



Modern Trends, Youth Choices, and the Silenced Voices of Women in Kinship and Marriage: A Socio-Cultural Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how kinship obligations, cultural traditions, and gender norms shape marriage practices and family life. Data collected through a semi-structured interview guide and focus group discussion, the findings reveal the prolonged traditional system of patriarchal society, where women's voices are often minimized, and decisions are heavily influenced by family authority, cultural expectations, and distorted interpretations of religion. Women share their experiences of navigating limitations on their movement, finances, and choices, frequently encountering verbal or physical control when they challenge these constraints. Younger generations are looking to combine tradition with modern values, wanting marriages that honor family respect while also embracing love, understanding, and personal choice. The study reveals an increasing conflict between long-standing family-centered practices and the changing ideas of equality and independence in marriage. It suggests that although culture and religion hold significant influence, there is a noticeable call for marital relationships that are more balanced, respectful, and equitable.

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1. Introduction

Marriage and kinship are two of the oldest institutions in human culture. They are the basic framework by which people relate with other people and find their own place in the world. They are the way by which people fulfill their obligations and responsibilities (May, 2011). Kinship and marriage are not just personal relationships; they are the foundation for all culture and society (Levine, 2008). They dictate not just the way people are organized as families but also the way people are organized as communities and the way they grow and transmit culture from one generation to the next (Stack & Burton, 2016). For one to understand marriage and kinship fully, however, they must first understand that they are never neutral. They are always defined and guided by the culture that people have of gender and the way people have defined the major roles of human beings based on gender and the way they act based on these roles, the responsibilities they should assume based on these roles, and the way they relate in terms of power and authority (Risman, 2018; Rudman, Glick, & Glick, 2021). Scheffler (1970) discusses the structures of Claude Lévi-Strauss in which he argued that marriage serves as a system of exchange, linking families and groups through the transfer of women in alliance-building, while Schneider (1984) highlighted how culture construct the kinship system rather than a purely biological given. Kinship ties regulate lines of descent whether patrilineal, matrilineal, or bilateral and shape obligations such as inheritance, caregiving, and the continuation of family identity

(Stone & King, 2018). Cultural meaning tied to gender and replication of inequalities among different family members, such as "men and women," is based on gender-based violence (GBV). Conflict always emerged in families just because of inequality, less power relations, and imposition of power on family members (Lowes, 2016). Gender based violence, depression, and argumentation are developed by the traditional gender norms (King & Stone, 2010). In traditional culture, maleness denotes the head of the society and controls all matters of the family systems (Kok, 2017). In every society, culture defines gender norms and social roles through its traditions, and these norms specify the appropriate roles and behaviors for men and women (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020). These gender norms differ according to the society but their function may be same like favoring male authority while situating women in supportive, reproductive, and caregiving roles (Boudet, 2013; Doucet, 2000; Jin, 2025).

In the research study marriage patterns are made on the kinship structure because there is pure endogamy in this society. The other reason is emergence of same sex marriages and people follow modern standards to diverse their own religion and culture (Malik, 2025; McClain, 2003). In religious and traditional societies youngsters will follow the modern and liberal trends and therefore they compromise their kinship and familial relationships through hybridity and this hybridization continuity with change (Ahmed, 2024). Stewart dedicated a chapter in the name of the child in which he explained the family conflicts and violence with the reference of five types of family violence (Wijaya, 2023). These types are episodic buffeting of men, initiated female violence, gendered-separation trauma, psychotic reactions, male controlling violence or conflicts, episodic conflicts generate from the men and his attitudes. Female initiated violence starts from the females with their frustrations and stress by the reasons of male passivity. Separation gendered is parental divorced on the disputes of custody. Psychotic reactions are created through negative and disordered thoughts (Stewart, 2001). Consequently, this study aims to provide a clear understanding of family norms, family structure, marital practices, and gender roles by analyzing the marriage patterns within the context of traditional gender norms. The purpose of this study is to analyze the kinship system that is referred to by the family, and based on this, the family has different types of norms and values that are followed by the members of the family. The overarching research question for this study is what type of kin relations are allowed to married within a group and support male authority? For this purpose researcher develop a research questions to investigate this phenomena, the research questions are: i) How are kinship and marriage practices evolving in response to changing social, economic, and cultural conditions?; ii) In what manner do these norms operate to support or to contest power structures among families and communities?

2. Literature Review

Kinship and marriage systems have traditionally played a vital role in understanding the dynamics through which cultures sustain themselves, both from a biological as well as a social perspective, with these systems being inextricably linked with traditional gender roles. Conventional anthropological studies on kinship systems have traditionally revolved around understanding the dynamics through which family systems determine gender roles, among other factors (Abram & Lien, 2023; Farhan, Firdous, & Arshad, 2025). In patrilineal and patrilocal systems, men typically possess control, and women are anticipated to depart from their natal families upon marriage, a framework that perpetuates male supremacy and female subservience (Agha, 2021). In some societies where the tracing of descent is based on women, i.e., a matrilineal society, the exercise of power and authority is by the males. This shows the gender and kinship relations (Robinson & Gottlieb, 2021). Marriage is the primary concept by which we may understand the relationships within the family group and the system of gendered orders (Srivastava & Willoughby, 2023). People often prefer cousin marriages to save and manage the land, property, and ownership, but the consequences are faced by the men and women of the family, not the whole family (Kumari & Jamali, 2024). Women's prestige and authority in the new family are based on their bride wealth and dowry practices, which symbolize the value of women's labor and fertility, yet female autonomy is still restricted within the larger kinship family (Akurugu, Dery, & Domanban, 2022). Likewise, inheritance and residency rules also impact the availability of resources and support systems for women and may play a significant role in the balance of power in the household (Hirschon, 2023). Feminist studies of kinship research also highlighted the way women were portrayed as passive actors in the exchange system rather than as active actors (Ullah). Later studies have also demonstrated the way women cope with patriarchal systems, such as the role of the family network or life transitions (Agha, 2021). The phrase 'bargaining with patriarchy' refers to the coping strategies women use with the patriarchal

constraints. Most of the time, they tend to reinforce the patriarchal system; however, in the long run, they achieve power and security (Haque, 2025). Feminist scholarship analyzing the kinship systems that structure female sexuality and work, combinations of honor, purity, and isolation that reinforce patriarchy have also been examined (Loza, 2022).

Contemporary studies have also looked at the shift in the education, labor market, and migration in relation to kinship and marriage practices (Basu, 2024). Some civilisations have started to replace arranged weddings with self-choice marriages, but traditional ways of choosing a mate, where to live, and how to pass on property still rule (Parkin, 2021). Recent improvements in technology and certain reforms in the law have given women additional chances. At the same time, some new problems sprang up, such higher dowry demands or stricter rules on how women may move around in transnational marriages (Mishra & Pandey, 2025). Customary and religious regulations also make these problems worse since efforts to make things more equitable are met with sluggish and unequal attempts to modify things or open disobedience of such changes (Bazaanah & Ngcobo, 2024). In general, kinship and marriage are still very important places where gender norms are passed down, challenged, and changed. They show that patriarchal systems are still in place and that women and men use inventive ways to deal with changes in social, economic, and political life. An exploration of these institutions continues to shed light on the ways in which traditional gender roles are both reproduced and altered across cultures.

3. Data and Methodology

The researcher looked at how people in the community interacted with each other and how they got married and had children within the context of traditional gender roles. Researcher did this by observing people directly and conducting semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. A purposive sampling method was used to choose individuals capable of offering comprehensive perspectives, including elderly, married couples, young people, and community leaders. Fieldwork was performed in chosen villages of Jatoi, Muzaffargarh, where cultural customs about kinship and marriage are profoundly entrenched in history. This descriptive research included 25 individuals, both male and female, aged 28 to 65, enabling intergenerational insights on the persistence and evolution of gendered expectations within marriage. Extended participant observation at family gatherings and weddings gave direct information on how people really live their kinship lives, and interviews helped to clarify and add to these insights.

The interviews were led by open-ended demographic and theme questions, and they were done in the participants' native language to make sure that the answers were clear, comfortable, and true. The interviews lasted between one and two hours, which gave the participants time to talk about their own experiences and thoughts on gender roles in marriage and kinship networks. Being familiar with the local dialect and cultural norms, the researcher personally transcribed the recorded interviews, before translating them into English with the assistance of a bilingual academic expert to preserve meaning, accuracy, and confidentiality. For analysis, deductive thematic analysis was employed, focusing on condensing, coding, and categorizing meaningful narrative units into themes. This process yielded substantial thematic patterns, encompassing: i) Kinship Obligations and Gender Inequality in Marriage Practices; and ii) Negotiating Tradition and Modernity in Marriage Choices; These themes were further analyzed to elucidate how kinship and marriage practices both uphold and contest established gender norms, emphasizing the lived experiences, negotiations, and perspectives of participants as crucial to the research.

4. Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Kinship Obligations and Gender Inequality in Marriage Practices

Gender inequality creates an imbalanced power dynamic within families. Family intramural conflicts arise from unequal power dynamics, disparities in wealth distribution, and social inequalities. This research has indicated that women rely on men for social, cultural, and economic support. Gender inequalities were evident as female respondents from rural areas answered questions regarding how their husbands managed their finances. *"They laughed and said we don't know"*. Gender disparities restrict women's options and strengthen their reliance on men. Imbalanced power dynamics contribute to domestic violence, including instances of wife beating within families. Gender inequality highlights the issue of men within families, where they are seen as the primary earners and bear all economic responsibilities. In the internal dynamics of families, women often take the lead in rural areas, particularly regarding marriage arrangements. One of my aged respondent shared his response below

The sons have taken on leadership roles, and no one has sought our input on anything. Even the wives have authority over their sons and make all the decisions within the families [Saqi/Q2]

The passage shows a strong feeling of loss and powerlessness when family roles and authority structures change. The speaker is sad that the sons have taken over as leaders, leaving the elder generation feeling overlooked and not consulted. People used to go to older people for advice and make decisions for everyone, but now that doesn't happen anymore, which makes people feel like they are missing out "no one asked us for anything." The speaker also speaks about how they think men and women communicate with each other differently now that the generations have changed. The expression "even wives control their sons" means that people don't like that women have greater input in family problems, which is something that males may have had earlier. The speaker's voice shows that they are sorry instead of viewing these developments as good. This means that the speaker believes they are losing their position, respect, and identity in the family. The sample shows how people who used to have control feel out of place in their own homes when long-standing rules about authority and hierarchy are questioned. This study indicates that findings through focus group discussions revealed that the traditional patterns and importance of male gender support the husbands to use their powers over their wives and control them in conditional manners. This implies that if a wife does not adhere to her husband's directives, he may resort to violent behavior. A husband has sexual rights, even in coercive circumstances. Conflicts and physical violence are often observed in families with lower economic status and among those who are illiterate. In this response one of my female respondent said in the excerpt below.

My husband restricted me from visiting my parents' house due to some disputes. I am rebot and all of my control in the hands of my husband and I think that it's an open violation of human rights and gender inequality [Ain/Q5]

The participant in this excerpt talks about how hard it is to live without freedom. She discusses how her husband's approval is necessary for even something as simple and personal as visiting her parents. She gains power from that small thing, demonstrating her incapacity to make her own choices. The statement she shares like she is "robot" cleared that she has no authority of her own life and she is living under the rules of someone else. When she talk about her life she hurt and her eyes says that her life is not in her control it controlled by someone else. That is why she bravely said that its gender inequality, because she see this as a collective problem that most of the women face in the society but no one talk about this. She further defined that if she speaks in the society it would consider against the family values and customs but if she silent then she faces a rejection of her humanity in the society. The people who responded are from the lower and middle classes and have many problems with their families because they do not have enough money. When the husband cannot make enough money to support the family, fights break out, and they are usually aimed at the wife. Women from economically disadvantaged families must endure significant hardships and violence without contemplating divorce or separation, as their impoverished parents are unable to assist them and their children. The excerpt below is from the focus group discussion data, in which most participants said they have these kinds of problems in rural areas.

It is very rare for husbands in these rural areas to give their wives money when they want or need something for themselves. When a set amount of money is given to wives, they are expected to do all the housework with that money. When wives ask their husbands to pay more for housework, the husbands start arguing about a variety of things [FGD/Q4]

This part of the focus group is very important because it talks about the real problems that women in rural households face. The women say that they cannot be financially independent because they are never given money freely to use or want. Women claim they receive a specific amount of money for their survival, and within this limit, they can survive. It hurts even more to know that asking for more money for basic needs will only lead to fights that could turn violent. The data shows that this type of controlling states creates problems and violence in the society where women are dependent on their families, and they are scared to ask for help for survival. Far away from the religion is the root cause of the violence for instance most of the people claim that Islam allow them to marry more than one wife but they are not aware the rules of the Islam and what especially Islam teach them like equality. Due to this equal rights Islam supports man

in terms of more than one marriage. In this regard one of the respondent shared her views in the below excerpt.

Islam is very flexible about the human rights like Islam give multiple rights to women like right to property, right to education, right to marriage but the problems occur when societal members dose not respect their rights. The other misconception in men is they can marry more than one without the approval of the first wife which is incorrect and it consider a cheating. These type of personal interpretations cause problems in the society and create mistrust between the husband and wife [Zari/Q9]

This excerpt reflects the frustration of women who see religion being misused to justify inequality. The speaker says that some people say that Islam gives them the right to marry more than one wife without any restrictions, even though the religion says that there should be balance and limits. The respondent says that Islam is flexible in women rights but it creates a problems when it interpreted by their own choices and create problems in the home. Men may obtain absolution or approbation, but women encounter judgment. That type of inconsistency doesn't simply seem unfair; it also breaks trust and makes the tie between husband and wife weaker. She wants things to be fair and for relationships to be based on respect for each other instead of unfair regulations. This idea pertains to women in establishing the basis for conflicts. Women are seen as contentious and loquacious, often leading to disputes within the family involving their relatives and husbands. It is explain in the focus group discussion as,

The words of women never cease and often lead to conflicts. Wives employ their tongues while husbands utilize their hands; otherwise, they do not [FGD/Q8]

This excerpt is an unfiltered depiction of a very concerning reality. The speaker says that women's voices are an issue since their "tongues never stop" and that they are to blame for the problems that happen. It shows a kind of thinking that sees women's speech whether it's questioning, saying they're wounded, or just standing up for themselves as something that can't be tolerated. The phrase is much stronger because it creates a clear distinction between women and men: women "use tongue," while men "use hands." In simple words, whenever women talk about something, men get angry, and this situation is not balanced, creating violence against women more and more day by day, in which women think about what to say about this. Because all the time they think that marriage is a separate power in which the male should be superior, and the female has less power in comparison to the man therefore she is afraid to speak in public because of insult. To conclude, this theme shows that women's perspective reveals that familial relationships and marital customs create a dependency on family members, leaving women unable to express their thoughts and wishes. Societal members make fun of those families instead of appreciating them in which women run their own houses without the involvement of the male members. This shows that they don't have the power to stop this woman's independence; therefore, they try to manipulate different things in society to show that we have more power than women. The overall theme showed that in these types of societies, men are consistently opposed to women's freedom and income. People have an urge to control women through the justifications of the moral and religious perspectives. The theme also explores those societies that have male dominance, which reduces the marriage system because different expectations occur for both genders. The society believe that male and female have different perceptions about the society values and customs for instance the guys who are physically aggressive are true man but women who speak up for her right are irritating women.

Theme 2: Negotiating Tradition and Modernity in Marriage Choices

This theme explores how people and families navigate the push and pull between old traditions and new ways of thinking when it comes to marriage. In more traditional contexts, marriage is rarely just about two individuals, it's often shaped by family involvement, community expectations, and factors like religion, caste, class, or ethnicity. It tends to be seen as a social bond as much as a personal one. On the other hand, modern perspectives tend to emphasize personal choice, emotional connection, shared values, education, career aspirations, and equality between partners. One of the people we spoke to share his thoughts on this tension in the quote below.

I saw dreams with someone for my future goals and career development but my parents' desire to marry someone from our family. I respect their desire but I do not want to compromise my whole life just for the sake of their traditional patterns. I also like our traditions but sometimes we cannot fit in our familial relations that is why I cannot marry in my family. Therefore I think my family ask my choice and I want to be able to day yes or no [Zoe/Q11]

Zoe's response indicates that she wants to hold on to traditional patterns, but she also wants to make her own marriage decisions, not those of her parents. In her discussion, she clearly stated that her parents' desire is for Zoe to marry someone in the family, but it is crucial for her to build a strong bond with the family before marriage. Zoe response reveals that she respect her cultural patterns but in the meanwhile she is against the family compulsion that is why she is not ready to marry in the family because she claim in her response for the sake of family traditional patterns her parents wants her marriage in the family but on the other hand there is no one in her family who can support Zoe's dream and future goals. The sentence "I also like our traditions, but sometimes we cannot fit in our familial relations" shows that the respondent is not in favor of compulsion, but she supports a peaceful environment.

In marriages, luck is linked to gender, with either males or females proving to be luckier for the family. The association primarily pertains to the bride, as she enters a new home after marriage, and the male family connects all circumstances to her. One case study illustrates these conventional ideas through the comments of both male and female respondents,

On the wedding day, a tragic incident took place where the groom's father fell from the tractor's mud guard and lost his life. It signifies that the bride was ill-fated (Manhoos) for the groom's family [FGD/Q5]

This focus group response reveals the heavy weight of superstition and blame that often falls on women in marriage. The speaker recalls how, on the very day of the wedding, a tragic accident took the life of the groom's father. Instead of being seen for what it was an accident the event was tied to the bride's presence, and she was branded as "black-hearted" or unlucky. In these words we hear how a woman's identity and worth can be reduced to an omen, where she is held responsible for events entirely beyond her control. These type of incidents never ended because the death of the groom father is not the single pain for the bride the main painful act is when her in laws blame on the new bride that her role is bad evil in the new family and it starts from the beginning. This type of acts shows that how sometimes marriages converts into harmful cultural beliefs and causes gender inequality because women throughout the life bear the misfortune blame but man is free from this. These type of cultural norms and values convert marriages into family conflicts and turbulences throughout the life.

Modern trends focuses on the personal choice and freedom instead of family prestige, desires and traditional patterns. Because in our traditional societies marriage is something that was important custom of the whole society same as family honor. Today in our society love and same mindset both are same importance and attention. In today modern world everyone has known its importance and freedom of choice therefore individuals claims that they want to choose their pattern by their will and choice instead of blindly follow their parents on the suitability of a partner because their own feelings would decide what happens.

If we want to consider the past in the traditional families marriage is a responsibility and family status. But in today society we focus on love and material things then how we consider past traditions. I will respect my parents' choice and listen carefully but I will do whatever I want because the ultimate decision is according to my own desire. Therefore I believe that traditions and modern ways both work together create a new ways [Hali/Q11]

The Hali excerpt shows that marriage is a problem in today young generation because the respondent compare the past traditional time with new era. In past marriage is a responsibility but now marriage is a competition and status of the families. In this modern era people focus on love and demands material things to side off the prestige, responsibility and family reputation. The respondent claims that he want to respect their parents wish but at the same time he support relations that develop on the basis of love and personal choices. The main focus of today young generation to keep the both ways together traditional and modern ways therefore they are finding a ways in which they balance the both family prestige and personal freedom. Saying "I will

respect my parents' choice and listen carefully but I will do whatever I want because the ultimate decision is according to my own desire" support both parents choice and personal freedom, youngsters hybridize the marriage practices with modern values and they want to maintain personal choices and family pride is both important. In marriages, the different ways that people understand religious and cultural norms may cause problems in the home. Women are not fully aware about their rights that given by the religion and culture while on the other hand men believe that they are more superior to women because they have more freedom than their spiritual values really allow. In this regard, one of the respondents shares his thoughts in which he claims that these thoughts create dissatisfaction and weaken the foundation of the cultural family.

In this modern world both genders have personal wishes and choices therefore they treat themselves according to them. Like men use their authority and power to control the women but in all this men forget how much power their religion allow them. In the same vein, women feel that their rights are not fulfilled and ignored by society; some of them are not fully aware of the rights given by religion and culture. These type of scenarios caused societal imbalance and built mistrust in the family ties. It creates constant tension [Bio/Q8]

The Bio's response directly addresses the issue of inequality among women and men in marriage. Participant expresses how women often feel ignored, disregarded and overlooked while on the other hand men enjoy freedom and use of excessive power that even religion does not grant them and even not allow to ignored the women rights. The use of the phrase "*constant tension*" explains that this inequality is not ended in a simple way it creates conflicts and by its seeping the home environment not peaceful. The participant's second phrase "*built mistrust in the family ties*" synthesizes the consequences of these inequalities, such as weak family relations, loss of trust, and marriage is not the primary responsibility. In traditional family patterns, marriage decisions are taken by the head of the family; therefore, the choice of women is not preferred, and in some families, decisions are made without informing the women. Now, in this modern era, many youngsters highlight this issue and believe that this is an important decision in choosing a life partner for the whole life; therefore, women and men have the freedom to choose relationships with mutual respect. In this regard, one of the respondents' points of view is discussed below in the excerpt.

In traditional societies, decisions taken by the head of the family, specifically marriage decisions, and women's involvement is very little. In my opinion, today's Gen Z want to marry according to their own choices and liking, therefore they want autonomy in their marital decision. But the problem emerged when so called head of the family use religion to utilize their power instead of understanding this Islam support the choice and permission in this matter [Zaini/Q10]

The participant excerpts focus on the issue between traditional patterns of the family and the modern younger generation's desires. Generally, elders of the family are very strict in their decision-making, especially in matters of marriage, and in this case they did not accept women's interference. The participant points out that the issue started when youngsters want to hybridize their culture, but family members want to impose their decisions with the help of playing the religion card because, through religion, they justify their power and inequality. In all these situations, they forget that marriage is not a simple relation; it can be built on equality and shared respect. In conclusion of the theme it is observed that the voices from the discussion show that marriage today sits at a crossroads between old traditions and new expectations. For many, family honor and kinship obligations still carry great weight, and there is respect for parents' wishes and community ties. At the same time, younger people want something more personal in their marriages love, companionship, and the freedom to make their own choices. They aren't completely dismissing tradition; rather, they are seeking to mold it in a way that aligns with their aspirations and desires. Negotiating can be quite challenging, as societal expectations and the misuse of religious beliefs often lead to inequalities, particularly affecting women. Amid these discussions, there's a feeling of transformation: a wish to preserve what truly matters from the past while also asserting the need for equality, respect, and a voice in marriage. The future of marriage seems to be emerging from a blend of respecting tradition while also allowing for individual preferences.

5. Conclusion

The findings reveal that kinship and marriage patterns are still heavily influenced by traditional gender norms, with women frequently shouldering the burden of cultural expectations and lacking equal agency in family dynamics. Controlling women's finances, limiting their movements, or placing blame on them for misfortunes shows how deeply rooted patriarchal authority is and how it continues to silence women's voices. Meanwhile, the wider freedoms enjoyed by men are frequently defended by selective or twisted interpretations of religion, which only serve to exacerbate inequality. However, the stories also highlight significant changes: numerous young individuals wish to acknowledge their parents' influence in marriage while simultaneously protecting their own right to choose, love, and form relationships grounded in respect. This negotiation between tradition and modernity highlights how cultural norms can endure while also reflecting the increasing desire for change. The study finds that we can achieve a fairer and more balanced view of kinship and marriage by taking a closer look at cultural practices, interpreting religious principles with fairness, and ensuring that women's voices are acknowledged as vital to family and community life.

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