

Marrying Nandini
A short play
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Lights up on a kitchen in a suburban house. An Indian woman in her late 50's is sitting at a kitchen table, looking at a copy of India Abroad and tentatively trying to push some buttons on a laptop computer that is open on the table. The table has three stacks of papers on it, one of India Abroad, one of India Today, and one of loose papers with longhand writing on them. Around the kitchen is evidence of Indian cooking in various stages. Throughout the following scene, SHE may go back and forth between her cooking and the computer. After some time, she calls upstairs to her husband.

She:

Ithe! Come down! I need your help with something!

He:

(offstage)

What do you want? I am watching Rachael Ray!

She:

I need your help with the computer.

Silence.

She:

Come down and help me! It is imperative to your daughter's happiness!

Silence.

She:

Ithe! Come down right now!

He:

Can it not wait until the commercial?

She:

Ey? Who is more important to you, Nandini or Rachael Ray?

He:

I only want Nandini to be as happy as Rachael Ray, and so I am observing her.

She:

Don't be so stupid. Nandini wants us to find her a husband, and I need your help.

Some sounds of movement from upstairs and then an Indian man in his 60's enters. He is wearing pajamas and flip flops.

He:

Our Nandini?

She:

Who else? Do I care if some other Nandini wants to get married? Our daughter has said she is fed up of the American way, and she wants us to find her a husband.

He:

Really? She said that?

She:

More or less.

He:

Less, I think.

He starts to leave.

She:

Rab re! When I told her that Vidya was getting married she told me that she was fed up with looking. So I said, "Why don't you let us look?" and she said, "Okay."

He:

Okay? Okay? Now she says okay because her cousin is getting married?

She:

Vidya is seven years younger than Nandini. It doesn't look good.

He:

Look good? To who? She is thirty-two years old. It has not been looking good for quite some time.

She:

Arre? Nandini looks very good. She just felt bad that Vidya is getting married when she is so much younger, and to a nice Konkani boy. My sister is so happy!

He:

Your sister is an idiot.

She:

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Chup re! Look, now that Vidya is getting married first, Nandini is open to the Indian way. Just think, if we work hard, we could get her engaged before Vidya gets married! We should take advantage.

He:

Thirty-two years, and now she is ready? Now she wants the Indian way?

She:

Hanh. The new Indian way. On the computer. Nandini said she would let us write a profile on this Match.com for her.

He:

Match.com?

She:

Yes, yes! It is a website for the dating. She said this is how they do it now. And she will do it if we write the profile.

He:

Profile?

She:

That's what she said. I don't know. That's why I need you to go online-offline whatever and find this place and see what we have to do.

He:

Match.com?

She:

That's what she said. We write this profile-bofile, then we choose, and then she will go on the dates. This is how we will find her a husband.

He:

This is not the Indian way.

She:

Not exactly, but almost. How different can it be from writing a matrimonial? See - I have all these matrimonials here to look at, and we can write the "profile" however we want to get the type of boy we think would be good for her. She agreed to it. I think this is our best chance.

He:

This will be difficult, though. 32?

She:

Ey! I read some matrimonials in India Abroad for women as old as 40. And Shanti's son just found a girl on the

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internet, and he is 36. He used Shaadi.com, but Nandini says that one is no good. Anyway, Nandini looks very young.

He:

Do we put a picture?

She:

Chup re! No picture-picture. She will not allow us to put her picture. We just write something about how young she looks.

He:

What do we write? "One young-looking 32 year old?"

She:

We don't put her age. We say youthful. Why don't you get on the computer and find this place, Match.com? Then we will write a profile and find some boys.

He:

Are you sure she said she will do this?

She:

What? Am I so stupid that I don't understand my own daughter?

He:

Do you really want me to answer that?

She:

Ey!

He:

Okay, okay. If she said she will do it, then we must do it too. I would feel better if she were married.

She:

Everybody would.

He:

(Grumbling to himself) Okay, okay. Let me see how we find this Match.com.

He sits purposefully in front of the computer. After looking at the screen with his glasses raised above his eyes, he lowers his glasses into place and begins to type. He uses his two index fingers to type and uses the mouse pad.

He:

Wa! Dr. Phil is on this Match.com.

She:

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Didn't I tell you that everyone does it like this?

He:

Wa! Just look at this.

He turns the computer towards her as she joins him behind the table. They spend a few minutes in silence staring at the screen as he clicks on the mouse pad to advance the screens.

She:

So many questions we have to answer for Nandini? When do we get to write the profile?

He:

I think we have to answer these questions first. Yes, these are the "three easy steps" that Dr. Phil says. First we answer the questionnaire, next we sign up for an account, and *then* we write the profile. The computer will match our answers with the database and then it will show us who matches what we want. Match.com. First question - body type. What body type do you think Nandini prefers?

She:

Body type?

He:

Yes. Slender, athletic and toned, a few extra pounds, heavysset, average, and any.

She:

Any.

He:

I don't think so.

She:

Arre? Why not? She is not so snobby to care about the outside. Nandini cares what is inside a man's heart.

He:

She goes to the gym every day. I am putting athletic and toned.

She:

Well then, why don't you write down self-centered too? Everyone knows that Indian boys who are too good-looking are too concerned with their own looks to be a good match.

He:

I am not.

She:

You are not too good-looking.

He:

I am good-looking.

She:

You look nice, gondu, but you are not "athletic and toned." Those knee bends you do in the summer are not really exercise.

He:

What do you know, *manthari*? I am athletic. I walked to the bottom of the Grand Canyon.

She:

And you nearly had a heart attack, *mantharo*.

He:

But I did not have a heart attack.

She:

Chup re! Let's keep looking for Nandini. Put athletic and toned if you think that is what she wants.

He:

I do. And I do push ups, too. Not just knee bends. All year round.

She:

Okay, okay. Knee bends, push ups, whatever. I'm sure Nandini is looking for someone just like her beloved father.

He:

And that is why she is having such a hard time finding someone. It is hard to find a match as good as yours.

She:

Little does she know what trouble you are.

He:

You are no picnic either.

She:

Hanh!

He:

Hanh!

Silence. After a moment he returns to typing.

He:

What do you think about the rest of these answers?

She:

Why did you put "any" ethnicity? We want East Indian.

He:

I don't think Nandini really cares about that.

She:

I care! We care! Put East Indian. I will not be responsible for matching her with a *gorah*. (Pause) Or a black.

He:

Arre bapre! Okay, East Indian. If you think the rest of these answers are okay, we can move on to the profile.

She:

Yes, let's get to the profile! Never married - yes; education bachelors degree - okay; social drinker - fine; non-smoking- definitely. Maybe we should write no drinking.

He:

But Nandini drinks.

She:

But she shouldn't.

He:

But she does.

She:

Okay, okay. Then the answers are fine. When do we write the profile?

He:

Wait. (*Pressing the return button*) I've submitted the questionnaire and signed up for an account. Now we write the profile. What should we write?

She:

Okay. Ready? Let's see...Youthful Konkani girl seeks Konkani boy for conversation, companionship, and marriage. Wheatish complexion. Ivy League education... What else, what else?

He:

"Conversation, companionship, and marriage?"

She:

What?

He:

I am just wondering if "conversation, companionship, and marriage" is the correct way to put it.

She:

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What's wrong with that? That's what women want in a husband. Some nice conversation and someone to go to places with, movies, shopping, whatever. I think that is what she should have.

He:
Is that what we have?

She:
We have marriage.

Silence.

He:
I talk.

She:
You watch Rachael Ray. Just write down what I am telling you... Professional. Write that she is a professional.

He:
A professional what?

She:
Consultant, *beta*! She is a professional consultant. But just write professional because no one knows what a consultant does. Oh, and US citizen. Write that.

He:
US citizen? Who are we looking for that cares about her citizenship? An illegal alien?

She:
Every matrimonial in India Tribune mentions citizenship. A US passport can be a very attractive feature for someone from back home.

He:
You don't think Nandini will marry someone from India.

Silence.

She:
Fine, then, don't put US citizen. What do you think we should put?

He:
I don't think we should write Konkani. It seems too specific. Such a small group in this country, maybe we won't find one.

She:

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But we are Konkanis. Of course, we want a Konkani boy. And don't you tell me every day how everyone uses the internet? Are you telling me now that not one Konkani boy will be using this?

He:

No, but maybe we won't get a nice boy if we only write Konkani. Vatsala's son is Konkani, and you hate him.

She:

Oh that Vatsala's son is no good. He is a mama's boy and has no job. He thinks he is so good looking.

He:

But he's Konkani. That's what I'm saying. If we write Brahmin, we will get a nice boy with other qualities that are more important. Besides, Nandini barely speaks Konkani.

She:

Hanh, maybe you are right. We don't want Vatsala's son to answer the ad just because it says "Konkani boy." She told me that he was using this Match.com. We don't want him.

He:

So maybe instead we write "Brahmin who must have job?" And I think that we should write man and woman instead of boy and girl. It is the American way.

She:

Humph! Man/woman, boy/girl - whatever. If they paid as much attention to other things as picking on these words, the young people today would be happy. But what else can we write? We want someone good for Nandini - someone who will make her happy.

He:

What can we write for that?

She:

Good sense of humor? She is always laughing. Write sense of humor next to job.

He:

Before or after job?

She:

After. Job is first. No. Education is first. Then job. Then humor. Write. And then tell.

He:

(Reading) "Youthful, professional Konkani woman seeks Brahmin man for conversation, companionship, and marriage. Must be educated, have job and good sense of humor. Wheatish

complexion. Ivy League education." I think we should write that she is pretty. That isn't there.

She:

Yes it is. It says wheatish complexion. That means beautiful.

He:

It does?

She:

Yes, it does. Madhuri Dixit has a wheatish complexion. Nandini gets hers from my side.

He:

You have wheatish complexion?

She:

Arre? What are you saying? You don't think I am beautiful? What do you know? You think you are good looking.

He:

I am good looking! And I talk and give companionship. And I am a very good husband.

She:

Ey? You give me so much trouble that sometimes I wonder why I tell her to get married at all. Always watching TV and munching on chips, walking around in your pajamas. Never wash a dish in this house.

He:

Always and never! Wa! Who pays for all these things, the house and the dishes and my pajamas?

She:

Nandini comes and goes as she pleases and doesn't have to clean up after anyone. She buys whatever she wants without answering to anybody. And she does not have to be insulted in her own home. Maybe she should stay just like that.

He:

You think that Nandini should not get married now?

She:

Are you stupid? Of course she should get married.

He:

But you just said-

She:

Do you see how the other Indians look at her when she comes home? Shanti and Vatsala just shake their heads at her. Shanti with her pregnant daughter and Vatsala with her good

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for nothing son. They look at my Nandini with pity, my Nandini who is smarter and prettier than any of their no good children. No one should look at her like that.

He:

No one looks at her like that.

She:

You don't notice these things. The whole house could fall down, and you wouldn't notice. But while all the men are watching the TV, the women are in the kitchen talking, and they say it is our fault that Nandini has not married.

He:

But it's not our fault that she isn't married. She won't marry.

She:

That's not how they see it. Shanti made her daughter go to medical school even though she studied some comparative literature at Brown University. They think we should make Nandini marry.

He:

Far be it for us to *make* Nandini do anything.

She:

That's what I said. But all they talk about is this one's wedding and that one's baby, and my Nandini has neither. I don't get to talk at all.

He:

I find that hard to believe.

She:

It's true. They talk all about all of their children's houses and their babies and their jobs.

He:

But Nandini has a house and a very good job.

She:

But it doesn't mean anything without a husband. When I told Shanti that Nandini bought a one-bedroom apartment in the same neighborhood like the Jeffersons on tv, do you know what she said? "One bedroom? If it's just her, she only needs one bedroom, right?" Her daughter has so many children that she will need to buy a Patel motel for all of them.

He:

So those *mantharis* talk. Who cares?

She:

They think you're a terrible father.

He:

What? Who said that?

She:

Vatsala says that it is the father's responsibility to marry off his children to good matches. The mother teaches the children how to behave, and my Nandini is very well-behaved. But your daughter is not married.

He:

Responsibility! Didn't I give her the best of everything? Didn't I send her to the best schools? I took care of my responsibility. It is not my responsibility to make her do something she does not want to do.

She:

Does not want to marry? Who wants to be alone forever? She told me just now on the phone to find someone. Don't you listen?

He:

I listen!

She:

You know, you should take this seriously. She has said no for so many years, but now, finally, we have this chance to help her. And you are not taking this seriously.

He:

What do you mean? I am using the computer. I am writing. Very seriously.

She:

Good. Keep writing. We have to find a boy quickly.

He:

But, *gond*, don't you think it will take some time? If she hasn't found anyone yet, maybe it is a bit harder than we thought?

She:

It will be hard because we waited so long. But we must try. Nandini is a good girl. Any boy would be lucky to have her. The problem is these boys here don't know anything. They are just looking at breasts. They are so blinded by these American twinkies and Pamela Anderson and Playboy that they don't know a good girl when they see one. Nandini is a smart girl, very pretty. If she has small breasts, so what? She would be a good wife to anyone. We have to find a boy who can see that, who is not so worried about the sex.

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He:

Everyone in America is worried about the sex. Maybe even Nandini is worried about the sex.

She:

What are you talking about? Nandini is a very serious girl. She is not worried about the sex. She has better things to think about.

He:

She is 32 years old. I think she has thought about the sex.

She:

What are you saying? Are you saying that my Nandini has-

He:

I am saying that she maybe has thought about the sex.

Silence.

She:

Well, anyway, we should find a serious boy who is not so obsessed with sex. I am sure that Nandini would agree.

He:

But how will we know if he is obsessed? This is not something you can write about.

She:

And why not? If we don't want any sex maniacs we should write that. No sex maniacs need reply.

He:

You want me to write that?

She:

Something. Write something.

He:

I just don't think she would like us to write that. I'm not sure we can write what she is looking for.

She:

Who said we write what she is looking for? We write what we are looking for. Did our parents ask us what we wanted? No. They just looked for what they thought was important, and we agreed. And look at us! 35 years we have been together.

He:

Yes, 35 long years.

She:

Ey! Not funny. If you were not married to me, you would be living in filth. And if I were not married to you -

He:

You would be living in India.

She:

Hanh. We did okay, don't you think? We came here, away from our families, built a nice life and raised a good daughter. We can't complain.

He:

You complain all the time.

She:

That is not the point. The point is that our parents found for us, and we have to find for Nandini. We are sitting here now together. Who will sit with Nandini when she is old?

He:

We are not old.

She:

Not now. But later, we will be, and then what will she do? She doesn't always look at the right things. She doesn't look at the family. She doesn't ask what are his plans. She just wants to feel this American love. That is the problem. We shouldn't have let her watch all those movies, that *Pretty Woman* and such. She thinks the right man is going to drive around in his limousine, climb up the ladder and *bas!* Finished! We know better than that. We can see what she can't.

He:

But can we, *gondu*? That is what I am asking.

She:

I think so. Our parents saw. I think we can see, too.
(Pause) I think we must try.

He:

Yes, let us try.

She:

She's a good daughter, *gondu*. We must find someone for her.

He:

We will find. What else should I write?

She:

Write that our daughter is beautiful and loving and she has a sensitive heart. We just want a boy from a good family with a good education who will cherish her and stay with her when we are gone.

He suddenly begins to type frenetically. When he finishes...

He:

How about this? "Youthful, professional Konkani woman seeks Brahmin man for conversation, companionship, and marriage. I am well educated, have a wheatish complexion, and like to laugh, and I seek someone of like mind. My family is very important to me, and so you will have to meet them first. But they only want the best for me. Only serious men need apply."

She:

Wa! That is very good, *gondu*! This sounds like a very good match for Nandini. Send it; let's see. What do you have to do? Press some button?

He:

Just hit send. You press the return button.

She pushes the return button. They watch the screen in silence for a moment.

She:

No matches? *Gondu*, what does this mean?

He:

I don't know how this happened. Match.com is supposed to have millions of candidates.

She:

No one wants to marry Nandini?

He:

No, no one matched our profile.

She:

But how can that be?

He:

I don't know. Maybe we didn't write a good profile.

She:

Our profile is very good. You wrote so nicely.

He:

Well, maybe we didn't answer the questionnaire properly. No one has the qualities we want.

She:

But why not? Did we ask for too much? To look for a nice, thoughtful Indian boy?

He:

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Maybe there are no such boys out there. Maybe that's why she hasn't found anyone.

She:

How can that be? There must be someone out there, online, offline.

He:

Maybe there isn't. Maybe my Nandini is too good-

She:

My Nandini is very good but not too good for anyone. She still cries if she gets hungry, and in the summer she lets herself get so dark. And she has some qualities from your side, pig-headedness, stubbornness, irritability -

He:

You know, perhaps your parents did not do such a good job of finding you a good match then if they found you a pig-headed, stubborn, irritable, not handsome husband.

Silence.

She:

Ithe! I think they did okay. (Pause) Our Nandini is the best of both of us. Come, show me this online-offline business; we will find something else, try again...

Lights fade.

End of play.