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## Of Women, Gay Men, and Dead Cats: The Precarity of Neoliberal Aspirations in *Made in Heaven* (2019).

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### Abstract

Written by Zoya Akhtar, Reema Kagti, and Alankrita Shrivastava, the first season of the nine-episode web series, *Made in Heaven*, premiered on Amazon Prime Video on 8 March 2019 to great acclaim, garnering praise for being both “daring and revelatory” in its “provocative exploration of gender, marriage and love” and for offering “binge-worthy television” (Qureshi). In this essay, we examine how *Made in Heaven* investigates women’s lives as they navigate precarity, a distinct and historically contingent condition produced by neoliberalism in India. It does so by especially paying attention to the configurations of precarity produced through the intersectional workings of gender and class simultaneously. We argue that the show maps the ubiquity of precarity as it permeates and engulfs all life but ends with offering alternatives to perpetuating neoliberal logics of precarity and precarization by suggesting other possible worlds of solidarities, love, and care.

**Keywords:** *Made in Heaven*; Neoliberal India; Gender; Precarity

The first season of the nine-episode web series, *Made in Heaven*, premiered on Amazon Prime Video on 8 March 2019 to great acclaim, garnering praise for being both “daring and revelatory” in its “provocative exploration of gender, marriage and love” and for offering “binge-worthy television” (Qureshi). Set in New Delhi, the show revolves around two wedding planners, and the personal and professional challenges they face as they get their new wedding planning business “Made in Heaven” off the ground, with each episode focusing on a wedding they organize. A collaborative effort by a team of mostly women filmmakers, the series was created by Bollywood auteurs Zoya Akhtar and Reema Kagti; written by them along with another well-known filmmaker Alankrita Shrivastava; and directed by Akhtar, Shrivastava, Prashant Nair, and Nitya Mehra. The series also has an ensemble cast; it is led by protagonists Tara Khanna and Karan Mehra who are business partners in “Made in Heaven,” and includes five other principal characters from different strata of society: Adil Khanna, Tara’s businessman-CEO husband; Faiza Naqvi, Tara and Adil’s friend; and other employees in the wedding agency (Kabir Basrai, the videographer, whose voiceover provides social commentary; Jaspreet Kaur, a new production assistant; and Shibani Bagchi, the production manager). In addition to fleshing out the lives of these characters, each episode, which

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revolves around a new wedding that the enterprise plans, also introduces new characters (the bride and bridegroom, and their families, for instance). Through these stories, *Made in Heaven* investigates especially women's lives as they navigate precarity, a distinct and historically contingent condition produced by neoliberalism in India. The show maps the ubiquity of precarity as it permeates and engulfs all life but ends with offering alternatives to perpetuating neoliberal logics of precarity and precarization by suggesting other possible worlds of solidarities, love, and care.

In our essay, we examine how *Made in Heaven* (henceforth *MIH*) pays attention to the particular configurations of precarity produced through the intersectional workings of gender and class simultaneously. It follows women's ambitions and the machinations they manufacture, and the ruthlessness with which they have to operate in order to exercise agency in a world that has very fastidious scripts of what female success, desire, and mobility entails and the permissible directions it is allowed to take. *Made in Heaven* does not adopt a dewy-eyed lens towards its principal and passing women characters. On the contrary, the show steadfastly observes the emotional-affective, linguistic, and aesthetic coldness they acquire as armor to survive an impossibly hostile and precarity-producing world. It offers an unmitigated look at the games they play, lies they tell, people they hurt, and the violence they perpetuate to be active agents of neoliberalism. In fact, the show is scathing in its depiction of how feudal and neoliberal ideologies converge in the moments when elite women marginalize, abuse, and exploit their subaltern counterparts (episode 8, "Bridezilla" and episode 7, "A Royal Affair").

And yet, *MIH* distinguishes itself by its capacity to hold together, along with its critique, a genuine compassion for the women who traverse its milieu. It pierces through the familial, marital, sexual, professional, and sartorial pressures that grind women down. Women like Tara, Jazz, Faiza, Shibani, and Mrs. Gupta (Karan's landlady) are never purely victims; but neither are they exempt from the show's capacious ability to extend humanity to its characters. They are, each of them, survivors of abusive and/or discomfoting familial situations—narcissistic and emotionally icy mothers; drug-addict brothers; repressive fathers; violent, sexually-unavailable, unsupportive, and adulterous (ex)husbands. The way in which each episode webs together the present with the past, giving us the suffering that the women have endured and resolute (even violent) zeal with which each of them strives to make meaning of their lives—creates a psychologically complex context for understanding the practical-ethical compromises that the women participate in. The precarities women navigate in *MIH* are often endless and continuous, cutting across class: Tara, Faiza, Shibani and Jazz are all economically precarious and exist on a continuous spectrum of financial vulnerability. But their class origins, their differential access to social capital, and the disparateness in their proximity to material pleasures and privileges in post-liberalized India, opens up a simultaneously diverse and precise articulation of how precarity operates for women as classed subjects of a neoliberal world.

In that sense, *MIH* resonates with recent scholarship—such as Shrayana Bhattacharya's *Desperately Seeking Shah Rukh* (2021) or Suchismita Chattopadhyaya's research on finishing schools or grooming institutions in India<sup>3</sup>—that offer a meditation on and assessment of what

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<sup>3</sup> In her research on finishing or grooming schools and institutions in India, Suchismita Chattopadhyay notes how these finishing schools create a new neoliberal subject who treats her life like an enterprise and maximizes her potential. <https://omny.fm/shows/made-to-order/through-the-eyes-of-another>. See also, Anand Giridharadas, "Finishing Schools for the New India," *The New York Times*, August 24, 2007; and Gauri Pathak, "'Presentable': The Body and Neoliberal Subjecthood in Contemporary India," *Social Identities* 20.4-5 (2014): 314-329.



the last three decades of liberalization have meant for women and their material and emotional lives. For example, in the show, many flashbacks which relate to Tara's repressed past return to her time at the "Princess Grooming Academy," where she was part of a group of aspirational middle-class women being groomed or disciplined—to learn to eat, talk, walk, behave, or comport themselves a certain way—into polished self-regulating neoliberal subjects able to access the opportunities made available by globalization. Indeed, Tara is touted as the school's success story as she first gains a job as a worker in the service industry which leads to further upward mobility through access, and marriage, to a member of the city's elite. Tara's story—along with those of other women in the show—allows for an exploration of what India's economic liberalization has felt like for women, which is the topic of Bhattacharya's book. Bhattacharya casts what she calls a female gaze at the economy; and explores the emotional underpinnings of economic behavior through following the stories of women from different social strata as they navigate affective precarities related to economic ones.<sup>4</sup> *MIH* could similarly be read as telling a "story of the sentiments that structural transformation has evoked,"<sup>5</sup> as it tracks women's vulnerabilities, as they manifest across classes, in post-liberalization urban India.

### ***Made In Heaven* and Post-liberalization Cinematic/Postcinematic Contexts**

*MIH* marks a new moment in the post-liberalization cinematic trajectory of matrimony and conjugality, which have consisted primarily of two trends: the lavish designer wedding film and films that imagine post-nuptial life. *MIH* coalesces these trends as it gives its audience both the exhilaration of the extravagant wedding, as well as the vicissitudes of marital life. Even as it engages with and borrows from these preexisting post-liberalization cinematic scripts, it bends them by foregrounding the endemic and multiple intersecting precarities produced by neoliberalism. Through its intimate representation of India's wedding industrial complex, *MIH* unravels the institution of marriage and the place of amorous desire within the matrix of neoliberal aspirations. In *MIH*, romantic relationships, and the (im)possibility of their ratification through the ritual of the Big Fat wedding, lay bare the fault lines within individual affective landscapes and the gross contradictions within a larger political economy shot through with neoliberal precarities. Weddings and wedding-planning thus emerge as sites of contestations.

In a way, *MIH* intervenes in cinematic representations of the post-liberalization big-fat "designer" Indian wedding (*Hum Aapke Hain Kaun...!/HAHK*, 1994; *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge/DDJ*, 1995) and its diasporic offshoots (*Monsoon Wedding*, 2001; *Bride and Prejudice*, 2004), which are its most important cinematic precursors or references. These films served as an index and product of economic liberalization as they seized upon the site of the Hindu wedding—that readily conjoined the cornucopias of capitalism and traditionalism—to manage the excitement and anxiety generated by, and the cultural reconfigurations launched by, neoliberal economic reforms. In her essay, "An 'Arranged Love' Marriage: India's Neoliberal Turn and the Bollywood Wedding Culture Industry," Jyotsna Kapur examines the designer wedding phenomenon as "a specific class- based, gendered response to India's turn

<sup>4</sup> For Shrayana Bhattacharya, superhero/icon Shah Rukh Khan becomes a research device or method that allows her to bear witness to the stories the women tell about themselves. SRK is a metaphor in the book for "markets, money, freedom." Escape, relief or comfort, entertainment, aspiration, and achievement through hard work, SRK comes to represent different things to these post-liberalization women navigating the affective changes accompanying market changes.

<sup>5</sup> Shruti Rajagopalan, "Ideas of India," *Discourse* (February 3, 2022). <https://www.discoursemagazine.com/culture-and-society/2022/02/03/ideas-of-india-womens-love-longing-and-labor-post-liberalization/>

to neoliberalism.” Kapur argues that the “contemporary big wedding phenomenon” (227) forms the ideological centerpiece of such films in that it amalgamates an upper-class, caste-based patriarchy with post-liberalization politics of individuated choice, articulated, most often, through conspicuous consumption. These wedding films served up spectacles of plenitude as harmonious happy (Hindu) families with contented servants celebrated traditional rituals.<sup>6</sup> Even a diasporic/cross-over film like *Monsoon Wedding*—which contested the “utopia” of Bollywood spectacles such as *HAAK* or *DDLJ* by being “critical of the rosy picture presented in its family dramas” (Sharpe 61)<sup>7</sup>—ended up rendering “invisible the widening gap between rich and poor, urban and rural areas under India’s economic liberalization policy” (Sharpe 76).

*MIH* interrupts the “Shining India” narrative presented in these wedding films, deploying, instead, the wedding as a locus to investigate the widespread and deep precarity in neoliberal India. Thus, in *MIH*, henna/mehndi festivities become sites of molestation of the gender and class subaltern; Hindu, upper-caste identity asserted in post-1990s wedding films metamorphoses into Hindu Right hooliganism. Traditionalism is not sentimentalized but exposed as feudal and regressive, especially for women. The women are not virginal and self-sacrificing receptacles of homeland culture but take up space to vocalize their needs and resourcefully navigate the volatile socio-economic sphere; class stratification, aspirations, and anxieties are front and center rather than rendered invisible. As Meheli Sen notes in her insightful essay on *MIH*, through its portrayal of “the great Indian family, the big, fat Indian wedding, the very idea of romantic love, and the heterosexual couple,” as “toxic, corrupt, and irredeemable,” the series offers “a stunning indictment of all that Bollywood traditionally celebrates.”

Indeed, *MIH* engages with, and extends, New Bollywood’s depiction of the post-nuptial afterlife of the romantic couple within the context of structural vulnerability. Sangita Gopal’s groundbreaking work on love and marriage in New Bollywood’s cinematic corpus examines a post-liberalization trend to imagine and represent the previously neglected terrain of marital life (*Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna*, 2006; *Honeymoon Travels Pvt. Ltd.*, 2007). Gopal argues that, in disavowing romance, these films, mainstream or multiplex, replace “the problematic of romance with one concerned with intimacy.” It is the couple’s “private space,” their neoliberal subjectivities played out in the context of privatized, internal impediments and events that come to dominate New Bollywood cinema” (Gopal 18). *MIH* presents us with several couples: unmarried, on the verge of marriage, post-nuptial; old and young; mostly heterosexual although the show is certainly not inattentive to non-heteronormative coupledness or intimate relationships. But what is constant across them is the political economy of intimacy, the entanglement of coupledness—its consummation or crisis—with interlocking differentials of insecurity. Thus, for example, the complications in Tara and Adil’s relationship and marriage are not merely a private matter of a husband cheating on his wife, or a couple unable to conceive. What impedes their intimacy is that they belong to different

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<sup>6</sup> As Rustom Bharucha states of the ur-text of wedding films, *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*, “the economy that supports the representation of wealth and happiness in the film is not exposed” and “the representation of capital is extravagant and loaded with fun, but at no point in the film is its ‘illusion’ called into question” (804). The poor are excluded, and “class signs are almost entirely eradicated” in the film (803).

<sup>7</sup> See Megha Anwer and Vrinda Marwah, “The Incest Wound in Hindi Cinema” for a discussion of sexual abuse in *Monsoon Wedding*.



social strata (propertied wealth vs aspirational lower-class) and that their coupling or intimacy emerges or is forged within these contexts of material precarity or privilege.

Here, *MIH*'s industrial context as a web-series on a global digital platform is also important. The series is part of a “post-Bollywood’ media dispensation, where the basic parameters of the commercial movie industry and its generic matrices are being radically reimagined, if not rejected altogether” (Sen). *MIH* walks the line with other web series on OTT platforms (*Little Things*, 2016–2019)<sup>8</sup> and anthology films (*Lust Stories*, 2018; *Modern Love Mumbai*, 2022) that revise/reimagine romance and marriage in postmillennial New Media terrain. Likewise, *MIH* also belongs to a group of other women-helmed web-series—such as *Bombay Begums* (2021), *Masaba Masaba* (2020), and *Four More Shots Please* (2019)—that cover somewhat similar terrain exploring love, labor, leisure, longing, or loneliness of women in neoliberal urban India. In fact, the writers of *MIH* (Zoya Akhtar, Reema Kagti, and Alankrita Shrivastava) have all been involved in multiplex films and OTT platforms. This speaks to both the traffic between mainstream, multiplex, and other emergent new media spaces, as well as the increased opportunities for women creators in the digital space.<sup>9</sup>

In an interview, Reema Kagti, one of the creators of *MIH*, extols digital platforms for “encourag[ing] stories of women, diversity and inclusiveness, which a conventional theatrical release doesn’t. Also, the lack of censorship results in creators not censoring themselves.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in its initial years, OTT platforms were not subject to the whims of the Censor Board of Film Certification, the government-appointed statutory body, which clears and certifies every film in India before its theatrical release. However, since 2021, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has announced stricter digital guidelines and oversight mechanisms. While *MIH* escaped the wrath of Hindu right-wing groups, in contrast to another Amazon Prime series such as *Tandav* (2021), there is no doubt that cultural producers in India exist in a highly politicized and precariatized environment of increased surveillance, and a tightening grip on all cultural/media production—whether Bollywood or OTT platforms.<sup>11</sup> *MIH*, thus, belongs to a world that is all too familiar with the aggressive muffling of any views/content that run contrary to the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)’s agenda. Loss of privacy, weaponization of laws to persecute people, rampant cultural conservatism in a foundationally inequitable society, and the obsession with marriage as the institutional-vehicle that reproduces caste, class, and gender inequity—this is the world of *MIH*. In this context, the final episodes of season one of *MIH*, which perfectly demonstrate the intertwining of neoliberal precarity and Hindutva as they bear upon love and marriage, become especially potent.

<sup>8</sup> Considering how India is a global leader in the wedding industrial complex, where weddings are a multibillion-dollar industry, it is also not surprising that two of the popular Netflix reality television shows revolve around the business of weddings: *The Big Day* (2021) and *Indian Matchmaking* (2020).

<sup>9</sup> Aparna Purohit, Head of India Originals at Amazon Prime Video, discusses the company’s commitment toward gender equality, “With more women at the creative helms (as writers, editors, cinematographers, directors, producers), more female characters emerge, with more agency, better representation and more engaging plots and themes.” See, Sweta Kaushal, “Amazon Prime Video’s Efforts Against Gender Divide,” *Forbes*, April 24, 2022. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/swetakaushal/2022/04/24/amazon-prime-videos-efforts-against-gender-divide-focus-on-writers-rooms/?sh=58f6f734173c>

<sup>10</sup> Kaveree Bamzai, “This is Us,” *Open: The Magazine*, July 19, 2019. <https://openthemagazine.com/open-decade-2009-2019/this-is-us-2/>

<sup>11</sup> Samantha Subramanian, “When the Hindu Right Came for Bollywood,” *The New Yorker*, October 10, 2022.

### **“Nothing Cuts It.” *The Internalization and Universalization of Precarity in Neoliberal India***

To discuss the internalization and universalization of precarity, we draw upon a range of theoretical studies of precarity (especially Lauren Berlant’s work on “cruel optimism” and Isabelle Lorey’s work on “biopolitical governmental self-governing” or “self-precarization”), and scholarly work that discusses precarities engendered by neoliberal capitalism—as well as coping mechanisms developed to respond to precarious material existence—in twenty-first-century South Asia and India more particularly (Gooptu, Mankekar, Nayar, Dwivedi, Lau and Mendes—among others). For example, in his work, Pramod K. Nayar examines representations of precarity in South Asian literature to note that “a sense of precarity ... haunts the vast majority of Indians” (2017, 47) and “that there is no invulnerable life, there is no guaranteed safety” (2022, 145). In their work, Ana Cristina Mendes and Lisa Lau note how Arundhati Roy’s novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* highlights the potential and limits of the creative “agency” of the precarious “in response to the debilitating economic and political structures within which they must survive [ ...] without compromising on depicting the bleakness and oppressive landscape of Indian neo-liberalism” (74). Nandini Gooptu and Purnima Mankekar’s work, that examines how the discourse of enterprise proliferated in post-liberalization India as a pathway to success and a solution to neoliberal precarity, is especially useful for us as *MIH* interrogates the crises that entrepreneurialism addresses and produces through focusing on the psychological impact or strain of relentless insecurity on individuals struggling to fulfill the neoliberal ideal.

*MIH*’s social world is a quagmire of paradoxes: the elite are endlessly entitled to their ambitions, sexual dalliances, consumerism, and mobility—all the markers of neoliberal subjecthood—while those on the margins have to beg, borrow, and steal in order to fashion themselves differently from what their impoverished lives determine. There exists an unsavory alliance between residual-feudal and the emergent-neo-conservative impulses. In this social landscape, marriage is predominantly a vehicle for caste and class consolidation. Arranged marriages are really schemes for business and political-electoral gains; Westernized affectations and foreign educational degrees barely mask dowry-seeking in-laws and astrology-pundits who are quick to pronounced women inauspicious *mangliks*. Homophobic mobs, mobilized by the Hindu right-wing, are never far from the action.

On the other hand, *MIH* also gives us the world of rational-aspirational individuals, governed by the desire to better themselves. “They make an ‘enterprise of themselves’ by developing suitable ‘techniques of the self,’ conducive to self-care and self-responsibilization” (Gooptu 8). They follow all the protocols of self-actualization available to people in their social status: they go to finishing schools; commute for work that takes them out of down-market urban geographies and into the heart of the elite metropolis (New and South Delhi). They take loans from family members and loan-sharks to launch entrepreneurial start-ups and build commensurately grandiose offices; enter marriages that enable upward mobility; and visit bars to give expression to “illegal” and precarious queer desire. The show presents us with a robust cast of characters who represent India’s neoliberal youth. The lives of these men and women, all in their 20s and 30s, are framed by a markedly neoliberal commitment to productivity, a relentless management and expansion of the self. At the same time, their enactment/pursuit of aspirations trigger all kinds of spatial, cultural, class, caste, gender, and sexual trespassing, regularly exceeding the limits of propriety set by the old-guard and their neo-conservative



allies. Their neoliberal ambitions are often interlaced with an alternative imagination of what it means to live by a new ethic: where love and marriage can transgress class and religious stratifications; where women and their families don't "pay anyone to marry [them]" (episode 4, "The Price of Love"); where class-interlopers are welcomed with open arms; and gay love and sex are championed by both family and state.

And yet, the show's genius lies in that it pulls no punches as it uncovers the tenuous fragility of these millennial transgressions. All their desperate, violent, and schizoid attempts to contrive and coerce a successful entrepreneurial self, and in the process upend social-economic hierarchies, are continuously undermined. In the end, as Tara puts it, almost "nothing cuts it" (episode 7, "A Royal Affair"). Neoliberalism's precarities are tenacious and work overtime to undo neoliberalism's aspirations. Or, to put it another way, by focusing on the bodies and identities made precarious by neoliberalism, and their despairing efforts at escaping the shackles of precarity, *MIH* unveils neoliberalism's promises of upward mobility, entrepreneurial success, and self-fashioning as grand myths or as falsities doomed to failure. This is because the promise is the poison.

Here, we rely on Lauren Berlant's idea of "cruel optimism:" the individual and collective emotional registers that come in the way of toppling systems that perpetuate precarity and compromise our wellbeing. Berlant suggests that the precariat, as an affective class, is distinguished by "cruel optimism"—a perverse and compulsive adherence to the fantasy of a "good life" that is no longer attainable in the present world order, and perhaps was never truly realizable or universal to begin with. No matter how hard we slog and do everything right, there are there no guarantees that things will get better or that our neoliberal aspirations will be realized. In fact, Berlant goes a step further to argue that cruel optimism "exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (1). It is, therefore, precisely our addiction to neoliberalism's phantasmic ambitions that ensure our continuity in a state of precarity, instead of opting, for instance, for an alternative route such as undertaking a struggle for a more secure world. Cruel optimism, then, refers also to the personal and communal "logic of adjustment" (10), the coping mechanisms that allow us to withstand the cruel contradictoriness of the present moment. These techniques and skills of management make it possible for us to navigate what's overwhelming; comfort us through an existence that is "painful, costly and obsolete" (Marcuse 256); and help bridge the gaping chasm between life and fantasy.

Importantly, for Berlant, these "affective rhythms of survival" (11) that emerge when we're confronted with the attrition of the neoliberal fantasy, find articulation in the aesthetic conventions and genres of the moment, and contribute to producing a whole new precarious public sphere. This is why Berlant studies affective responses not as solitary utterances but as symptoms of shared emotional atmospheres. We study *MIH* as an expression of neoliberal India's public sphere. It explores the "cruel optimism" that sustains and propels India's urban youth and re-entrenches neoliberalism as the only modality for existence. And it does so by examining the gendered and class dimensions of neoliberal precarity.

With liberalization, a key shift occurred in Hindi cinema: the most popular big-budget films dedicated their narrative focus to the lives of the extreme rich. Gone were the iconic templates of the everyman exemplified in figures like the naive indigent played by actors like Raj Kapoor in films like *Sabri 420* (1955) and *Awaara* (1951), or the 1970s figure of the Angry Young Man

railing against a corrupt state and its dysfunctions, played by Amitabh Bachchan in *Zanjeer* (1973) and *Deewar* (1975). Their postcolonial cinematic embodiments were replaced in the 1990s by the grotesquely lavish, decorative lifestyles of industrialist joint families (*Maine Pyar Kiya*, 1989; *Hum Aapke Hain Koun...*, 1994; *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, 1998; *Vivah*, 2006) and diasporic business tycoons (*Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, 1995; *Pardes*, 1997). For film audiences of the 1990s and early 2000s, class elites and their unabashed cultures of consumption represented a new aspirational goal as well as a new universal norm. The values, rituals, anxieties, and preoccupations of the *nouveau riche* were the subjects of national-cultural mythologization. Most critically, it was their capacity to revive a fetishistic traditionalism and reconcile it with unrepentant-luxuriating in international brands that turned them into India's new ideal consumer-citizens (Leela Fernandes) with cross-class, mass appeal. Globe-trotting, factory-running, convertible-driving protagonists (*Dil Chahta Hai*, 2001; *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*, 2011) were insignias of Indian liberalization's success-story. They showcased the privileges afforded to those who were willing inductees into neoliberal ideology and protocols.

By the second decade of the twenty-first century, however, India had transitioned from the glee and gusto of liberalization to a nation contending with the failures and inadequacies of neoliberalism's promises. The failure of neoliberal economics, combined with the Hindu-rightwing takeover of the Indian state has dramatically altered the country's political-cultural landscape. In this context, the universal appeal of the rich has taken on a distinctly different tenor. While a fascination with elite lifestyles and life-struggles still dominates a significant portion of Bollywood films and shows on VOD and OTT platforms, their enigma, and aspirational-signification is also tainted by a melancholic underpinning—a recognition of the impossibility of exiting the ordinary, crushing mundanity of everyday existence under the brutal regime of neoliberalism. Nothing is ever enough! Even entering the echelons of power and prestige does not guarantee happiness; even for a moment, one cannot afford to pause the desperate scrambling for security.

This is the cruel realization that Tara articulates in her final meltdown-confrontation with her husband Adil: "I thought it'll be perfect, you know. That if I had you, and if I had this life, I'd be happy ... I'm not" (episode 9, "The Great Escape"). With *MIH*, then, we observe a new phase in post-liberalization cinema and its New Media offshoots. The construction of the rich as the once affirmatory universal norm has morphed, instead, into an avenue to analyze the universality of neoliberal precarity, in which even the affluent are not exempt from professional-economic and inter-relational insecurity. The upper classes, as the site of hope, aspiration, desire, and encouragement to pursue neoliberal dreams, now function as reminders of the intrinsic distortion of those dreams; of the futility and unviability of escape from the drudgery that neoliberalism condemns us to.

Isabelle Lorey suggests that with neoliberalism, precarity moves from the fringes of society, where it applied to nonhegemonic others, to the center and emerges as a "as a mode of life" (viii) embedded in everyday existence. This normalization and universalization of insecurity produces individuals who resort to copious tactics of self-governing in order to manage and mitigate the very social conditions responsible for their precarity. This self-responsibilization mantra—fix your own problems, manage your own suffering, overcome your own pathologies—is touted as agency and self-empowerment. Within this rhetoric, "insecurity becomes recast as freedom, self-exploitation reframed as 'being your own boss'" (Prentice,





qtd. in Parry 9). The constant regulation and disciplining of one's conduct fosters "fantasies of mastering" one's own precariousness (Lorey 26).

In *MIH* we encounter a whole host of women who have internalized neoliberal ambitions, and also its self-subscribing logic. These women are convinced that they hold the magic bullet to escape their precarious, unfulfilled, paltry existence. Even a Mrs. Gupta, who embodies the show's Punjabi middle-class, gauche, conservative worldview,<sup>12</sup> adopts this neoliberal ethic of needing to persistently "work" on herself. Her domestic time and space are perpetually retrained/repurposed for weight-loss. She's a multi-tasking expert: whether watching TV, talking to her daughter, or doing kitchen-work, she is also, almost always, atop a fat-dissolving machine. And, in keeping with the logic of maximum efficiency, her weight-loss regimen seemingly involves little effort on her part: the vibrating belt that gyrates against her flabby waist does the work without her having to sweat or exert herself for desired gains. Yet, this form of self-management is, in fact, exceedingly laborious. It masks a profound nameless-invisible effort—to be desirable to her gentle and gently disinterested (surreptitiously gay) husband. Her low-intensity weight-loss program, then, disguises the deep emotional toil that she must sustain to disavow the truth about her husband's homosexual desires and snooping surveillance of Karan.

In that sense, *MIH* masterfully unpacks the excess, indignity, malice, self-delusion, and guilt that accompany women's industriousness in a neoliberal world where they are not only encouraged to express desires that exceed their class-cultural context, but also expected to take singular responsibility for the attainment of those desires. Tara and her sister Karuna scoff at their mother's reductive view of women's capacities and her unabashedly utilitarian view of marriage (a fair, pretty face is all they can rely on to get on in the world; "Love won't pay the bills. You must be aware how much money the man is bringing home," episode 3, "It's Never Too Late"). But these crucial flashback sequences tell us something important about women's self-directed cruelty and their imagination of the limited avenues available to women to improve their lives for themselves and their daughters. These memories also contextualize Tara's unwavering quest for security; they help us understand her strategic and timely weaponization of her beauty for securing a financially sound marriage. Tara's journey from an aspirational secretary—with access only to an un-posh English accent, and an Old-Delhi finishing-school version of upper-class etiquette—to an eerily poised, perfectly manicured, and impeccably dressed wife of an industrialist and partner in her own wedding-planning business ("hard and shiny, like a diamond", as Faiza puts it), is a confirmation of the lessons her mother ingrained in her to maximize and leverage her beauty.

At the same time, her trajectory is also a reminder that it takes a whole lot more than just "good looks" for a woman like Tara to succeed. Conniving to be in the right place at the right time; play-acting innocence; deliberated, furtive hand-touches; taking loans; having a friend like Faiza constantly translate her new elite social landscape; managing the complex emotional-practical outcomes of being indebted to a friend who betrays you by sleeping with your husband—these are only some of things Tara has to navigate in addition to the calculative deployment of her good looks. Add to this the boundless hours of work, of being on her feet, traversing different urban geographies as she scrambles to keep her business going, keeping a straight face through the vicious classist, sexist, casteist remarks she

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<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Gupta reprimands her daughter for reading too much because no one wants to marry a smart girl," and she is uncomfortable about Karan, her young, single male renter, bringing home different men each night.

encounters from her clients, her mother-in-law, and even her husband—she must relentlessly perform and juggle all of incrementally taxing forms of labor to fulfill her aspirations, yes, but also just survive a hyper-aspirational world.

In a rare moment, Tara lets slip her perfectly-poised persona. In a state of rage, she trashes Faiza's house after discovering that Adil is cheating on her with Faiza. When Adil finds out, he is appalled at her over-the-top response, at the crassness of hysteria, and hits her where it hurts most: "At the end of the day, class just fucking shows up. You can't buy it. It can't be taught. And it can't be married into clearly. Maybe think about it next time before letting your *jaat* [caste/class] show" (episode 7, "A Royal Affair"). This is why Tara can never rest easy. Even when she lands a perfectly lucrative marital situation, she compulsively continues down the road of neoliberal self-actualization. The desire to have her own business, and "do it on her own" (episode 8, "Pride and Bridezilla") rather than just rely on her husband's fortune is, of course, the classic neoliberal myth and fantasy of individual autonomy. And yet, her instinct is spot on: she cannot afford to rely on her husband's munificence. In the end, she must herself conjure the conditions of her resilience.

Unfortunately, all the grueling hours of work, all the finagling of the system, and all the self-modulation and self-management are undone by the tricks and tenacity of neoliberal precarity. While precarity was originally associated with the lives of people ridden by poverty (Barbier), today it denotes a generalized vulnerability to unemployment. What was once a hallmark of the proletarian condition, today, the threat of losing one's employment status plagues managers, white-collar professionals as well (Parry 3). But not just unemployment; loss of professional reputation, loss of personal credibility, losing oneself to spirals of debt, being undervalued by bosses, managing impossible-to-please clients, fending off sexual predators at work, and workplaces vandalized by rightwing mobs—these threats haunt the actions and exertions of nearly all characters in *MIH*. Such professional predicaments are baked into the characters' understanding of what it takes to make it in neoliberal India.

And we see how precarity's pervasiveness cuts across class. Neoliberalism's disciplinary effects are experienced by everyone, including those who belong to the upper rungs of class stratification (Seymour). Even Adil, who in many ways occupies the top of the social-financial pyramid, is not inured against the pressure to demonstrate profit and business expansion. This is why when Jauhari, a small-time plumbing-shop owner from Old Delhi, can see through Adil's façade of accomplishments, it's an especially jarring assault to his pride. Adil may have started new factories, but that doesn't offset the falling stock value of "Khanna infrastructures." In the end, Jauhari's capital trumps Adil's social capital; "speaking good English" doesn't automatically lead to good business acumen (episode 8, "Pride and Bridezilla"). In a precarious ecosystem, Adil and Jauhari can both be co-investors in a business, and Adil has no choice but to inhabit the same room as a man he finds socially reprehensible. Adil may refuse to eat food from the "filthy streets" of Old Delhi; but he can't stop shady businessmen from that same geography from owning "three-percent" stock in his company.

Permanent precarity inflects everyone's professional life. Tara, a now wealthy businesswoman, is constantly under pressure from her husband Adil and her in-laws to repay the debt she's taken from them to launch her wedding planning business, *Made in Heaven*. Karan, her upper-middle-class business-partner suffers daily humiliations from his father and physical threats from Jauhari, the money lender from whom he borrowed money to start the company.



Karan is all too familiar with the shame of a failed business. The burden of losing his jazz bar—his dream project—haunts his entrepreneurial confidence and interpersonal relationships.

Shibani, Tara and Karan’s friend and righthand/main employee, a middle-class, educated woman, endures a lower status in the professional hierarchy—she’s the production manager at Made in Heaven and not a partner—even though she was a part of the original team that came up with the business plan (presumably because unlike the other two she could not afford the initial investment capital to launch the company). As a single mother, whose ex-partner refuses to support their daughter’s financial needs, Shibani is frustrated at having to remind Karan and Tara of her value and demand fair compensation for her contributions to the business. In the end, she moves to a competing wedding planning firm in order to afford her daughter’s elite education.

Likewise, Jaspreet is caught between being demeaned for her “West Delhi” accent and her “synthetic outfits” that connote her impoverished class background and being punished with job-loss when she contrives to dress more chicly. Through Jazz’s enterprise, the show “valorizes the work ethic, spirit of risk-taking, and self-sufficiency of its lower-middle-class protagonists as [she] successfully traverse[s] the class-polarized spaces of New Delhi” (Mankekar 28). Nothing, however, guarantees job security for her: neither selecting a new sobriquet “Jazz” as a way of fashioning a new identity to match her “hi-fi” job, nor being incredibly resourceful at her job, or being an exceptionally compassionate person. Professional uncertainty is, of course, only the tip of the iceberg of the precarity she experiences at home: a drug-addict brother who steals from his own family; helpless parents who rely on her financially, emotionally, and physically to deal with the mayhem the brother unleashes; street harassment from men in her neighborhood constitute the everyday harshness of Jazz’s material and affective reality. Moreover, she is at the receiving end of the condescension and cruelty of middle/upper-class women: her boss, Shibani, passes snide comments on her dress (“Punjabi pastry”) and domicile (“next time anything like this happens, catch a bus to Dwarka or Rohini, or wherever the fuck you’re from”); a bridezilla (episode 8) yells at her for being a “fucking *ganwaar* [inurbane]. A fucking vernac”). But, in several ways, her life looks and feels very different from Pooja’s—the young *mehndi* (henna)-girl assaulted by the king of Jodhpur at his son’s wedding (episode 7, “A Royal Affair). Jazz seems to enjoy much more agency and mobility. She articulates a far more concrete vision of upward mobility. At the same time, there is a foundational, shared vulnerability in the challenges they encounter, the fears that govern them, and the frustrations that constrain their lives.

### **Wedding Planning and Weddings as Precarious Enterprises**

In many ways, the wedding planning business is a definitively neoliberal and precarious enterprise. It involves a wide array of small-businesses; self-employed contractors and their menial laborers; official and illicit circuits of money-lending and loan-sharks; free-flow of traffic, capital, and goods between the unevenly developed geographies of the city. All of these come together to create an employment network of seasonal workers who are infinitely dispensable, with very little scope for upward mobility, at always at the whims of those above them, and burdened with high-sounding epithets meant to conceal their disposability (Standing 17).

In this business, Tara and Karan are forever in crisis-response mode, trying to keep pace with the explicitly outlandish or the sub-textual near-impossible demands/needs of their clients. Arranging celebrity performances, wedding music videos, heart-shaped beds, antediluvian rituals like marrying a tree, familial reconciliations, escape from coerced marriages, not to mention the complicated fallouts of these capricious and tall order asks—it's all par for the course in their job. Tara and Karan's days and nights are swallowed up by this job: their days are spent organizing the paraphernalia for the decorative hyperreality their clients desire; at night, they oversee the fantasy's execution. They're never off the clock; there's always a new emergency waiting to strike. Errant social media footage from a wedding going viral, aggrieved brides discovering they've been duped by dowry-seeking men or impotent NRIs, angry grooms, extortionist in-laws, oppressive parents—all of this mandates that as wedding planners, Tara and Karan must remain “infinitely adaptable” (Standing 24) in order to ward off precarity.

In nearly every one of the weddings they plan, families of the bride and groom arbitrarily and unfairly threaten to dissolve the contract or not pay Tara and Karan their fee. The families show no care for how long the two have spent and how far they've gone in planning a wedding. If they're unable to resolve a problem, no matter how outside their purview of operation the problem may be, the immediate consequence is the retraction of their work contract. All kinds of things put their work in jeopardy, threatening to hurl them into a credit deficit they can ill-afford. Anything and everything can torpedo their professional survival: from refusing to invade the privacy of a bride and carry out a private investigation about her past, to not being able to reconcile quarreling couples on the eve of their wedding, or mend fences between a son and his parents. Their “uptitled” designation (Standing 17) as partners of a joint-venture barely conceals the extreme itinerancy and volatility in their sense of security. They're always one catastrophe away from losing their barely-afloat business.

Tara and Karan's fetishistic investment in building an excessively large, upscale office, when they're barely making ends meet, articulates this precarity at the core of their operations. In an economy of otherwise fluctuating fortunes, a lavish office is a mythical spatial anchorage. It functions as a stand-in for, and a concrete reminder of, having arrived. At the same time, the *Made in Heaven* office is also a testimony to the hollow center of their enterprise: it's all about appearances, about *looking* successful and impressing the uber-elite clients they want to serve and satisfy. Given how little time they actually spend in the office, and that the office is destroyed (in the final episode of season one) by Hindu right-wing goons objecting to Karan's queer-advocacy, Jauhari's premonition rings alarmingly true. They should not have wasted their time and money accruing the simulacra of security. Under neoliberal precarity, nothing remains standing or secure; nothing is insured against the onslaught of the violence and unpredictable oscillations that precarity unleashes.

And finally, it is not just the infrastructure of wedding-planning but the institution of marriage itself that comes under scrutiny for the way it upholds a precarity-inducing world-order. Foundationally, precarity jeopardizes not just professional and employment security, it also distorts subject-formation, altering people's relationship to themselves and to each other. It cultivates human beings that are driven by self-serving hedonism and endless opportunism; it converts relationships into transactions for self-aggrandizement, it produces an alienation from oneself and others. This is why, self-delusion doesn't just characterize Mrs. Gupta. It is, in fact, at the heart of so many marriages that transpire in *MIH*. Whether it's the young Punjabi



hotel-owner who readily convinces himself that his bride-to-be could never cheat on him with her favorite film star on the eve of their wedding (episode 2, “Star Struck Lovers”); or the UK-based doctor who thinks that he’s successfully convinced his fiancé to not go through with the tree-marrying ceremony as a way to fend-off the inauspicious alignment of stars in her birth-chart (episode 6, “Something Old, Something New”); or the Ludhiana bride (episode 5, “A Marriage of Convenience”) who refuses to dissolve her marriage to a violent, impotent man because it is her only recourse to exit the morass of her smalltown—the grooms, brides, and their respective families willingly turn a blind eye to what stares them in the face. They do so to get on with the business of moving up and acquiring whatever semblance of security they can afford. And yet, an intangible terror tethered to the fundamental unknowability of people, the terrifying unreliability of even one’s most intimate relationships grips so many of the characters we encounter in the show. This is why, “Who the fuck is the person I’m about to marry” and “do I even know them” are the most pressing questions the characters are invariably left asking.

### “We’ll Survive:” Resisting Precarity

Perhaps the most efficient guarantee of neoliberalism’s persistence, and even more dangerous than neoliberalism’s economic crisis, is the crisis of politics and the collapse of resistance it has induced. Neoliberalism’s ubiquity, its spaceless-nameless quality (Monbiot), the acceptance and normalization of its dictate that “there is no alternative” have produced a logic whereby, as Frederic Jameson argues, “it is earlier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism.”<sup>13</sup> This is because neoliberalism commands not only the market but also insists that a market rationality govern all aspects of life; politics, citizenship, social relations, identities, and subjectivities are all subject to survival of the fittest ethic. The possessive individual and consumer citizen are held up as exemplars of neoliberal modality.<sup>14</sup> It’s also hard to conjure resistance to this world order because, as Byung-Chul Han suggests, unlike in industrial capitalism’s system of oppression, where “both the oppressors and the oppressed were visible,” neoliberalism is preserved not through repression, but through seduction; prohibition and privation are replaced by the goals of pleasure and fulfilment. Once the oppressed worker is converted into a “free contractor,” a self-exploiting “entrepreneur,” the class struggle is easily obfuscated. People start to “see themselves, not society, as the problem.” A combination of factors—the systematic dismantling of unions; the high rates of unemployment; precarious employment; huge debts; threat of state violence; the expansion of the surveillance state; and the “emergence of apocalyptic narratives in which the future appears indeterminate, bleak, and insecure” (Giroux)—have resulted in a generation that is despairing, resigned, burnt out, and withdrawn from the political arena. In other words, people recognize that there is little they can do as individuals. All significant gains made in workers’ rights were a consequence of collective action, revolutions, strikes. Under neoliberalism this kind of political agency feels like a thing of the past; the working class is too heterogenous, fragmented, and lacks a work-based identity and solidaristic labor community (Standing 12) to be able to sustain any collective action.

<sup>13</sup> Frederic Jameson, “Future City,” *New Left Review* 21 (May-June), 2003. <http://newleftreview.org/II/21/fredric-jameson-future-city>.

<sup>14</sup> Henry A. Giroux, “Protesting Youth in an Age of Neoliberal Savagery,” *E-International Relations*, May 20, 2014, <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/05/20/protesting-youth-in-an-age-of-neoliberal-savagery/>

In *MIH*, we get so much of this precarious world, but we also get something else. Even as neoliberal precarity is ubiquitous, *MIH* presents a resistance to its overwhelming pervasiveness through showcasing solidarities that present an alternative to the “survival of the fittest” ethic. By the end, we see how different characters are “not seeking to escape precarity by falling in line and climbing the ladder to (projected and desired) social safety, but instead by substituting one set of precarities with a different set of belongings and relationships vital to life” (Mendes and Lau 72). A range of relationships suggest how allyship can be built with others who exist in structures of palimpsestic vulnerability. For instance, even though Shibani leaves “Made in Heaven” to work for a rival business “Harmony Weddings” when they make her a more lucrative competitive offer, she returns to warn Tara that Harmony will exploit the sexual scandal surrounding Karan and his vocal queer advocacy to steer clients away. Her rationale for helping Tara and Karan is that she doesn’t want her daughter “to grow up in a world that is mean” (episode 7, “A Royal Affair”). Even as this reduction of structural disenfranchisement to “mean-ness” is neoliberal-speak, there’s meaning in Shibani’s refusal to participate in producing or perpetuating precarity.

The central relationship undergirding the show is, of course, the one between Tara and Karan, a gay man, and a woman from a lower-middle class background. Their friendship represents an alternative alignment of gender and sexual politics against Hindu supremacist and capitalist heteropatriarchy. Karan and Tara are more than business partners; their respective histories of precarity—gendered, classed, and sexual—make them attuned to each other’s needs. While they are emotionally aloof with others, they are able to unfurl their layers of vulnerability and emotional trauma with one another. They speak truth to each other—a privilege that few others enjoy in their lives. Tara can demand that Karan put a stop to his debt-cycle; Karan can make her laugh even when she’s grieving the breakdown of her marriage. Even more, they anticipate each other’s thoughts, speak the same language, and share a common politics, such as when they decide to “pick up the tab” for their Muslim peon Khalil’s daughter’s wedding, telling him, “Aap haamari company mein shuru se hain, toh parivar hua na” (Since you’ve been with our company from the very beginning, you’re family, right?) (Episode 8, “Pride and Bridezilla”). It is precisely this alternative imagining of *parivar*/family—as chosen, inclusive, expansive—that is anathema to the exclusionary Hindu nationalist Sangh Parivar.<sup>15</sup> This reimagining of family presents a model of kinship not based in biology or blood but in affective solidarities. In *MIH*, hope and resilience are found in non-filial, non-normative, non-matrimonial relationships that are actively constructed through shared experiences and a conjoined sociality, as a community of choice across differences.

In a sense, the last two episodes of season one, not only forefront this affective community, they also attribute it with a political weight and inclination, morphing it into something larger than a purely emotive-intimacy. The final set of disruptions and reconciliations that transpire in episodes 8 and 9, form a bulwark of solidarity against the discriminatory and violent politics of the Hindu Right which, in India, accompanies, weaponizes, and exacerbates neoliberal precarity. This is best captured in the changing nature of Karan’s relationship to his own queerness. Until his first-hand experience with violence and sexual assault in police custody, Karan adopts an ostensibly apolitical attitude to his queerness. In episode 4, for instance, he hooks-up with a foreigner in a bar, and they make out in Karan’s car. When they’re interrupted and harassed by cops, Karan has to bribe them to get out of the situation. Back at Karan’s

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<sup>15</sup> Sangh Parivar is an umbrella term for Hindu Right-wing organizations.



apartment, the white-foreigner expresses his horror about their intimidatory encounter with the police: “How do you live like this?...What if you couldn’t afford to bribe them? We’d be in jail right now.” Karan dismisses the class-dimensions of police harassment: “It’s not so bad” and “No we wouldn’t [end up in jail]...When you live here, you see that it really doesn’t matter. Everyone just does what they want anyway. No one cares. It’s okay, relax.” Clearly, even mid-way through the show, Karan mistakes his ability to bribe with the right to freedom. By the end, however, Karan has to recognize that he was misreading the tentative (and impermanent) privilege his class affords him for a universal ability to do as one likes. Ultimately, even someone like him is not exempt from the violence of a homophobic state. And, so, with support from Tara, he launches a legal case to decriminalize homosexuality and leads a public campaign to rescue Indian culture from its self-appointed Hindutva protectors. In some ways, through this defiant gesture, Karan takes on more precarity, “thus seizing the prerogative of choice rather than accepting relegation, insisting on the right to at least choose which precariousities [he] will endure, if precarious [his life] must be” (Mendes and Lau 71). Karan’s journey from a man who disavows the class and political dimensions of sexuality, to someone who launches a public battle to reduce the queer community’s legal-social precarity, is a testimony to the way in which *MIH* expands individual identities into political configurations. In the bargain, it opens up important questions about what it means to extend beyond the self and self-preservation.

While sexual/queer precarity is something that *MIH* attends to head-on, it also tackles the issue of precarity for religious minorities under a neoliberal Hindu nationalist regime. At first, in keeping with the real-world, systematic marginalization of Muslims in Modi’s India, the show too seems to reproduce an equivalent narratological marginalization. Muslims are always on the outskirts of romance and marriage. Whether it’s working-class Muslims like Khalil who are barely a presence in Tara and Karan’s company (and therefore in the show itself), the mechanic Nadeem (who Jazz turns to only when she faces rejection from her elite colleagues), or major characters like Faiza and Nawab, Muslim characters remain un-incorporable within a mainstream imagination of romance and nuptial-bliss. Tara’s mother even goes as far as to say that Adil will never leave her for a “Muslim divorcee,” (referring to Faiza) and so she must remain patient and hang tight in her marriage (episode 7, “A Royal Affair”). For most of the show, Muslim characters connote the queer-repressed and the adulterous underbelly of love: always haunting, hidden, and cast aside for survival.

In the last two episodes, however, the show inverts its own sidelining of characters who in contemporary India embody religious minoritization and precarization. In one of the tenderest scenes in the series, Karan reconciles with Nawab, his childhood (Muslim) sweetheart who he had betrayed as an adolescent, in a panicked moment to prove his own heterosexuality. Karan and Tara also support Nutan—the daughter of their big-shot politician client—with her “great escape” from the coerced arranged marriage, and help her marry the man she loves, an ordinary Christian engineer from Cochin in a church ceremony (episode 9). It is significant that Nutan’s escape from her violent family, and this inter-faith marriage (Nutan is Hindu), is made possible with the help of *hijras*, people marked by gender/sexual precarity in an oppressively heteronormative society. And, in an intimate sun-dappled terrace ceremony, Khalil’s aspirational English-speaking daughter, Asma, a proud professional (an accountant), marries her Hindu colleague, Subodh. In fact, meeting Asma—a young Muslim woman—and organizing her wedding becomes the catalyst for Tara’s reconnection to her

disavowed lower-class origins/biological family and her subsequent “escape” from her own lucrative but unhappy marriage. Asma-Subodh’s wedding is the first and only wedding at which we see Tara, Karan, and Jazz participate with authentic joy, without the threat of insecurity, vulnerability, and crisis marring the pleasure of the celebration. Attending this ceremony in Old Delhi—the only non-posh location and non-extravagant wedding festivities we see in the series—is what helps Tara decide that she will no longer be governed by insecurity; that she will not normalize the dictate of neoliberal precarity to “keep taking it.” After Asma’s wedding, Tara visits her sister’s home in Old Delhi and exchanges the first tender moments with her family. She even revisits the Princess Grooming Academy and speaks to the young women currently enrolled there, starkly sharing her hard-won lessons about the limits of neoliberal aspirations with them:

I polished myself, erased every bit of the old me. I was so full of dreams and ambition. But no one tells you that the façade is just superficial. Confidence comes from your inner identity. I ran so far away from my old life that I maybe lost myself in the process. I’m afraid I don’t know who I am. My advice is that: learn as much as you can about grooming—table manners, etiquette, dinner, make-up, English, clothes. But never let go of your inner identity. Hold on to that. Please.

Cumulatively, these narratological and characterological deviations from, and defiance against, the frantic pursuit of neoliberal individual entrepreneurialism push against the logic that there are no alternatives. It is true that Hindu Right hooligans destroy the precious office of *Made in Heaven*, trashing the furniture and graffitiing the walls in bright red paint with homophobic slurs, leaving behind a slaughtered-bloody dead cat at the reception desk. The dead cat allows us to reflect on an aspect of what Nayar calls “ecoprecarity” and how “the relationship *between* and *among* human and other life/non-life forms is constantly edging towards the precarious often resulting in species death” (2022, 8). This final sequence does a remarkable job of capturing the conjoined fates of human, non-human animal, and infrastructural worlds under neoliberal Hindutva. Even so, this is not the final-lasting image the season ends with. Instead, we have Tara and Karan, sharing a drink and laughing resolutely in the face of the vandalization they are surrounded by. Tara, in her bright red sari embodies a chronic counterpoint to the hateful slurs on the walls. When Karan presents her with his melancholic, despairing question, “What are we going to do,” Tara’s tenacity, resistance, and resilience shine through in her response: “We’ll survive” (episode 9, “The Great Escape”). And, not for a moment does her friend, or we the viewers, doubt her.





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