed to state intervention in marriage-related affairs. Instead, they were keen to restore a degree of sincerity and distinction in weddings by reforming society from within. Thus we find voluminous data on refashioning existing wedding rituals or creating new ones. There were still others for whom law was the only available tool to correct the gender inequities that resulted from matrimonial arrangements in Bengali society.

The field that constituted arranged marriage was anything but static or predefined. References to a marriage market in Bengal from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth actually signal the striking changes that characterized marriage negotiations during British rule and after. On the one hand the growth of cities and urban populations in this period necessitated the creation of a new information market relating to marriageable men and women. On the other, that a new monetary culture pervaded weddings of all classes of city dwellers was signaled, among other things, by the rise of extortionate dowry demands. As contemporaries grew vocal in criticizing the objectification of men and women in matrimonial advertisements and the commodification of eligible men represented by demands for dowry, they all seemed to concede that these developments were of recent vintage, inextricably linked to the changes wrought in family life by the pressures of colonial, urban living. The city created social models that would gradually spread to the countryside. Marriages during this time were sites of tremendous flux, with competing ideas about the norms of an ideal wedding, spouse selection, ritual procedure, and laws best suited to the needs of the Bengali family caught in the currents of change induced by colonial conditions of life.

An analysis of the marriage market is instructive for the light it sheds on the relationship between the individual and the family in the making of colonial modernity in Bengal. It also draws attention to the fact that there remains an unresolved tension at the heart of this modernity. With the spread of Western education, the growth of civil and social associations, and eventually the rise of organized feminist groups, there was indeed a consciousness in the Bengali public sphere about the liberal citizen subject—the unmarked individual—whose ideal telos is the bourgeois couple. But these bourgeois forms never quite realized themselves as they were invariably intertwined within other novel and normative constructions of the joint family. This is not to characterize Bengali society during this period as a neofeudal relic. The centrality of the couple was often recognized but at the same time subordinated to the larger ideal of the joint family. There were conflicts, of course, between these ideas of the individual or couple and the family. These struggles gave rise to certain changes in the marriage form that constitute the substance of this book. The centrality of the family was a matter of active contestation rather than an accomplished fact, and this contestation was mirrored in the ritual processes and protocols of the wedding. If classical liberal thought in the West, from Locke onward, presupposed the birth of the autonomous, propertied individual subject, then Bengali discussions of modernity focus on a different construction of the subject.[28] Whether we look at legal reforms, reforms in wedding rituals, or matrimonial advertisements looking for prospective brides and bridegrooms, it is always the reconstituted joint family that emerges as the subject of the "family romance" in modern Bengali history.[29] The process has not been without contestation, even today.

How are we to understand this kind of modernity? Running through the entirety of this book is the problem of how we evaluate this institution in terms of the effects it had on people who participated in it. Once we recognize that arranged marriage was not a result of stasis in Hindu society, but rather a symbol of that society's dynamism, how are we to grapple with the inequities it gave rise to?

In raising these questions this book participates in a growing body of scholarship that seeks to understand the complexities of the processes of modernity and modernization in the putative non-West. In her study of the Egyptian Muslim women's piety movement Saba Mahmood has argued quite powerfully that it is historically anachronistic to judge individuals as progressive or otherwise by simply testing their actions against the measure of liberal values.[30] I take Mahmood's insights seriously as I set out to analyze the descriptive template of arranged marriage in colonial Bengal. Such a historical and archivally grounded study seriously destabilizes the easy equation between arranged marriage, the joint family, and the so-called traditional. Once we tease out the lineaments of the marriage market it is quite clear that this was a modern condition. But the norms that governed Bengali familial arrangements did not, indeed could not champion the interests of independent, rights-oriented, interest-bearing individuals over and against those of the family. The figure of the extended family remains, in many discussions of Bengali modernity, a higher norm that makes the descriptive template of this modernity different from the Western one.

But the persistent invocation of the family does not mean that the debates about the nature of modern marriage in Bengal were resolved once and for all in its favor. Models of companionate marriage, equality of partners, and individual subjectivity and ideas of rights- and property-bearing subjects who stood above familial or community affiliations continued to contest the normative position accorded to the family in these debates. The unresolved status of this debate brings us to the theoretical conundrum that characterizes many non-Western histories, one most eloquently articulated by Dipesh Chakrabarty in *Provincializing Europe*. Taking my cue from his work, I argue that certain concepts — such as the property-owning, contractual, individual citizen subject, the nuclear family, and companionate love — whose intellectual provenance and climactic expression lie in the course of European Enlightenment and the nineteenth century, do not adequately describe the condition of modernity in other parts of the world (in this case, Bengal). But that does not render these concepts ineffectual as evaluative norms in non-Western modernity.[31] We see these very norms being invoked repeatedly by people who questioned the injustices of dowry and favored granting property rights to women; by feminist writers who wrote in the name of an autonomous female citizen subject who stood vulnerable in the wilderness of the marriage market; and within the ranks of India's avant-garde political leadership as they set out to modernize the country in the postcolonial period by legally removing the discrimination perpetrated by past generations. To that extent, these norms, whose genealogy lay somewhere in Western Europe in the Enlightenment and in the French Revolution, carried in them an "unavoidable and in a sense indispensable universal secular vision of the human."[32]

The history of marriage and the family in any region of India is not a simple narrative of historical progress. The Bengali marriage market was an arena in which both liberal and nonliberal notions of personhood and family jostled against each other. As the extended family emerged as a revered, ancient social institution and arranged marriage as the symbol of an Indian tradition, there also ensued new struggles that sought to establish ideals of companionship, rights, and interests within the rubric of these formations. The overall result of these struggles is what Indrani Chatterjee has termed the "democratization of the family" in India.[33] But even this democratization is unevenly molded by the tensions that characterized the marriage market and the politics of family values that were enshrined in the relations of that marketplace. This book elaborates on what this process looked like. The results of the process were fortuitous in many respects but not always beneficial to all. Nonetheless they are at the heart of what constitutes modernity in the subcontinent, with its own uniqueness and peculiarities.

Marriage, on which the ethical life of a community depends, wrote Hegel, "results from the free surrender by both sexes of their personality." The "objective source" of marriage, he continued, "lies in the *free consent* of persons, especially in their consent to make themselves one person, to renounce their natural and individual personality to this unity of one with the other." It is consent of this kind that could allow for the fact that, "though marriage begins in a contract, it is precisely a contract to transcend the standpoint of contract, the standpoint from which persons are regarded in their individuality as self-subsistent units."[34] This is one of the most powerful and eloquent expressions of the couple form, wherein two individuals through the marital bond become one. This book is a historical study of the modern Bengali subject's agonistic relationship with the normative universe encapsulated in Hegel's description. Before introducing the reader to the history of Bengali marriage and family, we would, however, do well to recall some lines from a postcolonial Indian poet. A. K. Ramanujan's "Love Poem for a Wife" is a brilliant summation of both the modern Indian's deep acceptance of the normative horizons of the Western couple form outlined above, and his recognition of its impossibility. "Really what keeps us apart at the end of years is unshared childhood," says the husband to the wife in Ramanujan's poem. So how does a couple become one, renouncing as it were each one's "natural and individual personality?" Ramanujan's answer, which muddles the normative worlds of both East and West, resonates with a poetic irony, "Probably," he wrote,

> only the Egyptians had it right:
> their kings had sisters for queens
> to continue the incests
> of childhood into marriage.
> Or should we do as well-meaning
> Hindus did,
>
> Betroth us before birth
> Forestalling separate horoscopes
> And mothers' first periods,
> And wed us in the oral cradle
> And carry marriage back into
> The namelessness of childhoods.[35]

THE PLAN OF THE BOOK

The special nature of the archives used for this book warrant a brief discussion. Unlike in the history of nationalism or other well-known events that constitute topics of much social or cultural historical work, there is no ready-made, official archive for Bengali marriages. This is probably true of many cultures in the world which did not have an institution such as a Christian church to maintain a centralized record of marriages. There was no compulsory registration of marriages in Bengal during the period considered here. Civil registration of marriages among Hindus became widespread only well into the twentieth century, and a bill for the compulsory registration of all marriages irrespective of community was not introduced in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of Parliament, until 2005.[36] There is, of course, a vast array of sources on matrimonial legislation in colonial and postcolonial India; these include parliamentary debates, official correspondence, remarks by legal experts and scholars, and newspaper reports. But as sources for the history of arranged marriage as a social practice, the official archive does not lead us very far. I have therefore had to create my own archive. This has been a particular challenge, a rewarding challenge, of this research. I had to travel and "discover" much of the wedding trivia that I have used in the text. The wedding invitations, poems, jewelry catalogues, menu cards, and even some of the photographs are now part of my own collection. I have, in addition, extensively used contemporary periodicals, caste association publications, newspapers, private papers, and visual archives housed in research institutes and libraries in India and elsewhere. Autobiographies and literary materials have helped me to supplement information gleaned from official documents and secondary sources. Given the centrality of marriage in Indian life, historical data on weddings are abundant. I make no claims of having exhaustively covered all the ground.

As the research has been dependent on institutions such as libraries as well as on families and individuals preserving written documents such as invitation cards, matrimonial advertisements, caste journals, and newspapers, there has been a necessary element of selection in the archives I have used. The material pertains to the social group that is often loosely called the educated middle class. The Bengali word for the people referred to in the literature is *bhadralok*. But the expressions *middle class* and *bhadralok* should not give rise to the impression of a sociologically cohesive category, as there were wide economic, professional, and caste differences within this bloc. Furthermore, for reasons of familiarity with the language and availability of sources, this book focuses on Bengali Hindus.

I have organized the book into three broad sections that speak of the modernity of arranged marriage. Part I, "The Emergence of a Marriage Market," outlines the terrain of this market by elaborating on some of the institutions, such as matrimonial advertisements and marriage bureaus, that supported it. These first two chapters demonstrate the shifts that took place in the process of arranging marriages as families sought novel techniques to look for brides and bridegrooms under the pressures of modern, urban living. The outcomes of these developments were often tragic, as exemplified most clearly by the suicide of Snehalata Mukhopadhyay in 1914 and the debate about the dowry system that her death brought to a crescendo. But as the demand for dowry—symbolic of an excess of money, display, power, and pomp—rose in Bengali society, there were also serious criticisms of this practice. To the critics, these new developments that ensued from the new marriage market were robbing Bengali weddings of sincerity and spirituality.

Part II, "Culture and the Marketplace," analyzes these issues relating to spirituality by outlining the new discourse of taste that Bengalis articulated to combat what they saw as the vulgarity of the marriage market. Combining an analysis of literary and visual artifacts that became parts of wedding ceremonies, the two chapters in this section show that, while critical of all forms of excess in weddings, the new regime of taste bolstered the creation of a new patriarchy in Bengali family history.

The two final chapters, which make up Part III, "Marriage and the Law," deal with two critical moments in marriage-related legislation in India. The first of these chapters is about Act III of 1872, the first civil marriage act promulgated in India. It was the result of the struggle waged by a small but influential Bengali community (the Brahmos) to have their marriages recognized by the state even when they were solemnized without the ritual ceremonies of Hindu weddings. But a few years after the law was passed, in 1878, K. C. Sen, who was greatly instrumental in its promulgation, flouted most of its clauses when he arranged the marriage of his minor daughter to the Hindu scion of a princely state. The extraordinary public outcry that followed this event highlights the relationship between ritual performance and legality in Indian weddings. Far from secularizing the law, most reformers demanded that the law be constituted by rituals, which were an inescapable part of familial, community, and religious identity. The theme of the last chapter, the Hindu Code bill, is a consideration of the legal imaginations of the propertied subject and the family in modern India. The account of arranged marriage as an institution that was marked by historical difference and yet inescapably caught in certain universal imaginations of modernity emerges with striking clarity as we analyze the property clauses of the Code (the Succession Act of 1956). The Hindu Succession Act and the debates that preceded it showed that arranged marriage and the joint family were far from discredited in modern India. Indeed, these were depicted as the resources that would enable India to take a distinctive path in its avowed trajectory of development. Arranged marriage and the joint family were reincarnated in the debates on the Hindu Code bill as the harbingers of India's postcolonial modernity.