



SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY
HIGHER LEVEL
PAPER 1

Monday 6 November 2000 (afternoon)

1 hour

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Read the passage very carefully and then answer all the questions.

Texts in this examination paper have been edited: word additions or explanations are shown in square brackets []; substantive deletions of text are indicated by ellipses (three points ...); minor changes are not indicated.

Extract (pp. 192-199) from Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella. 1998. Friendship and Flirting: Micro-Politics in Kerala, South India. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4(n.s.):189-206.

As in popular films, romance [in Valiyagramam, a village in South India,] often begins in aggression and apparent mutual hostility. That the seeds of love should flourish in what could look like hatred or harassment is just the first of many ambiguities.

5 ... Despite youths' aggression towards girls and women, and despite an
apparent mutual hostility between the sexes, all youths are keen to persuade a girl to flirt
(*tune*) with them. ... Against their families' best efforts, young men and women do
10 find opportunities to talk to each other: at festivals, bus-stops, or college – whenever
girls feel confident of being either unobserved or safe from gossips. Contact begins
with *tuning*, a tentative exchange between the two, and often stops at this point if the
15 girl fails to respond to the youth's opening questions. If she proves ready to speak and
take things further, the two have a *line*, a mutual agreement to speak (and exchange
glances) when they meet by chance, and possibly to send letters and cards. Regular
conversations and correspondence may eventually lead to romance or love, involving
pre-arranged secret meetings.

20 All *tuning* conversations follow an almost stereotyped form. ... A youth,
having approached a girl and initiated contact, either by means of some trivial remark or
through an aggressive comment about her, tries to keep interaction going, as he
continually edges physically closer towards the girl. She will side-step, back off and
25 move away, her face showing a mixture of irritation and amusement. If her girlfriends
are present, as they usually are, she will appeal to them with looks which suggest, 'Look
at this person who won't leave me alone: what can I do?' They, in turn, look
sympathetic but do not intervene. But their supportive presence in the early stages is
essential.

25 As the would-be romancer speaks, he leans towards the girl, while using a
forceful, loud and challenging tone, giving an impression of aggression, if not attack.
... A girl, safe within the protective circle of her girlfriends, may still choose simply to
ignore the boy, often by pretending that his remarks are not intended for her or that she
cannot hear them. Ambiguity about the remark's meaning, speaker's intentions and
30 intended audience is carefully maintained. Eventually, a girl will choose whether to
interpret the remarks as unwanted harassment or as an attempt to provoke a reaction and
open communication.

35 If a girl chooses to interpret the remarks as an opening move and decides to
respond, she generally uses culturally stereotyped signs of deference or nervousness as
she speaks: giggling, twisting the end of her *sari*, and turning her face away or looking
at her feet. Again, the actions are ambiguous: it is impossible to judge the extent to
which they are unconscious reactions to dominance, or conscious manipulations of
gestures of submission; and to ponder over such issues would be to miss the point
entirely. The youth, the audience of friends and any observing bystanders alike cannot

40 know the extent to which a girl is genuinely feeling nervous or embarrassed, or the degree to which she is consciously exaggerating feminine behaviours.

... The conversation's content contrasts strongly with its physical style of boy-dominates-girl. A girl responds to a boy's remarks with speedy counter-attack and counter-challenge. That she occasionally glances quickly upwards into his eyes before
45 swiftly looking demurely downwards again piles on the ambiguity: this eye-contact can be taken as direct aggressive confrontation, a challenge or exchange and offer of something. The overall effect is that of a battle of wits or verbal duel. If the interaction goes too far, as when the boy simply harasses the girl, or if the pair begin to trade strong or over-obscene insults, the whole process collapses and interaction ceases. If, on the
50 other hand, it is contained within appropriate limits, and if direct visual and verbal contact is successfully established, the boy and girl now have a *line*. Many couples stay on this level, trading glances and smart remarks when they pass on the road or meet at the temple.

Far from reinforcing gender hierarchy, the confusion in flirting between a girl's
55 submissive demeanor and her vicious tongue, like her actual firm control within the situation, is part of a breaking down of normality, and of distance and hierarchy, and a necessary prelude to the fostering of intimacy. In *tuning*, young men and women seek to provoke reactions from each other and to draw out hidden power: the power of who has control and, [for the girl in particular, the power of] deciding whether she can take
60 the potential risk to her reputation of moving forward into romance proper.

1. How does the interaction of young people differ when they engage in *tuning* and when they have a *line* in Valiyagramam? [4 marks]
 2. Provide **three** examples of the ambiguity that characterises *tuning* between young women and young men in Valiyagramam. Explain clearly why the examples you have chosen are ambiguous. [6 marks]
 3. Drawing on the evidence in the passage of gender hierarchy that characterises everyday life, show how this hierarchy is challenged in *tuning* and the *line* in Valiyagramam. [5 marks]
 4. Compare the challenge to hierarchy that occurs in *tuning* and the *line* in Valiyagramam with a similar process in one other society which you have studied. [5 marks]
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