

Penguin



Readers



(UN)ARRANGED MARRIAGE

bali rai

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BALI RAI

LEVEL

5

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Note about the story

Bali Rai is an English writer of children's and young adult books. His parents came from the **Punjab*** in India to live in Leicester, England. Leicester is a **multicultural** city, which means that people from many different **cultures** live together in the same place.

(Un)arranged Marriage is about Manny, who also has **Punjabi** parents and lives in Leicester. Manny does not feel close to his family. His **working-class** parents have strong **traditions**. They want to choose his wife for him for an **arranged marriage**, which is normal in **traditional** Punjabi culture. But Manny does not want to marry someone that he has never met before.

(Un)arranged Marriage is about choosing what *you* want to do, and not doing things just because everyone else did them before you. Manny's family want him to be the same as them, but he believes that there are more options in life than just following tradition. He decides to find a way to live the life that he wants.

Before-reading question

- 1 Read the "Note about the story". What do you know about arranged marriages, and do you agree with them? Do you have arranged marriages in your culture?

*Definitions of words in **bold** can be found in the glossary on pages 92–96.

PART ONE: FOUR YEARS EARLIER

CHAPTER ONE

May

“No! I’m not getting married.”

I was shouting, which I didn’t do often. I had come home from school and my oldest brother, Ranjit, was having sex with his wife in their bedroom. I had **ignored** them and gone into the kitchen to get something to eat, but he had come downstairs, saying something about “exercising”. I was only 13, but I was not a child and I knew what they were doing up there! It was so **embarrassing**.

“One day, Manjit,” Ranjit had said, “you’ll be like me – married to a nice **Punjabi** girl and thinking about babies.” His wife, Jas, had walked into the kitchen as he was saying it. I just ignored him. I tried to never listen to any of my family.

I hated being called Manjit. It was a girl’s name. *Manny* was my name, but my brother still called me Manjit because he knew that I hated it. I was the youngest. I had two brothers. There was Ranjit and then Bilhar, who everyone called Harry. He was 17, fat, hairy and smelly, and he was engaged to a girl who he had never met before. My parents had shown him a picture of a friend’s daughter, and he had said “yes” just by looking at her. That was how things were in my family. We had **arranged marriages** as soon as school was finished.

I had two older sisters, Dalbir and Balbir, who were both married and had kids. They lived in different cities with their **in-laws**. In Punjabi families, it is **traditional** for a wife to become a **member** of her husband's family. My sisters had got married to **immigrants** from India, who were working in England and needed the **marriage** to stay in the country. My dad had planned them with friends of his – like doing business. It was so strange to me. How could anyone marry a person who they had never met?

My mum was like a stranger who never spoke to me unless she was shouting at me or calling me for dinner. She never wanted to know how I was feeling.

My dad was always either at work or drunk. He got angry all the time and he shouted at my mum and sister-in-law a lot. Sometimes, he actually hit my brothers, although he didn't do it a lot. They were both turning into men like him and that made him happy.

But he **slapped** me all the time. One time when I **swore** at him, he hit me with a chair. I had to tell everyone at school that I had hurt myself playing football. I didn't care that much about it because he had hit me since I was a kid. I suppose he did it because I was the youngest, or maybe he hated me for some reason. Maybe he could see that I liked **Western culture** more than my brothers. He definitely didn't like my best friend, who was not **Asian**. Getting hit all the time made me feel like I wasn't really part of my family, and the feeling got stronger as I got older.

We lived on Evington Drive, in an area that had a lot of Punjabi families. I had to share a bedroom with Harry because Ranjit and his wife, Jas, took my old room when they got married.

Sharing a room with Harry was awful. He was fat and hairy, left his dirty clothes everywhere and he only showered every three days. At night, I used to go under my blanket and read, but he threw things at me.

“Why are you reading? Are you a *gorah* (white)?”

I hated having no time for myself. Every time I wanted some peace, he was there.

I couldn't even do my homework in peace because my family didn't believe that **education** was important. Quite a lot of British **working-class** Punjabi families think like this. They're only interested in working for money. Ranjit and Harry had both got jobs in factories as soon as they left school and no one in my family cared when I got good exam **grades**.

I spent as much time as possible outside with my friends. My best friend was Adrian – or Ady – who described himself as “Black-Jamaican”. Ady and I played football with other boys and we were always together in school, but my family hated Ady. Once, when I was leaving the house, my dad came to the front door.

“Come back, Manjit! Where are you going?” he shouted.

“Just up the road with Ady,” I said.

“Ady? Why are you always with that *kalah* (black)? He'll lead you into **drugs** and crime. I know what these *kaleh* do. You'll start stealing and smoking . . .”

And then I got angry and I called him a **racist**. He slapped me and told me to come home before dinner. But most nights he drank so much **alcohol** that he **passed out** before ten and didn't notice if I came home late anyway.

Stealing and smoking? He knew *nothing*. It was actually me who stole first – small things like CDs from the shops in the city centre. It was really easy so Ady started doing it, too. We sold the stuff to other kids at school. We smoked to try to be cool and make the girls notice us.

Ady was a relaxed guy. Nothing made him angry. He lived with his mum and dad, who wanted him to get good grades in school, but Ady didn't do what his parents wanted. He liked to be the bad boy.

I didn't care what anyone said about him. He was my friend and we did everything together.

When Harry got married, I would have to move into a small new bedroom that my dad was building, but this meant having lots of people living in the same house, which I hated.

One of my cousins, Ekbal, who was the same age as me, used to talk to me about it. He was my mum's nephew, but my dad didn't talk to his dad. Ekbal's dad was a doctor and he was the opposite of mine. He was modern and relaxed about things, he believed in education and he wanted Ekbal to go to university. He let Ekbal do what he wanted and he didn't care what colour Eky's friends were.

"Look at him," my dad said about Eky's dad. "Does he think that he's special, with his university education? He's not better than me. I'm a real **Punjabi**, not *gorah* like him."

Why did I belong to a traditional working-class Punjabi family and not a modern one that believed in education? Eky was so lucky.

I sat in my room one night when Harry was playing football with his friends, and I wrote a plan of my life for the next year.

MAY	HELL ON EVINGTON DRIVE
JULY	SCHOOL HOLIDAYS - BETTER TIMES?
SEPT	NEW YEAR AT SCHOOL
DEC	RANJIT AND JAS'S BABY ARRIVES - HELL AGAIN
APRIL	THE END OF EVERYTHING HARRY GETS MARRIED PRISONER IN MY NEW "BEDROOM" NO FUTURE



I sat on my bed and read the plan. My life would be finished at the age of 14-and-a-half.

As I sat there, I heard Harry's heavy feet coming up the stairs. I quickly put the paper under the bed as he came in the room.

"What are you doing?" he said, dropping heavily on his bed.

"Nothing," I said.

"Nothing? Mum says you've been up here all day." Then he swore at me and turned on the CD player.

"Swearing is for people who are not smart," I said, which was what my favourite teacher, Mr Cooke, had said to me once.

"Stop talking like you're something special," he said. "Do you think you're some kind of *gorah*? Anyone could think you're white, **innit**."

I hated the way my brothers spoke. Every sentence ended with "innit". They sounded so stupid. I never wanted to be like them.

"You're just a racist, Harry," I replied.

"No, I'm just proud to be Punjabi. You're always trying to be white — that's your problem."

I stared at him. I wanted to kick the stupid racist, but I just called him "daddy's little robot" and left the room before he could throw his **trainer** at me.

One Saturday, my dad was getting ready to go to a family wedding. I was watching TV in the living room when he walked in.

During-reading questions

CHAPTER ONE

- 1 How does Manny feel about having an arranged marriage?
- 2 What does Manny want to achieve with his cheat, do you think?

CHAPTER TWO

- 1 How does Manny feel when he first meets Lisa?
- 2 Why does Lisa hold Manny's hand?

CHAPTER THREE

- 1 "These people are not the same as us." What does Manny's dad mean, do you think?
- 2 Why does Manny decide that he needs to get married?

CHAPTER FOUR

- 1 Why does Mr Sandhu ask Manny about his parents' opinion of him and Lisa, do you think?
- 2 Why do people sometimes look at Manny and Lisa when they are together?

CHAPTER FIVE

- 1 Why is Manny missing school more and getting drunk with Ady, do you think?
- 2 How does Lisa's letter change Manny's mind about India, do you think?

CHAPTER SIX

- 1 How does Manny feel on the journey from Delhi to his father's village?
- 2 Why does Manny's dad let him drink beer?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

- 1 Why doesn't Manny want to have a drink with Ranjit and the family, do you think?
- 2 Why does Manny change his mind about taking his dad's money?
- 3 Who is the person that coughs in the toilet, do you think?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

- 1 Where does Manny live now?
- 2 Why does Manny's dad now have two sons instead of three?
- 3 How does Manny feel about his life now?

After-reading questions

- 1 Was Manny right to take the money from his dad, do you think?
- 2 Will Manny ever talk to his family again, do you think?
- 3 How does Manny change during the story, do you think?
- 4 Manny's life isn't easy at the end of the book. He still has to work and study hard. So why is he happier now, do you think?

Exercises

CHAPTERS ONE AND TWO

- 1 Complete these sentences in your notebook, using the names from the box.**

Manny Ekbal Lisa Harry Ady Manny's dad

- 1 *..Manny..* has to share a room with his brother.
- 2 is going to get married soon.
- 3 is often angry and drunk.
- 4 doesn't really care about studying hard in school.
- 5 has a family who are less traditional and more relaxed about things.
- 6 is Sarah's cousin and goes to the same school as Manny.

CHAPTERS THREE AND FOUR

- 2 Use these words to join the sentences in your notebook.**

because while Despite so Although but

- 1 Harry slapped Manny *..because..* he had been caught stealing.
- 2 his feelings, Manny decides that he has to get married.
- 3 Manny's school grades are getting worse, Mr Sandhu wants to talk to him.
- 4 Manny doesn't want to do what his parents want, he doesn't know what he wants to do himself.
- 5 Lisa's mum arrives at the school in her car Lisa and Manny are kissing.
- 6 Manny tries to be a good student again, it doesn't last long after he goes to a party with Ady.