

Reimagining Marriage: An Insight from Post-Graduate Students

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Abstract:

As rightly mentioned by the feminist scholars, marriage is one of the most important social institutions through which we can understand the present condition of women. Though it is universally understood as the union between two heterosexual individuals, though over the period we can see that the traditional meaning of marriage is changing and now it is understood as the union between two individuals be it hetero/homo. Nowadays both the prospect couple have their certain attribute in mind for their future partner, therefore not only the family background but also the education qualification, character, their way of perceiving the societal expectations is all kept in mind while choosing their partner hence their companion's quality is checked before they tie their conjugal knot. This paper is based on the perception of marriage through the lens of post-graduate students from various department opted for a credit-based course in Gender Studies. It was an interesting experience as the concept of marriage as a sacred rite is slowly changing into a companionship where apart from the family background and social attributes the concept of caste and class can also be seen evaporating and mutual understanding is taking the crucial places.

Keywords: Marriage, Social status, Education qualification, Students

Introduction

Marriage is widely recognized as a social duty, where two individuals form a legitimate union with the approval and blessings of their elders. This bond is created not only for mutual companionship but also with the significant aim of procreation, ensuring the continuation of the family lineage. The essence of marriage transcends a singular definition, encompassing a variety of cultural, religious, and social dimensions. Despite this variability, one constant remains: marriage is regarded as a profound obligation, rooted in both religious and societal expectations. It represents a vital institution that reinforces familial and communal bonds, underpinned by the belief that it upholds moral and social order, while fostering a stable environment for raising children and perpetuating cultural and familial traditions.

Marriage, as a social institution, is often perceived as a strategic avenue for individuals to elevate their social standing. This concept goes beyond the union of two individuals; it encompasses the broader implications of family prestige and societal recognition. Before finalizing the match, the parents of the prospective spouses meticulously evaluate various factors to ensure the alliance will be beneficial. These considerations include the economic status of the families, the amount of property owned, the physical appearance of the potential partner, and their level of education. These criteria are assessed with the intent of securing the future stability and prosperity of the newly formed family unit (Deep Punia, 2016).

The financial outlay on the marriage ceremony itself plays a crucial role in this social elevation. Lavish and extravagant weddings are often used to display the family's wealth and social status. Such ceremonies not only reflect the financial capability of the family but also reinforce their social standing within the community.

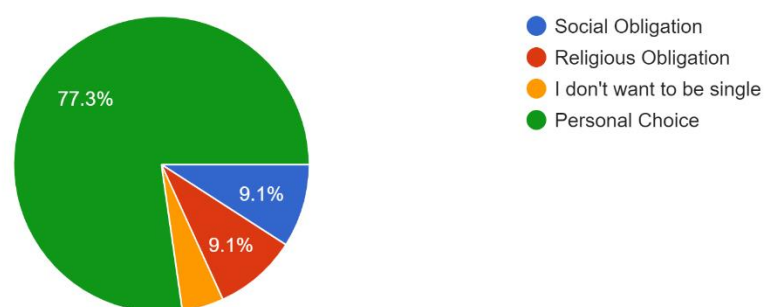
Over time, the customs and meanings associated with marriage have undergone significant transformations. In the context of India, marriage has traditionally served as a medium through which the groom's family can acquire wealth, often in the form of dowry, as well as labor, particularly when the bride is expected to contribute to the household or family business. This economic aspect of marriage underscores the multifaceted nature of the institution, blending personal relationships with broader social and economic dynamics.

Despite these evolving customs, the fundamental perception of marriage as both a social and economic contract remains deeply ingrained in Indian society. This perspective highlights the enduring importance of marriage in maintaining social structures, upholding family honor, and ensuring economic stability across generations

On the other hand, the students I surveyed have a nuanced perspective on marriage. They acknowledge that marriage is traditionally viewed as a social and religious obligation. However, they place greater emphasis on the notion of personal choice. An overwhelming 77.3% of the respondents assert that marriage should fundamentally be a personal decision. They believe that each individual should have the autonomy to decide whether they want to enter into marriage or prefer to remain single. This perspective highlights a shift from traditional views, indicating a growing recognition of individual agency and personal preference in matters of marriage. For these students, the decision to marry is not merely about fulfilling societal or religious expectations, but about making a deliberate choice that aligns with their personal desires and life goals.

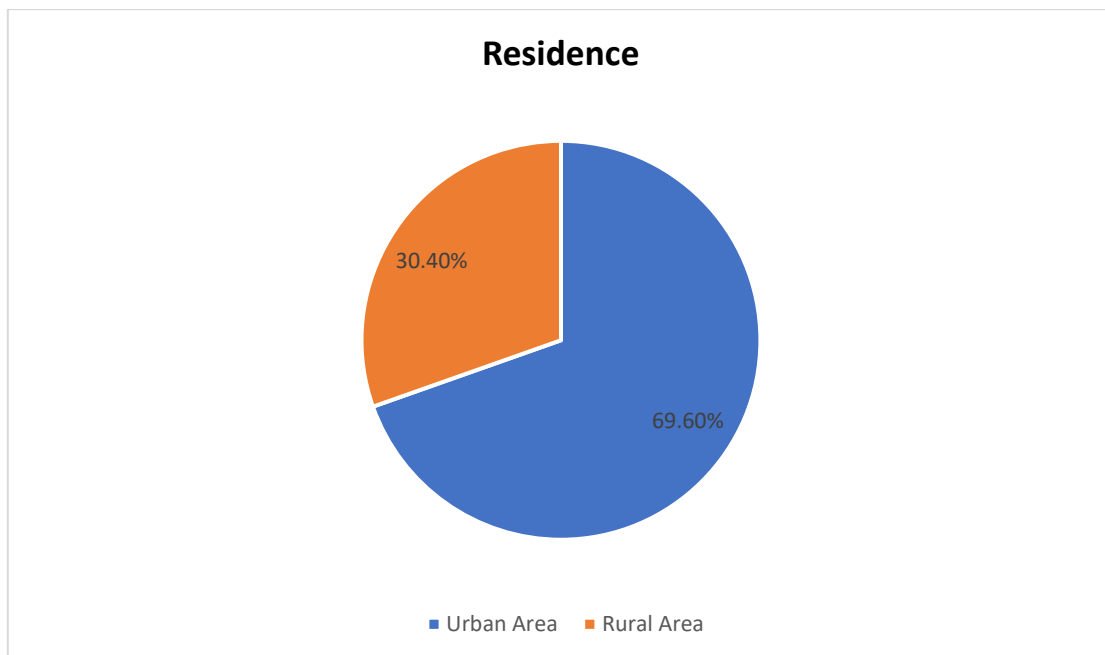
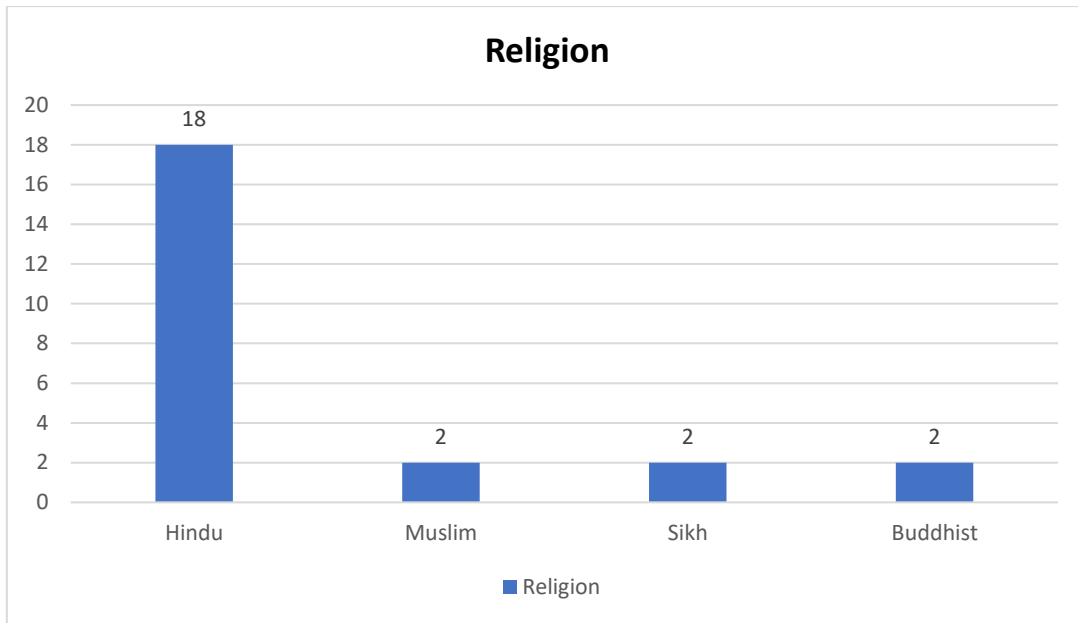
What do you think marriage is?

22 responses



Methodology

This is experimental qualitative research aims to understand students' personal perceptions and thoughts on marriage. Participants were asked open-ended questions, allowing them to express both their observations and personal feelings about marriage. This study is not a traditional research paper but rather an exploratory piece conducted with final-year students from various disciplines who chose to take an open course. Most of my respondents are between the ages of 20 and 25, representing diverse faiths and both urban and rural backgrounds.



Mate selection:

In South Asian societies, the process of mate selection has historically been a responsibility entrusted to elders within the community. These elders, often respected for their wisdom and experience, would meticulously match the horoscopes of potential couples, taking into account various factors such as compatibility and astrological alignments. This practice was deeply ingrained in the culture, with younger individuals typically deferring to the judgment of their elders in matters of marriage.

For women especially, the idea of choosing a mate independently was often viewed with skepticism. If a woman did express her own preferences or select her own partner, her character could come under scrutiny within the community. This societal norm reflected a collective mindset where individual autonomy in matters of love and marriage was not widely accepted (Deep Punia,2016).

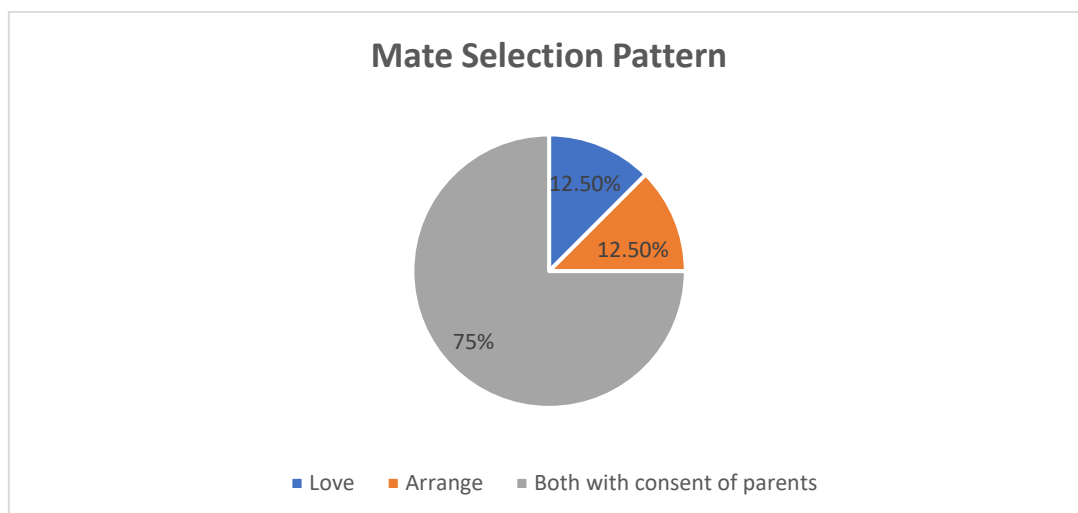
However, societal attitudes towards mate selection have gradually evolved over time. In modern South Asian society, there has been a noticeable shift towards greater individual agency in the process of finding a life partner. Both parents and prospective brides now actively participate in the search for suitable matches, with input from the younger generation being increasingly valued (J.P. Singh, 2016).

Despite these changes, the degree of freedom individuals have in choosing their partners can still vary significantly based on factors such as geographical region and religious beliefs. In some areas, traditional customs may still exert a strong influence, while in others, there may be more openness to alternative approaches to mate selection.

Furthermore, there has been a notable shift in perceptions surrounding different types of marriages, particularly between love marriages and arranged marriages. Previously, choosing a love marriage was often associated with societal stigma and was viewed as a departure from tradition. Love marriages were sometimes seen as being more fleeting and less stable compared to arranged marriages, which were perceived as being more rooted in family and community values.

However, contemporary attitudes towards love marriages have shifted considerably. Many now view love marriages as an opportunity for couples to build a deeper understanding and connection before entering into wedlock. Both parents and young couples alike increasingly see the value in relationships founded on mutual affection and compatibility.

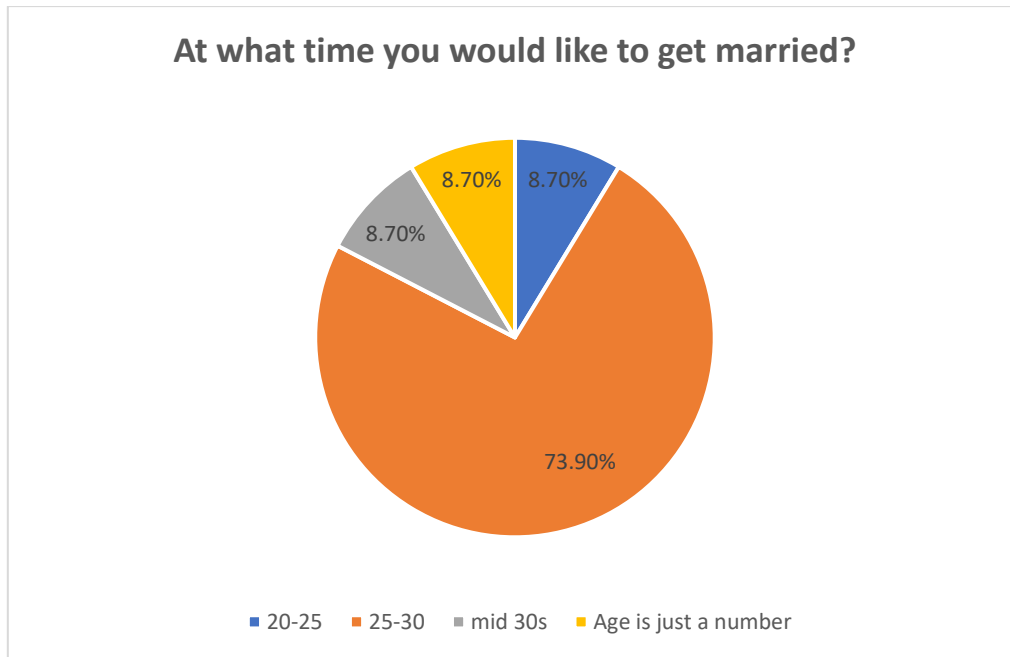
These changes in societal attitudes towards marriage are not occurring in isolation. They are part of a broader trend influenced by factors such as urbanization and technological advancements (Gupta, 2013). As South Asian societies become more interconnected with the global community and as access to information and communication technologies increases, traditional norms and practices are being re-examined and reinterpreted considering contemporary realities.



Age at Marriage:

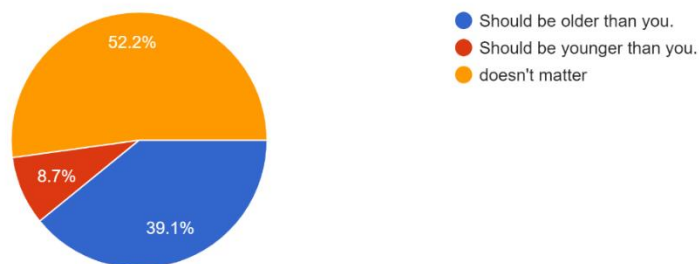
Young people nowadays have different ideas about when they want to get married compared to older generations. There is this idea that women need to get married before a certain age because they might have trouble having kids later. Surveys show that most students want to get married between 25 and 30 years old. But before they tie the knot, they want to finish university and be able to support themselves financially. It is good to see that most students think it is important to be financially independent before getting married.

Studies also found that girls who stay in school longer tend to get married later. Nowadays, young people think that marriage can wait, but having a good career is really important. They do not want to rush into marriage because they are worried it might affect their future. Many students think marriage is a big part of life, but they want to make sure they are financially stable first. This shows that young people are understanding their responsibilities and how marriage is changing over time (Roest,2016) (Rakhee, 2018).



Just like the idea of finding someone who is Tall, Dark, and Handsome (TDH), there is also a strong inclination among some to seek out older partners. Around 52.2% of my students believe that age is not a significant factor in marriage, while 39% feel that their partner should be older than them. However, during our discussions, many students expressed the belief that having a deep understanding between partners is more crucial. They emphasized the importance of being able to openly discuss various aspects of life, such as financial situations, future plans, the number of children desired, and family planning, rather than just focusing on love alone.

Age of your partner
23 responses



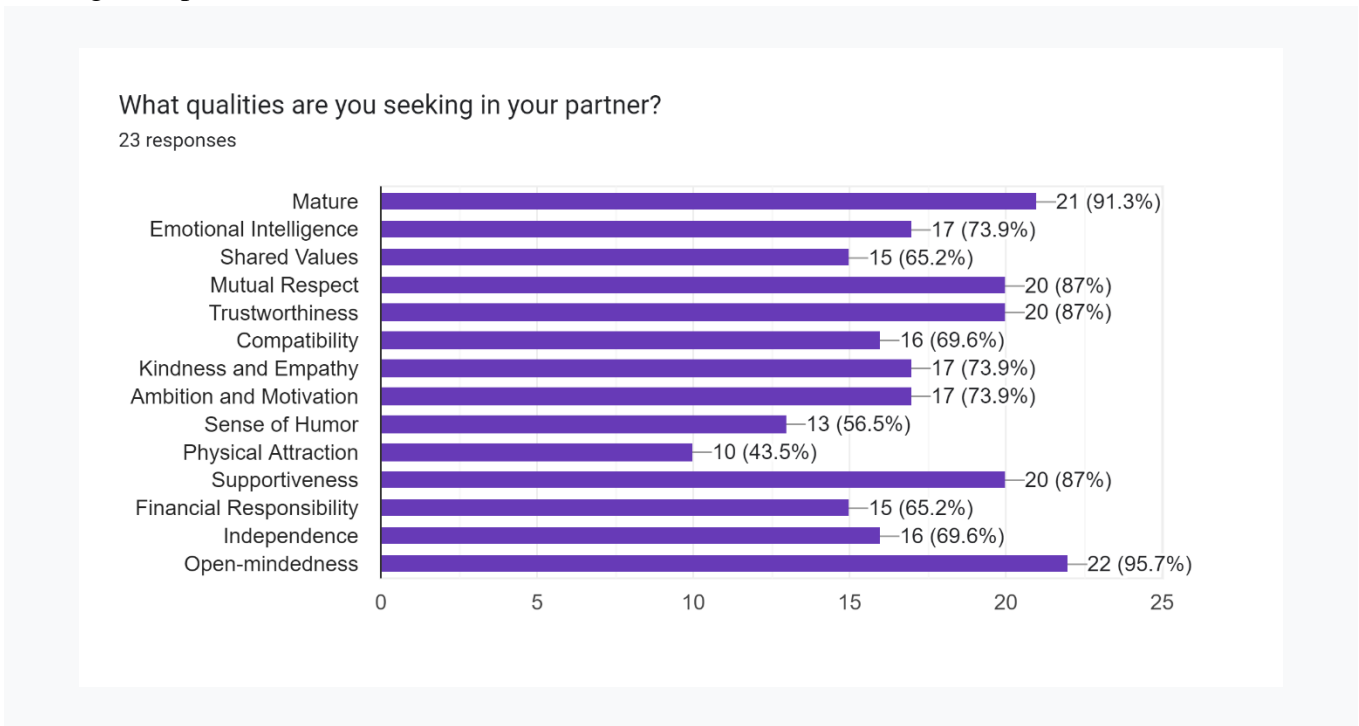
Education Qualification:

In addition to physical attributes, the younger generation also values the educational qualifications of their prospective partners. Education is not just about holding a degree; it encompasses various aspects of a person's status, including their outlook on life, financial stability, and level of independence. Therefore, educational attainment is seen as a crucial factor by students when considering a partner.

They believe that having an educated partner can enhance their understanding of responsibilities and bring added value to their lives. An educated partner can contribute to shared values, intellectual stimulation, and mutual support in achieving personal and professional goals. Furthermore, it can lead to better communication, decision-making, and a more fulfilling relationship overall.

Apart from personal attributes, education also influences who will share the responsibilities within the relationship. Some students prefer partners who already have a job or business before marriage, as they believe this not only ensures financial security but also indicates a sense of independence and understanding of shared responsibilities. However, others feel that compatibility is more important than employment status, and as long as there is mutual understanding, they are willing to work together towards a bright future.

Additionally, the younger generation's preferences for qualities in a partner have evolved. While traditional notions of attractiveness, such as being bearded or macho, were once popular, nowadays, sensibility and sensitivity are more desirable traits. Below are some qualities that they prioritize when looking for a partner.



Within and Outside:

Within marriage there is a prescribe groups based on one's caste, class, and religion to marry or not to marry. On the justification to preserve the purity of their own community and to go against those norms is considered to be the betrayal to one's own community. It is believed that there is a perception to have a partner from one's own faith, region, class, or caste and this preference often arises due to increased familiarity with the group, adjusting in adapting to a new environment (Deep Punia,2016).

Most students believe that people should make their own choices, so they think marrying within or outside their caste (endogamy or exogamy) depends on personal preference. They agree that marrying within the same caste can make it easier to adjust because people share similar customs and practices. Having a partner from the same background can feel familiar and make the relationship easier to manage.

Students also believe that education helps reduce differences between people and changes how they view marriage and social institutions. Many students prefer marrying within their caste or class because it's familiar, but others believe that personality and attitude are more important than caste or class.

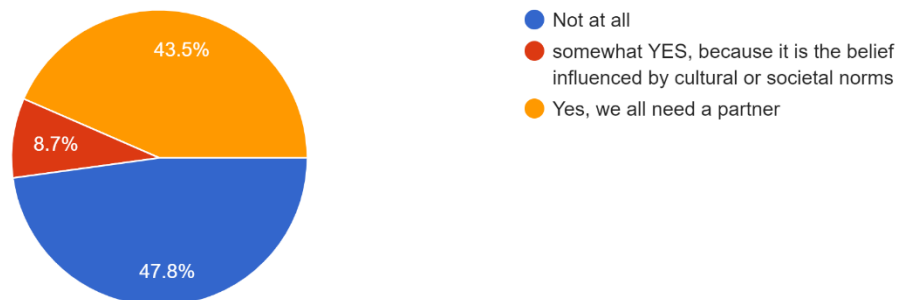
They understand that marriage is influenced by societal norms, and going against these norms can have consequences for the person and their family. Despite this, students feel that marriage should be an individual's choice, allowing them to decide whether to marry someone from their own caste or a different one, because marriage is about spending a lifetime together.

Traditional marriages within the same caste have evolved, with inter-caste marriages becoming more common than those between different communities or religions. Practices like polyandry (one woman with multiple husbands) and polygyny (one man with multiple wives) are also changing, especially in the Muslim community where they are religiously allowed. Education has significantly influenced these changes (J.P. Singh, 2016).

Students believe that marrying someone from a different cultural, ethnic, or social background is acceptable if both partners agree and are compatible. The key is that they respect each other's opinions and cultures. It is important that neither person is forced to adopt the other's values. "It's not wrong if someone loves you like your parents do."

What do you think: "Life is incomplete without marriage"?

23 responses



As there is a perception that marriage is a destiny for woman and life is incomplete without marriage for every individual at some point of their life. Students generally agree that marriage is important because humans are social creatures who need companionship. However, they also think that marriage is not something you have to do right away. It is important, but it is okay to wait until the right time. Marriage can happen later when both people feel ready for it.

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