

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

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Megan Nicole Reed

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This dissertation studies two important dimensions of family life in contemporary India, marriage partner selection and female seclusion, using three different data sources: 48 interviews with the middle-class in New Delhi, panel survey data from the India Human Development Survey, and survey data from the Center for the Advanced Study of India Delhi National Capital Region Survey. The first half of this dissertation sheds light on attitudes towards and the processes involved in arranged marriage among the urban middle class. The young people interviewed approach marriage decision-making with marital pragmatism, framing their choices in terms of risks, uncertainties, and costs. Most describe arranged marriage as the safer option due to the support that these relationships receive from parents. Despite a strong preference for arranged marriage, interviews revealed significant hybridization between arranged and self-choice or “love” marriage. Couples in arranged marriages often engaged in courtship during their engagement. Furthermore, new survey data suggests that many families are willing to call off a wedding if the betrothed find themselves to be incompatible during their engagement, revealing the family’s prioritization of choice and compatibility for the couple. The second half of this dissertation examines patterns of female seclusion and attitudes towards women’s careers. Analysis of panel data shows that women from households which became wealthier reported increased restrictions on their physical mobility and greater odds of practicing head-covering or purdah. These findings suggest that the upwardly mobile may be using female seclusion as a way to signal

household status. Dual earner professional couples in India challenge male breadwinner norms through their division of labor. Men who married working women mostly report that they were actively searching for an employed wife on the marriage market because of the financial security that a second income could provide. In addition, to some respondents, dual earning was believed to help facilitate a companionate marriage. This dissertation highlights the role of family, economic precarity, risk, and social norms in shaping marriage and family life in India.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines two unique features of the Indian family system, arranged marriage and gender segregation, and, in doing so, makes important contributions to family sociology and demography. Most countries which have traditionally practiced arranged marriage have seen significant declines in the prevalence of this practice over the past century (Ghimire et al. 2006; Malhotra 1991; Matsukura, Retherford, and Ogawa 2011; Nedoluzhko and Agadjanian 2015; Riley 1994; Thornton, Chang, and Lin 1994). India is an outlier in that arranged marriage shows limited evidence of decline (Allendorf and Pandian 2016). The first part of this dissertation focuses on arranged marriage and how those in the urban middle class think about and practice arranged marriage. India is also an outlier in its low rate of female labor force participation and the widespread prevalence of ideals of gender segregation (Desai and Andrist 2010; Lahoti and Swaminathan 2016). The second part of the dissertation shifts the focus to gender dynamics within married couples including the practice of female seclusion and attitudes towards women's careers.

The four empirical chapters of this dissertation employ a variety of different methods. The findings are based on data from 48 interviews with middle-class people living in the New Delhi metro region, survey data from the 2016 Center for the Advanced Study of India Delhi National Capital Region Survey, and panel survey data from two waves of the nationally representative India Human Development Survey (2004-5 and 2011-12). The first part of the dissertation, comprising of Chapters 2 and 3, draws primarily on interviews with the urban middle class to study attitudes towards and practices within arranged marriage. The second part of this dissertation, comprising of Chapters 4 and 5, examines patterns of

female seclusion and attitudes towards the male breadwinner ideal from both a macro perspective using survey data and a micro-perspective through interviews with dual earner professional couples. Chapter 6 concludes and discusses the key themes of the dissertation.

Arranged and love marriage among the urban middle class

Though India is home to the largest number of arranged marriages in the world, it has received limited attention in the sociological literature on arranged marriage and less attention than smaller societies such as Nepal and Taiwan (Ahearn 2001; Allendorf 2017; Allendorf and Thornton 2015; Thornton et al. 1994). Both of those societies have experienced a sharp decline in arranged marriage, while India has not. This hints at one possible reason why India shows up less in the literature. On many indicators, it appears as though little change is happening to marriage within India. India has extremely low and stable rates of divorce and intermarriage (Dommaraju 2016; Goli, Singh, and T.V. 2013). In addition, self-selection of one's marriage partner, called love marriage in India, constitutes less than 10% of all marriages in the most recent marriage cohorts, reflecting only a small increase over several decades (Allendorf and Pandian 2016). These demographic facts aside, a more complex picture emerges from recent qualitative research on Indian marriages implying a need for more investigation. For example, Fuller and Narasimhan (2008) finds that young people in South India are often deeply involved in selecting their arranged marriage partner. When survey respondents are given the option to indicate the role they played in arranging their own marriage, the statistics change and reflect a sharp decline in "parent-only" arranged marriage since the 1970s (Allendorf and Pandian 2016). This

suggests that the definition of arranged marriage is expanding as young people play a greater role in selecting their marriage partner.

The first part of this dissertation builds on this literature and fills in gaps in our understanding of family formation processes in the Indian context. By using interviews, I am able to shed light on dimensions of marriage not captured well in existing survey data such as how young people feel about arranged and love marriage. I supplement these findings with new data from an original attitudinal survey. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the marriage experiences and attitudes of the urban middle-class in India's largest metro, New Delhi. The middle class has grown recently due to rapid economic growth and the liberalization of the Indian economy which brought new jobs in the global service sector, access to foreign media, and new forms of middle-class consumption to India's metros (Kapur 2017). Chapter 2 seeks to understand how middle-class young adults think about arranged and love marriage and why they often prefer arranged marriage. I find that young people approach marriage decision-making with marital pragmatism, focusing on the risks, uncertainties, and costs associated with different options. Many decide against a love marriage because of the social stigma attached to it as well as the fact that they perceive that it will lead to less parental support after marriage. Chapter 2 illuminates how family relationships and social norms constrain young people's marriage choices. These findings help provide context for the pattern of persistence of arranged marriage.

Next, I turn to arranged marriage itself. Two-thirds of Indian women married in the 2000s report that they played some role in deciding their arranged marriage partner, a phenomenon that Allendorf and Pandian (2016) call "joint arranged" marriage. Researchers

still have a limited understanding of what joint-arrangement actually looks like in practice. Chapter 3 aims to fill this gap by examining how families expand the definition of arranged marriage to incorporate new elements of choice and compatibility. I find that the marriage engagement period is an important site for the hybridization of arranged and love marriage. Interviews with middle class young adults reveal that couples in arranged marriages engage in courtship during their engagement. New survey data suggests that many in New Delhi are open to breaking off an engagement if, during their engagement, the couple find themselves to be incompatible.

Female seclusion, class mobility, and women's careers

Female labor force participation rates are low in India; however, they are especially low for married women (Deshpande and Kabeer 2019; Deshpande and Singh 2021; Fletcher, Pande, and Moore 2018). The majority of Indian households appear to follow a traditional male breadwinner model with married women kept out of the labor force. The underrepresentation of women in the Indian labor force is also related to the practice of female seclusion, a system of gender differentiation and segregation common in South Asia. Female seclusion may include veiling or head covering (sometimes known as purdah), restrictions on the physical mobility of women, the gendering of spaces (both within and outside of the home), and the withdrawal of women from the public sphere and the labor force (Derne 1995; Jacobsen 1982; Miller 1982; Papanek 1982). These gendered practices are widespread and found across India's diverse communities. For example, nearly 60% of Indian households report practicing some form of veiling or purdah (Desai and Andrist 2010). Culturally, however, female seclusion is associated with higher status communities

which can afford to forgo women's paid labor (Amin 1997; Still 2011; Vatuk 1982). This pattern is akin to the breadwinner housewife family model in Western societies which has historically been associated with high status urban, white, and bourgeois families (Folbre 1991; Glenn 2002; Pfau-Effinger 2004).

The second part of this dissertation focuses on female seclusion and the male breadwinner ideal in India. Chapter 4 examines female seclusion and social class mobility from a macro perspective using nationally representative panel survey data. This chapter seeks to understand how household economic mobility impacts the practice of female seclusion in the household. Fixed effect regression models reveal that women from households which become wealthier between survey waves faced greater restrictions on their physical mobility and a higher probability of practicing purdah and withdrawing from the labor force. Upwardly mobile households may be drawing from the cultural script of status through female seclusion to perform their newly achieved economic status. Stratified analyses show that the patterns of mobility-induced female seclusion were primarily found in rural areas, among the less-educated, and in poorer communities. Urban and higher-status groups by caste, class, and education were not found to increase their practice of female seclusion with upward mobility suggesting that they may not see female seclusion as a marker of status.

Chapter 5 shifts the focus to the small population of dual breadwinning households within the urban middle class. Despite overall low rates of female work participation in India, high-skilled Indian women have increasing rates of employment, especially within the globalized Information Technology (IT) and financial services sectors (Datta Gupta, Nandy,

and Siddhanta 2020). Using interview data, this chapter sheds light on the attitudes and experiences of dual earner professional couples, specifically their attitudes towards male breadwinner ideals and how they negotiate household and care work responsibilities. Men who married working women report that they were actively searching for a working wife because of the greater financial security of dual earner households. Countering breadwinner ideals, many men and women argue that working women make better partners because they are better able to relate to their husband and therefore can better establish a companionate marriage. Despite their openness towards women's careers, much of housework and care work remains feminized in dual earner households with much of the work outsourced to other female household members and female domestic workers.

CHAPTER 2: “MARRIAGE IS A COMPLETE GAMBLE”: MARRIAGE ATTITUDES OF THE MIDDLE CLASS IN NEW DELHI

Abstract

Arranged marriage has declined dramatically since the mid-20th century in most countries where it was historically practiced. India is an outlier to this trend. There is little evidence of a decline in either the prevalence or popularity of arranged marriage in India. This study examines the attitudes of middle-class young adults towards marriage using data from 40 interviews conducted in New Delhi. Middle-class young adults were found to approach marriage with marital pragmatism, centering risks, uncertainty, and costs in their description of their preferences. To most young people interviewed, arranged marriage was viewed as the “safest” option because parental support for the marriage could serve as a form of insurance in the event of marital problems. Self-selection of one’s marriage partner, also known as “love marriage,” was less popular because of the steep social costs that are believed to accompany it including social stigma and less parental support. The findings highlight the centrality of the family and the normative context in determining marriage choices.

Arranged marriage, where parents or other kin select their children's marriage partner, has long attracted the attention of sociologists, especially those seeking to understand why this practice occurs in some cultural contexts, mostly in Asia and Africa, but not others. Since the middle of the 20th century, arranged marriage has declined in many countries where it was historically practiced including Japan (Matsukura et al. 2011), China (Riley 1994), Taiwan (Thornton et al. 1994), Kyrgyzstan (Nedoluzhko and Agadjanian 2015) Nepal (Ghimire et al. 2006), and Indonesia (Malhotra 1991). Over the past several decades, the sociological literature on arranged marriage has been dominated by two theoretical perspectives that attempt to describe the conditions that lead to the decline of arranged marriage. The first theoretical perspective, sometimes referred to as a Modernization Theory view, posits that macro-structural changes such as urbanization, economic development, and industrialization weaken the family structures that support arranged marriage and lead to an eventual decline in the practice (Goode 1963, 1982). A second approach argues that the spread of cultural schemas about the "modern family" is a main driver of the decline of arranged marriage. Exposure to normative beliefs about which types of family structures are "good" and "modern," referred to as Developmental Idealism in the literature, occurs through colonialism, mass media, missionaries, international development aid, and schools (Thornton 2005). Both of these theoretical perspectives have been successfully applied to describe the decline of arranged marriage across a wide range of settings (Allendorf 2017; Allendorf and Thornton 2015; Hoelter, Axinn, and Ghimire 2004; Kavas and Thornton 2013; Lai and Thornton 2015; Malhotra 1991; Nedoluzhko and Agadjanian 2015; Thornton and Fricke 1987).

India, the country with the largest number of arranged marriages, presents a puzzle in this literature because it seems to belie both theoretical perspectives. Arranged marriage remains persistent in India despite the country experiencing massive economic and cultural changes. Nearly 90% of Indian marriages in the 2000s were either arranged or semi-arranged (Allendorf and Pandian 2016). The rate of self-selection of one's marriage partner, called "love marriage" in the Indian context, constitutes less than 10% of marriages and has only increased by a few percentage points since the 1970's (Allendorf and Pandian 2016). Studies of attitudes towards marriage show that arranged marriage is extremely popular in India, much preferred to self-selection of one's marriage partner (Donner 2016; Netting 2010; Reed 2021; Twamley 2013b).

The persistence of arranged marriage is surprising given the other social and economic transformations that have occurred in Indian society in the past several decades. Over the past forty years, India has experienced rapid urbanization (Ren 2018), a decline in the agricultural labor force (Mehrotra and Parida 2017), massive expansion of education, especially for women (Lin, Desai, and Chen 2020), and a high rate of economic growth (Basu and Maertens 2007). Each of these indicators could be considered a predictor of the decline of arranged marriage. India's colonial history, expansive education system, and widespread access to Western media would also point to the idea that most Indians have extensive exposure to Developmental Idealism. Qualitative research has found evidence of exposure to and endorsement of Developmental Idealism in rural India (Allendorf 2013).

Understanding India's outlier status in the persistence of arranged marriage is an important sociological question that I tackle with this study. Drawing on 40 interviews with

middle class young adults in New Delhi, I aim to understand how young people make sense of their marriage options and why the preferred option for most is arranged marriage. I focus on the middle-class residing in the New Delhi metro region because this population is most exposed to globalized narratives on love and marriage.

I find that the urban middle class primarily frame their marriage decision-making through a lens of what I call marital pragmatism. In interviews, young people argue that their preferences reflect the most pragmatic choice given their assessment of the risks, uncertainties, and costs associated with different options. Marital pragmatism is a response to the social environment in which young people make marriage decisions including the social norms and taboos present in society which limit the desirability of various options such as love marriage. More important than young people's own attitudes and beliefs about marriage are the attitudes of their parents and those of their wider community. Parental attitudes and community norms moderate the costs associated with love marriage, making it more or less desirable to young people. The language of marital pragmatism reflects how young people grapple with competing desires for individual fulfillment in their marriage and the expectations of their parents and community.

Marriage in contemporary Indian society

Young adults' views on marriage are shaped by their social context. The norms in their community impact the availability and costs associated with different options regarding when they get married, who they can marry, and how they find their marriage partner. For example, in India marriage is seen as necessary and most Indians will remain with their first marriage partner for the remainder of their lives. Less than 2% of Indians are never married

by the time they reach their early 40's (IIPS & ICF 2017). Divorce and separation are also rare and come with significant stigma. Research suggests that only 2% of marriages in India will end in a divorce or separation within 20 years of marriage (Dommaraju 2016).

The majority of marriages in India today are arranged. Parent-arranged marriage has long been practiced in India and is built into the kinship structures of Indian families (Karve 1968). Self-selection of one's marriage partner, where the marriage is preceded by a romantic relationship, remains an uncommon route to marriage for most Indians. Only about 6% of couples married in the 2000's were classified as love marriages compared to 3% of those married in the 1970's (Allendorf and Pandian 2016). Though this reflects a doubling in the rate of love marriage, it still constitutes a very small share of the population.

Love marriage is seen as transgressive in Indian society because it breaches taboos on dating and often breaks endogamy norms. In much of South Asia, dating is taboo and there are especially negative reputational consequences for women and girls who engage in premarital romantic relationships (Aengst 2014; Huang 2018). As a result, most couples conceal their relationship from their family and sometimes even friends. Non-marital cohabitation, known in India as a "live-in" relationship, is uncommon and couples who wish to cohabit must contend with discrimination from landlords. These stigmas may even carry over to married life for couples who found each other through dating. Women who marry through love marriages report facing heightened social scrutiny and receive less sympathy from the community if they encounter marital problems (Grover 2018; Mody 2002).

One function of arranged marriage in Indian society is to ensure the maintenance of endogamy or marrying within one's community. Despite small increases since the 1980s,

only about 6% of marriages between 2001 and 2005 were inter-caste and only 2% crossed the barriers of religion (Goli et al. 2013). Attitudinal surveys indicate significant opposition to intermarriage in India. Roughly two-thirds of Indians say that it is very important to stop people from marrying outside of their religion and caste (Pew Research Center 2021). This view is not restricted to rural areas. As many as 40% of people in the Delhi metro support laws prohibiting inter-caste marriage (Coffey et al. 2018). Less than 5% of people in the Delhi region reported that their family would accept inter-marriage by caste (jati), language, religion, or social class (Reed 2021). Couples in inter-religious and inter-caste love marriages often face violence and disownment due to their choice of marriage partner (Chowdhry 2010; Mody 2008).

While love marriage remains uncommon, young people are playing an increasing role in selecting their marriage partner within the structure of arranged marriage. Recently, researchers have begun using the term “joint-arranged marriage” to describe marriages that fall somewhere in between love and arranged. Survey data suggests that an increasing share of the population describe their marriage in this way. Of those married in the 1970’s, about half describe their marriage as joint arranged, compared to two-thirds of marriages in the 2000’s (Allendorf and Pandian 2016). The literature is unclear about how joint-arranged marriage works in most families but recent survey data from the New Delhi region suggests that, for most families, joint-arranged marriage means that parents select their child’s spouse but that young people are allowed to “veto” options, often after meeting or speaking with the potential match a few times (Reed 2021). This type of joint-arranged marriage modifies arranged marriage to incorporate some degree of choice for young people but stops short of altering the centrality of parents in the process. Another type of “joint-arranged” marriage

occurs when couples in a romantic relationship seek their parents' blessing to marry to avoid the stigmatizing option of elopement. If the couple is successful in getting the support of both sets of parents, they sometimes proceed forward with the wedding plans as though it were a fully arranged marriage (Donner 2016; Uberoi 2006). This is sometimes referred to as a "love-cum-arranged" marriage or "arranged love marriage." With these practices middle class families are contributing to the increasingly fuzzy boundary between love and arranged marriage (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008).

Despite evidence of hybridizing marriage practices in India today, arranged and love marriage continue to serve as two competing cultural scripts in the public discourse. In explaining and rationalizing their choices, young people draw from marriage scripts as conceptual devices to make sense of their decisions (Swidler 2001). In social discourse, love marriage is often negatively associated with a "corrupted" Western family culture and is seen to lead to higher probability of divorce and marital unhappiness (Derné 2005; Mody 2008; Netting 2010; Twamley 2013a). In previous studies, young Indians were often found to speak negatively about love marriage while at the same time advocating for individual choice within arranged marriage or emphasizing romantic compatibility within their arranged matches (Netting 2010; Twamley 2013b). Thus, while many young Indians want a joint-arranged marriage, they reject the language of "love marriage" due to its association with taboo Western dating and family practices.

Data and methods

Data for this study comes from 40 semi-structured interviews with college-educated men and women ranging in age from 18 to 35 who reside in the New Delhi metro region.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face in Hindi and/or English between July 2018 and March 2019. The average length of an interview was an hour. There were two phases of data collection, each with a separate sub-population providing a different lens on the marriage process. In the first phase during summer 2018, I interviewed unmarried young people who were approaching the age of marriage. In the second phase, during spring 2019, I interviewed recently married or engaged individuals from 16 different-sex couples. Interviewing both those anticipating their marriage and those recently married provided a complete perspective on young people's attitudes during different stages of the marriage decision-making process. I used a semi-structured interview guide for the interviews but allowed significant latitude for interviewees to bring in related topics or take the conversation in new directions. Unmarried people were asked how they expected to find their spouse, what they thought about arranged and love marriage, and what they would look for in a marriage partner, among other topics. Recently married or engaged individuals were asked about their relationship history, the details of how they and/or their family found their marriage partner, and how things had been going since the wedding.

The criteria for participation in the study were that the respondent should be between the ages of 18 and 35, reside in the Delhi metro region, and have at least a bachelor's degree (or currently be pursuing a degree). I utilized a combination of different recruiting strategies to reach a diverse group of individuals. The unmarried respondents were recruited through cold-calling households which had participated in a 2016 survey based on a representative sample of the Delhi National Capital Region. In addition, some unmarried respondents were recruited through approaching college students near a local campus. In the second wave of data collection, recently married or engaged respondents were recruited using

recruiting text messages shared on the Whatsapp messaging app as well as recruiting posts in closed Facebook neighborhood groups. Respondents were also recruited by snowballing from previous respondents' contacts. I targeted recruitment of couples who had been married or engaged within the past 4 years. No financial incentives were given for participation in the study; but, in the second phase of data collection, married or engaged respondents were thanked for their time with a small gift package of chocolates. Interviews took place either in the home of the respondent or in a public location, most commonly a coffee shop. A local female research assistant attended each interview with the author and participated in the interview questioning. All interviews were audio recorded except one and fieldnotes were also taken to document contextual details from the interviews.

Ten interviews were conducted during the first phase, with six being individual interviews and the remaining four being small group interviews. Small group interviewing is especially useful in revealing how meaning is co-constructed within a group (Bjørnholt and Farstad 2014; Reczek 2014). While these interviews took on a slightly different dynamic than the individual interviews, they also provided valuable insights into how young people spoke with each other about their views on marriage. The small group interviews in this study included a group of brothers, a group of sisters, and two groups of female friends. The 17 young people interviewed during the first phase of data collection ranged in age from 18 to 29 and half were women.

In the second phase of data collection, thirty recently married or engaged people were interviewed, including 16 women and 14 men from 16 couples. Two of the husbands refused participation in the study. All married and engaged individuals were interviewed

alone and separate from their spouse. Five of the 16 couples described their marriage as an arranged love marriage whereas the other 11 couples described their marriage as arranged or semi-arranged. One couple was engaged and had not yet had their wedding. The rest of the couples had been married within the past four years, most within a year of the interview. Five of the couples already had a child together. The married and engaged respondents ranged in age from 23 to 35.

This study aimed to examine the views of the urban middle class, which was defined as having or working towards completing a higher education degree and residing in the Delhi metro region. All of the married respondents had at least a bachelor's degree and many had the equivalent of a graduate or professional degree. Half of the unmarried respondents were full-time college students. Five interviewees were unemployed at the time of the interview. Most of those who were employed had professional occupations in management, business, medicine, government/law, and information technology. Others worked in service or administrative jobs including customer service, teaching, and tutoring. A high proportion of the married couples were dual earner (12 out of 16 couples).

The interview respondents came from a diverse array of castes and religions which are represented in the urban middle-class of New Delhi. While the majority of respondents were Hindu, seven of the individuals followed the Sikh religion, four were Jains, and two were Muslims. The majority of Hindus interviewed were upper castes, but seven interviewees were members of government-categorized "Other Backward Classes" (OBC) or Dalit (oppressed castes) communities. Though marriage practices vary across India's

different caste and religious groups, arranged marriage is prevalent in all communities. The findings described in the text did not vary systematically by caste or religion.

The audio data from the interviews was transcribed and translated into English (if it was in Hindi) by the research assistant who is a fluent Hindi-speaker. The data was analyzed using ATLAS.ti software. Two waves of coding took place and analytical memos were used to help re-categorize codes and identify emerging themes and relationships between codes. First, codes were created around topics or ideas about the marriage arrangement process drawn from the interview schedule such as “the first meeting,” “ideal qualities of spouse,” and “pessimism about marriage.” In the second wave of coding, I created a broad list of codes and sub-codes from the emerging themes which guided my re-reading and re-coding of the interviews. In the following text, pseudonyms are used for the study participants and small details, such as place names, have been changed to protect their privacy.

The risk of ending up in a “bad marriage”

Individuals interviewed, especially those who were not yet married, often expressed anxious feelings about marriage. This anxiety was related to their fear about the risk of ending up in an unhappy or conflict-ridden marriage. Sumit, a 24-year-old unmarried graduate student, explained that “after hearing all the stories nowadays...there can be so many disputes after marriage, whatever the reason might be... so out of a hundred percent, twenty percent of the time I think about not getting married.” Sumit shared several examples of the “disputes” that couples can experience using anecdotes from his brother’s and friends’ marriages, including both love and arranged marriages. Sumit was not alone in recanting stories of unsuccessful marriages. It was quite common in the interviews for people to tell detailed

stories of unhappy marriages; about half of those interviewed did so. The stories they shared about unsuccessful marriages in their social network ranged from infidelity to abandonment to divorce. Young people interviewed employed these stories didactically as examples of worst-case scenarios of a negative marriage outcome.

Anxiety about marriage often led young people to delay their marriage as long as possible. Arun, a young man in his late twenties working in management, had an arranged marriage two years before our interview. Though currently happily married, he reflected on his efforts to delay his marriage in his early twenties explaining:

I just didn't want to give up my life ... I was against the idea [of getting married] ... I never realized that it could actually turn out to be this good, because I think I had seen other marriages, good and bad, so I always was scared ... of having a bad marriage.

Like Sumit, Arun expressed reservation about marriage because of a fear of ending up in a “bad” marriage. In addition, Arun was concerned about how marriage might impact his lifestyle, explaining later in the interview that he was afraid that he would not be able to go out with his friends as much after marriage and that his social “circle would reduce.”

The women interviewed expressed similar anxieties about marriage but with an added fear that marriage would be disempowering to them due to gender roles and the burden of household labor. Reena, a 31-year-old woman working in management who had an arranged marriage a year and a half ago, explained that she delayed her marriage for many years because of a fear that she would lose her autonomy as a married woman. She detailed her feelings:

I had seen so much fighting between my sister and her husband... him shouting at her and she's like, 'okay, this is how it is.' I've seen so many things and I was like, 'I don't want to get married!'... [like] when my father is angry at my mom and shouting at mom. This was also in my mind that time, that the girl always must listen to her husband.

Like Sumit and Arun, Reena feared ending up in a marriage filled with conflict. However, Reena was also concerned that she would be end up in a marriage where her husband would dominant decision-making. Kavita, an 18-year-old unmarried female college student shared a similar sentiment about women's autonomy after marriage:

I've fifty percent decided not to marry. Because when you get married, you get tied down, there are lots of constraints- 'don't do this, don't do that'. If we don't get married, we can do anything we want, go wherever we want, but after marriage it's all 'don't do this, do that'. [Without marriage] you don't have to answer to anyone.

Like Arun before his marriage, Kavita focused on how marriage would constrain her life. A focus on possible risks associated with marriage was an important part of how young people adopted a pragmatic approach to marriage decision-making.

Marriage as a “gamble”

In addition to a concern regarding risks, young people described marriage decision-making as fraught with uncertainty and unpredictability. Interview respondents spoke about having little to no control over whether they would end up in a good or a bad marriage. In over a quarter of the interviews, young people volunteered words like “gamble” or “luck” to describe the uncertainty of the marriage decision-making process. Amar, a medical professional in his early thirties who had an arranged marriage two years before the interview explained that “marriage is complete gamble...in arranged and love marriage... either you

win or lose, there is no mid-way. If it's a hit, it's a hit. If it's a flop, it's a flop." Amar's view of marriage framed it as a dichotomy of winners and losers who have no control over their fate. This perspective helped him justify his choice to go with the more traditional arranged marriage option over a love marriage.

To Amar and many people interviewed, the outcomes of both arranged and love marriages were equally unpredictable. Jyoti, a medical professional who had an arranged marriage three years prior, shared Amar's belief that both types of marriage were a "gamble." She said, "It's luck. I have seen people who have been talking for seven or eight years, but after getting married they have problems because they cannot work together." From Amar and Jyoti's perspective, if dating before marriage did not provide a guarantee that the marriage would not end up a "flop," then there was no advantage to love marriage over arranged.

Many young people felt that the uncertainty of marriage outcomes derives from the inability to assess compatibility before the wedding. Reena, quoted earlier, shared that:

No matter how much you try to get to know someone, it hardly matters. When you are going to spend the time with a particular person, and living day and night with him or her, only then you will get to know each other, otherwise you won't know, because meeting for two or three hours or a day does not allow you to really make a judgement on anybody.

Reena believed that people only show a part of their personality when getting to know a potential marriage partner, making it impossible to truly anticipate their behavior after marriage. Navya, a recently married scientist in her early thirties, shared a similar sentiment, "I can't make any decision when I met you only once, so for me it's like - at least you have

the financial stability... the emotional... that's the big dice." Navya went on to explain that since she felt there was no way to predict the emotional compatibility of the couple in an arranged marriage beforehand, they would simply have to "adjust" after the wedding. To Navya, financial security was a more pragmatic basis for a successful marriage than emotional compatibility and could be ensured through her family's proper vetting of the groom's financial status before fixing the marriage. Emotional compatibility, on the other hand, was left to the chance of a roll of dice.

There was disagreement regarding whether love marriage was as unpredictable as arranged marriage. Not all respondents, even those in an arranged marriage, shared the view of Amar and Jyoti, that love marriage involves the same degree of uncertainty as arranged. Geeta was an IT professional in her late 20s who had been married for the past year through in arranged marriage. She said that marriage "depends upon luck, because [someone's] real nature you cannot judge...when you start living with him, only then you can judge him, in any of the case, love or arranged." However, later in the interview she clarified:

The difference between love and arranged marriage is that, in love [marriage] you can visualize your future with your partner, but in arranged it's all gamble, I didn't know how his behavior actually would be ... you come to know only after marriage.

To Geeta, the outcome of both love and arranged marriages could be subject to "luck" however those in love marriages have a better idea of what to expect from their life with their partner because of their premarital relationship. Geeta's views on marriage were influenced by watching her brother's love marriage which she described as having more "chemistry" than her own arranged marriage.

Those who had a love marriage universally felt that it was a less uncertain choice than arranged marriage. In fact, to them the uncertainty of arranged marriage was the reason they had decided to opt for a love marriage. Apurva was a 29-year-old working for a media company who had married her boyfriend of eight years one month prior to our interview. She explained her views on arranged marriage:

The arranged marriage set-up is such a dubious thing. It's a total gamble...the first three or four times you meet someone, you show them your best, you will never show your flaws... the person I'm married to, he knows what my worst is and what my best is. He knows all of that. In arranged marriage it's like, you never show your worst and ... after three or four meetings you're expected to answer the question about how you liked him...you at least need six months to a year, to assess how it is, even though, according to me, one year is also not enough time.

Most people in arranged marriages interviewed described feeling pressure, as Apurva notes in her quote, to give an answer of whether they wanted to move forward with the arranged marriage after very little interaction with their potential marriage partner. To Apurva, what distinguished her relationship from an arranged marriage was just how well they knew each other before the wedding. Krishna, a 26-year-old management professional who had married his girlfriend of three years a few months prior to the interview, shared a similar view on arranged marriage:

I think love marriage is quite good because ...you get to know [each other] and ... take your time to... understand each other, see [each other in] your comfort zones... and then once you have gotten completely sure, you step into the marriage... There's no step back after marriage otherwise you'll spoil your lives because divorce is not easy to handle and it affects a lot of lives- your lives, your parents' lives as well ... I do not believe in arranged marriage, to be honest, because I want to know the person I'm getting married to and I want to know her well.

Both Apurva and Krishna advocated for a long period of dating as a precursor to any conversation about marriage. Even those who chose a love marriage framed their marriage decisions using a language of marital pragmatism around the goal of managing uncertainty. To them, arranged marriage was completely uncertain and love marriage, entered into after the couple feel ready, provided greater certainty of marriage success.

Love marriage may be less of a “gamble” but comes with costs for some

Costs were another major theme to emerge from the interviews. Some respondents, though they acknowledged that love marriage was less of a gamble, still chose to go with an arranged marriage because love marriage would entail social and emotional costs. In making sense of their options, they weighed the uncertainty against other costs, which might vary depending on their family situation. This was the primary way in which marital pragmatism led young people to select an arranged marriage over the choice of love marriage. Madhav, a 26-year-old working in the business sector who had been married through an arranged marriage only a few months before our interview, felt that arranged marriage was a bigger gamble than love marriage. However, Madhav was happy that he had taken that risk and opted for an arranged marriage. He detailed his views:

Arranged is good. It's like a gamble. Like what life partner you get, you can get a good life partner, a bad life partner, it depends. But love marriage is also good, you know each other from the beginning, you know them really well, and you know that you want to spend your whole life with them. But I would suggest arranged marriage to people.

Madhav explained that a few years ago he had approached his parents about having a love marriage to his then-girlfriend of five years, who was from a different religious and caste

community. His parents rejected the match. In retrospect he was satisfied with his choice to not move forward with the love marriage without his parents' support. He described why his arranged marriage was a better outcome than having married his ex-girlfriend:

The best part is, in this relationship, my parents are happy. They are very comfortable with her... if I had just gone against them and done [the marriage to my ex-girlfriend], they would have [accepted it] if I had forced them a lot, but things wouldn't be the way they are going on right now in our family... now they are really very happy, because the marriage is as per their choice and because they wanted to do it within our community, so they are really very happy... the first thing for me is that I want my parents to be happy... comparatively this is better for me [than having a love marriage].

In Madhav's case, love marriage would have come at a high social cost in weakened ties with his parents because of their disapproval of intermarriage and, as he explained, "the perception in their mind ... that love marriage doesn't work." To him, it was better to take a risk on an arranged marriage than face his parents' disappointment and potentially a lifetime of family tension. In addition, he felt a strong sense of compatibility with his wife and felt happy to have ended up in a marriage that made both himself and his parents happy.

Other couples interviewed fought for their love marriage but endured significant costs from their choice to do so. After twelve years of dating, Sunita, who was trained as a scientist, and Vinay, who works for a media company, had finally married eight months prior to our meeting. The college sweethearts faced significant opposition from Sunita's parents to their relationship both because it was inter-caste and because of the taboo on dating/love marriage. Sunita was raised in a low-income neighborhood by conservative parents who had migrated from a village. Vinay's family was wealthier and, according to Vinay and Sunita, "open minded" in outlook, having no opposition to love marriage. Sunita described the

significant lengths that she and Vinay went to convince her parents to accept the match. This including inviting Sunita's mother to Vinay's home under false pretense where Vinay's family staged a dramatic intervention, pleading with her to see the value in the match. In addition, Vinay's family offered to pay for all wedding expenses. Sunita explained that:

Running away was never an option... I used to think that if we run away, what will happen to [my parents]? My father was not very healthy... and even for my mother [it would be difficult] ... No matter what, we would do it after telling them, we're not going to run away.

Sunita experienced significant emotional distress during this time thinking about how her marriage to Vinay could impact her parents' health or cause them shame in their community. She was eventually able to convince her parents to accept the marriage partially because they had been unable to find her a good match on their own. According to Sunita, the primary obstacle for her parents was a concern about "what people would say" if they told their extended kin in the village that their daughter had an out-of-caste love marriage. As a result, Sunita's parents did not invite any of their extended kin to the wedding and Sunita explained, "[my mother] told everyone that ... we got Sunita married ... to someone from our caste and that the marriage is arranged." Sunita was uncomfortable with the lie that her mother had told and worried "how long can we hide it?" Sunita and Vinay's case reveals the significant social costs that can come with love marriage for individuals and their families if they come from a community that is not open to love marriage. Ultimately, Sunita was happy that her parents had given their support to the marriage, even if they were unable to confront the community stigma on inter-caste love marriage in her place of origin.

The situation of Ayesha and Rahul, an inter-religious couple who had a love marriage four years prior also illustrates the costs of love marriage for some. Ayesha and Rahul, both 29 at the time of the interview, had started dating in middle school but knew that they would face social disapproval of their relationship because Ayesha was Muslim, and Rahul was Hindu. Determined to make his relationship with Ayesha work after high school, Rahul chose to leave their hometown to relocate to New Delhi where he felt he would find more acceptance of his inter-religious relationship. Ayesha, an artist and entrepreneur, and Rahul, who worked in business, were able to gain the support of their parents for their marriage when they finally approached them about it at the age of 23. However, they faced significant opposition from their neighbors and relatives. Ayesha explained the difficult period:

Things got complicated, and the word of mouth spread. Obviously, people got to know... There was a lot of chaos ... Everybody was upset, except my parents and one of my uncles... there were other relatives who were quite upset. [My cousins] actually became obsessed with my marriage. They tried to kidnap me. They actually planned it that they would not let [me] get married to a Hindu guy.

Ayesha's cousins who were plotting to kidnap her so that she would not be able to marry Rahul eventually gave up on their plan after the intervention of other family members. The couple was satisfied that they were finally able to achieve their goal of getting married, something they had been planning for over eight years; however, they acknowledged that they did bear large costs for their choice. Their marriage had left lingering trauma, including emotional pain caused when Rahul's family attempted to forcibly change Ayesha's name to a Hindu name, and broken ties with extended family and neighbors who refused to accept the union. They continued to face discrimination as an interreligious married couple in Delhi. Rahul explained that:

There have been a lot of issues [finding an apartment]. We found a place and paid the advance as well, but when they asked for our IDs, they realised that one is a Hindu and one is a Muslim, so they refused [to rent to us].

They ended up losing their advance on that apartment. Rahul and Ayesha's situation is extreme because of the huge taboo on marriage between Hindus and Muslims in India. However, it exemplifies the steep costs that may come with the choice of pursuing a love marriage.

The social and emotional costs to love marriage vary dramatically depending on the openness of one's family. Some couples faced fewer costs because they had the support of their family for their love marriage and their marriage did not cross major boundaries of caste and religion. Both Krishna and Apurva, mentioned earlier, were able to pursue a love marriage without the steep social and emotional costs that Sunita, Vinay, Rahul, and Ayesha did. By getting the full endorsement of their love marriage from their parents, they might treat their marriage almost as though it were arranged, a process often called an "arranged love marriage." Apurva had been open with her parents about her romantic relationship with her boyfriend Siddharth for several years before they began formally talking about marriage. Her parents accepted the relationship and encouraged her to marry Siddharth. She explained that she faced no pressure to have an arranged marriage and her parents were even accepting of the fact that Siddharth came from a different caste. Siddharth's family was similarly supportive of the marriage.

Krishna and Shreya encountered a similar level of support for their love marriage because of their parent's attitudes towards marriage. Krishna and his wife Shreya kept their relationship a secret from their families until they knew they were ready for marriage.

Krishna explained that “my family is completely open in terms of relationships, so I never faced any restrictions... so I just told them that I like a girl and I want to get married, and they were happy with it. It’s your decision, it’s your life, go forward with it.” Krishna and Shreya’s parents supported the love marriage even though they came from different caste communities, perhaps because there was no large gap in status between their castes. Because they were both raised by parents who were open to the idea of self-selection of one’s marriage partner and because their marriages did not cross large caste or religious barriers, Apurva and Krishna faced few obstacles to their love marriages. When weighing the costs, risks, and uncertainties of love and arranged marriage, it was clear to Apurva and Krishna that love marriage to their long-term romantic partner made the most sense. This calculation was different for Madhav, whose parents were not accepting of an inter-caste love marriage. The social context, especially family attitudes, in which young people make marriage decisions was the most important factor determining the choices they will make.

Arranged marriage as insurance

Despite the view that it may be a “gamble,” arranged marriage remains popular within the urban middle-class and most of the unmarried respondents favored it over love marriage. This was because arranged marriage was viewed as coming with an important benefit, family support. To young people applying a marital pragmatism lens to their choice, this parental support made arranged marriage a “safer” and more desirable option. Neel, who was married to Geeta, was a management professional in his early 30s. He explained that:

I think both [types of] marriage are a gamble, whether it is love or arranged. With arranged, it is more of a gamble, it’s just that you have the backing of your families. If something goes wrong, the families have an option to

come into play. With love marriage, I think that option kind of gets reduced because it is eventually the individual's decision to get into that kind of marriage.

Neel's quote provides an example of the most common reason given by middle-class young adults for why they prefer arranged marriage. According to him, arranged marriage would allow him to access more parental support if the marriage did not work out or encountered issues. Thus, parents serve as a form of insurance against the risk of a "bad marriage" for those in an arranged marriage. Madhav, who had decided against a love marriage because of how it would impact his relationship with his parents, shared that:

It's your call to go for a love marriage, so you can't complain about your life partner to your parents, because they did not agree to it, so you can't complain or discuss anything if you have any kind of issues going on in your marriage.

Amar expressed a similar sentiment. He explained that he chose an arranged marriage "because you have a parental backing, so if anything bad happens to you, or if the marriage does not work, you have both families' support behind you... emotional support, financial support... any type of support you want." He later explained that some people in love marriage may get family support but not always and not to the same degree, in his opinion. Since, as his quote in the previous section reveals, Amar felt that both love and arranged marriage were a "gamble," he elected for an arranged marriage because it would come with this vital insurance.

The unmarried young people interviewed frequently brought up this line of reasoning as justification for their endorsement of arranged marriage over love marriage. Sumit, who is quoted earlier expressing a desire to skip marriage altogether, explained why

he was unable to give a strong promise of marriage to his secret girlfriend, who eventually ended up having an arranged marriage to someone else:

I, myself, am not prepared for marriage right now... my brother told our parents [that he wanted a love marriage], but he didn't force them to agree ... in the end, [parents] have to give in to their child's demands, but then they won't take responsibility for anything, and if something goes wrong in the future, then whose support do I have, if not my parents? ... she asked me to give her surety that I would marry her, so then she'd be able to stall her parents, [but] what surety could I give her? I don't have any myself.

Sumit felt unready for the magnitude of the commitment of marriage to his girlfriend when her parents began arranging her marriage. Witnessing how his older brother had to take on more responsibility for his choice since he had a love marriage had left a strong impression on Sumit, making him wary of such a large commitment. As a result, Sumit felt that he would go for an arranged marriage instead.

Many of the unmarried young people used a language of "blame" when describing who would take responsibility for adverse situations in their marriage. They feared that, if their love marriage encountered problems, they would be "blamed" for having picked a "bad" partner. Sanjay, a 21-year-old unmarried college student explained that:

When you choose someone, you have to be their guarantor, because you chose them. If my mother chooses someone, that's easier, there's more scope for compromise. I can blame her. It's like if I break a mirror, I get yelled at, but if my mother breaks it, no one says anything.

The parents of Gautam, a 29-year-old unmarried man working in sales, had begun searching for a wife for him at the time of our interview. He also discussed the role of "blame" in shaping his views on marriage:

Arranged is safer... you cannot blame yourself... If I have a love marriage, they'll go on and on for my entire life if the girl turns out wrong. If you have an arranged marriage, then you can be the one to go on and on... tell them to handle her since they chose her.

It was not only men who spoke about deflecting “blame” for their marriage choices. Sanjana, a 25-year-old medical student who wanted to marry her secret boyfriend but felt that her family wouldn't approve of the inter-caste love marriage had resigned herself to the probable outcome of an arranged marriage. However, she noted that she would make clear to her parents that “if I'm having an arranged marriage, if I'm getting married to someone of your choice, [then] if I have a problem later, you can't blame me if I leave... the blame shouldn't be on me.” While “blame” was a common theme in interviews with unmarried young people, those who were married rarely spoke about allocating blame and often did not categorize their marriage partner as wholly bad or good. Those who reported being unhappy in their arranged marriages generally reported having good relationships with their parents, primarily directing their frustration at their partner rather than the parents who chose their marriage partner.

For women, the desire to insure oneself in the event of a “bad marriage” sometimes took on a specific meaning related to safety. A few women described how women are in a more vulnerable position in a love marriage relative to an arranged marriage because they lack the same degree of family support. Kavita explained a hypothetical situation which could happen in a love marriage:

Later the boy says things to the girl about leaving her family, and can have any demands later, there's nothing the girl can do or say, because she chose this, she didn't do it with her parent's permission ... If we do something

with our parents' permission, then we know they're there, if the boy tortures you or something, you can tell your parents, they can help you.

Kavita's quote suggests that a woman who faces domestic violence after a love marriage many not be able to return to her parents for support and assistance. Tanvi, a 23-year-old unmarried schoolteacher, explained that, in an arranged marriage, a young woman can return to her parents if things go bad in her marital home "because we listened to our parents...so we can say it's not working and come back." Tanvi acknowledged that she had not seen this happen with anyone in her community but felt confident that her family would have her back if things went poorly after her wedding.

While having the insurance of parental support was an appealing advantage, some respondents felt that it was still not enough to compensate for the uncertainty that also comes with arranged marriage. Tripti, who was married to Amar, was a management professional in her early thirties. Tripti's family was, as she described, "liberal" and open to a love marriage; however, Tripti never had a serious boyfriend in her twenties that she considered marrying. By the time she was 29, the pressure to get married was overwhelming. Amar and Tripti were married just 45 days after initially meeting on an online matrimonial site, only having met three times before the ceremony. She shared:

After marriage... we had this issue with understanding each other... but fortunately it was an arranged marriage...so it was supported by the families. But then when you know the guy, when you've dated him for some time, things become easier after marriage.

Tripti agreed that the support of their families was an asset that made adjustment to married life easier; however, she still felt that it would have been easier to adjust if she had known

her husband better before the wedding. She contrasted her experience with that of her younger sister who was engaged to be married to her longtime boyfriend. Because of their premarital relationship, she did not anticipate her sister having as much trouble adjusting to married life as she had experienced.

Discussion

India is an outlier compared to other Asian countries in the persistence of arranged marriage. This study has examined the marriage attitudes of middle-class young adults in New Delhi and, in doing so, shed light on why arranged marriage remains dominant in India despite large economic and cultural changes in other dimensions of Indian life. Young Indians interviewed held strong reservations about marriage, often citing examples of “bad” marriages around them. The stories shared during the interviews of unhappy or conflict-ridden marriages in their social circles suggest that these issues may be more widespread than the literature suggests. Because of taboos on divorce, young people fear becoming trapped in one of these “bad” marriages. As a result of their concerns about marriage outcomes, the young Delhi-ites took an approach to marriage which I call marital pragmatism.

The language of marital pragmatism used by the urban middle class is a response to their desire to balance the competing expectations of their family with their own desire to have a fulfilling marriage. Given the high stakes of marriage decision-making, young people spoke through a lens of risks, uncertainties, and costs in justifying their choices. To many young people, arranged marriage was the “safer” choice because it came with the insurance of family support and did not suffer from the large costs associated with love marriage including disappointing parents and social stigma. However, they balanced these advantages

with the “gamble” of arranged marriage that derives from not really knowing their partner before marriage. They explained that the risk of incompatibility after marriage would be more manageable if they had the valuable support of their parents and community, which could be won only through conforming to the expectations of arranged marriage. What remains unclear, however, is how this parental support plays out for couples who face marital issues and whether parental assistance after marriage differs, as respondents believed, for couples in arranged, semi-arranged, and love marriages. Future research could examine this issue through focusing on the experiences of couples after marriage.

Those who advocated for love marriage, on the other hand, prioritized reducing uncertainty of marriage outcomes, sometimes at the expense of social and emotional costs. In doing so, they argued, they were reducing the risk of ending up in an unhappy marriage. Cultural narratives in India often describe love marriage as based on hasty and selfish decisions influenced by lust (Mody 2008; Twamley 2013a). Middle class respondents who advocated for love marriage challenged these narratives by casting their own decision-making through a lens of logic, pragmatism, and careful planning. While the young people interviewed often categorized marriage as a dichotomy between love and arranged when discussing their preferences and beliefs, in practice that distinction has grown blurry. Those couples interviewed who described their marriage as a love marriage did not elope against their parents’ wishes, as the stereotypical image of love marriage depicts. Instead, they sought the approval of their parents, seeking to obtain a hybrid “arranged love marriage” which would be seen publicly as supported by the families. However, the interviews as well as other literature suggests that these couples may still face some stigma or enjoy less family support after marriage (Grover 2018; Mody 2008; De Neve 2016). Those in arranged

marriages also pushed the boundaries, often describing how they tried to reduce uncertainty about their marriage partner by getting to know them before a decision was finalized and before the wedding.

The social and normative context plays a constraining role in young people's life decisions limiting the set of options which are desirable. Young Indians face a social expectation that they marry and a taboo on separation which made marriage both unavoidable and seemingly permanent. Taboos on dating and cohabitation bring logistic challenges to engaging in premarital romantic relationships. Finally, love marriage comes with significant social and emotional costs, due to the fact that it remains taboo in most communities. These social norms serve as hard barriers which circumscribe young people's lives and the life options available to them. Importantly, these structural constraints limit the effect of purely cultural globalization (Derné 2005). Ideational diffusion does not occur in a vacuum but interacts with local culture and social structures. This study highlights how normative and family constraints influence the marriage decision-making of the urban educated middle-class, the group most exposure to global cultural influences such as Developmental Idealism.

The findings also point to the central role of the family in framing the marriage options available to young people. This study contributes to a growing literature on how parents' marriage attitudes and beliefs impact the marriage behaviors of young people (Allendorf 2019; Jennings, Axinn, and Ghimire 2012). Preserving good relations with their parents is of paramount importance to young people and, as this study reveals, shapes the way that they think about marriage far more than globalized ideals regarding love and

“modernity.” Indeed, many of the respondents had decided against a love marriage with a previous romantic partner because it would weaken their relationship with their parents. Even those who chose a love marriage reported that they highly valued their parents’ appraisal of their marriage partner and went to great lengths to secure their parents’ blessing. When parents were open to a love marriage, it greatly reduced the costs associated with that option and made it more desirable to young people. Large changes to marriage practices, therefore, only become possible when the older generation adopts a new outlook on marriage.

CHAPTER 3: ROKA ENGAGEMENTS AND THE HYBRIDIZATION OF ARRANGED AND “LOVE” MARRIAGE IN URBAN INDIA

Abstract

In many parts of the world, arranged marriage is a common practice. Much of the sociological literature in arranged marriage contexts tends to classify marriages as either arranged or based on self-choice, ignoring the growth of hybrid marriages. Using data from 48 interviews and a representative survey, this study documents the central role of “roka” marriage engagements in the hybridization of arranged and self-choice marriage (also known as “love marriage”) in New Delhi. Couples in arranged marriages often engage in courtship during their engagement period drawing on the scripts of romantic love. This contact, however, may lead to a broken engagement if they couple determine that they are not compatible. Half of survey respondents in the Delhi region support breaking off an engagement in the case of incompatibility, reflecting the growing importance of emotional compatibility and personal autonomy in marriage decision-making. A second way in which roka is used in the hybridization of arranged and love marriage is for couples in premarital romantic relationships seeking to marry. These couples often use roka to signal that they have obtained parental endorsement of their “arranged love marriage.” The case of roka engagements in New Delhi reveals important ways in which the definition of arranged marriage now incorporates romantic love, individualism, and autonomy.

Arranged marriage, a system where parents choose their child's marriage partner, remains common in many parts of the world (Allendorf and Pandian 2016; Yeung, Desai, and Jones 2018). Some of the highest rates of arranged marriage can be found in South Asia. Despite numerous predictions that the practice would decline in favor of Western-style self-selection of one's marriage partner, arranged marriage remains a persistent feature of Indian family systems, even as the country has experienced economic growth, urbanization, and advancements in education. Rather than shifting to self-selection of one's marriage partner, Indians increasingly describe their marriage as something in-between arranged and self-selection. In fact, two thirds of Indian women married in the 2000s had marriages which could be categorized as "joint arranged" (Allendorf and Pandian 2016). Social scientists are only beginning to understand what joint-arrangement means to Indian families and the heterogeneity of different partner selection practices which can be found in India today. The various ways in which Indian families are modifying arranged marriage to incorporate romantic love, individualism, and autonomy reveals how "modern" cultural repertoires are blended with the "traditional" values associated with arranged marriage.

In this paper, I shed light on the nature of joint arrangement by focusing on a pivotal period in the marriage arrangement process in India which has received limited attention in the literature: the engagement. Drawing on 48 interviews among middle class individuals and new survey data from New Delhi, I document how engagements are used by young people to blur the distinction between self-choice, often referred to as "love marriage," and arranged marriage. In North India, families mark the end of the arranged marriage search process with an event often called roka, beginning a period of betrothal for the couple until the wedding day. I find that this roka engagement period is frequently used by couples in

arranged marriages to engage in courtship and develop a romantic relationship. New technologies like mobile phones and social media facilitate this contact during the betrothal. Alternatively, couples in premarital romantic relationships intending to marry were also found to use roka, albeit to different aims. For them, the roka ceremony helped signal the social legitimacy of their relationship because their parents' sponsorship allows them to treat their marriage as though it were full arranged. Finally, I show how the betrothal courtships of arranged couples can lead to broken engagements, a phenomenon which reveals the growing importance of compatibility and autonomous choice in marriage decision-making. Roka marriage engagements are an overlooked site for the hybridization of different marriage scripts in the Indian context. By focusing on roka, I show that arranged marriages in India are being reconceived as the definition expands to incorporate new practices.

Family change and the hybridization of marriage practices

The hybridization of marriage practices in India is significant because it seems to defy important theories of global family change which anticipate adoption of a Western marriage model. Goode's (1963) theory of family change predicted that development, industrialization, and urbanization would lead to a global convergence of family forms to the Western model, including self-selection of one's marriage partner. Growing individualism, the impracticality of large extended family co-residence in cities, and the breakdown of the traditional age or gender hierarchy in "modern" societies are often cited as causes for this expected global convergence (Goode 1963, 1982; Pesando 2019). While some evidence has been found of a link between economic development and family change for a number of family indicators, such as fertility, marriage practices appear to have a weaker association

with development and continue to show significant diversity across regions (Ortega 2014; Pesando et al. 2019; Raymo et al. 2015; Ruggles 2009).

Other perspectives on global family change focus on the spread of ideas, values, and cultural scripts. Even within Western societies, the idea that love is the most important pretext for marriage and that marriages should be decided only by the couple involved is relatively new (Coontz 2004; Giddens 1992). Across the 20th century, the cultural meanings associated with marriage in American society experienced several major transformations as part of a larger deinstitutionalization of family life in favor of individualized intimacy (Cherlin 2004). The growing importance of individual autonomy, self-realization, and romantic love in intimate relationships continues to shape family transformations globally (Giddens 1992; Lesthaeghe 2010).

In developing countries, the literature has often focused on the spread of ideas about the relationship between family and modernity. Thornton (2005) argues that beliefs that Western family structures are both a cause and consequence of development have spread throughout the developing world through colonialism, schools, travel, mass media, missionaries and international development aid. Significant evidence has been found linking endorsement of these Developmental Idealism beliefs with adoption of so-called “modern” family behaviors in a variety of social contexts including Iran, India, Nepal, Turkey, and China (Abbasi-Shavazi and Askari-Nodoushan 2012; Allendorf 2013; Allendorf and Thornton 2015; Kavas and Thornton 2013; Lai and Thornton 2015; Thornton, Binstock, et al. 2012). One of these beliefs is that self-selection of one’s marriage partner is both modern and inherently good.

However, family change may not manifest as a direct imitation of Western family forms. Individuals, in both the developed and developing world, have access to a wide variety of cultural repertoires or “scripts” regarding marriage at their disposal to make sense of their lives and their choices (Swidler 2001). In blending different cultural scripts, families may create new family structures and practices. Harkness and Khaled (2014), describing the hybrid practice of consanguineous love marriages in Qatar coined the term “modern traditionalism” because it is an amalgam of conventional practices with modern elements of romantic love and choice. Similar hybrid marriage models have been documented in Sri Lanka and Turkey as families have expanded the definition of arranged marriage to incorporate elements of romance and autonomy (Hart 2007; Manglos-Weber and Weinreb 2017; de Munck 1996). Even in the East Asian context, which has documented a dramatic decline in arranged marriage, parents still play a central role in both the search process and marriage decision-making (Tian and Davis 2019; Tsutsui 2013). Finding one’s marriage partner through family introduction continues to be a common practice in China today (Tian and Davis 2019). These examples from diverse social settings reveal how the process of family change produces heterogeneous outcomes that reflect the cultural context in which those changes are situated. The resultant family forms, while sharing elements with Western family structures, are often entirely unique hybrids reflecting the multitude of different cultural influences. This study builds on this literature by revealing how India’s joint-arranged marriages allow young people to merge their desire for emotional intimacy and romantic love with the values of respecting elders and following tradition.

India's joint arranged marriages

The literature has often highlighted India's outlier status in the persistence of marriage practices over time. Marriage remains nearly universal in India, divorce is rare, and nearly all marriages are endogamous by caste and religion (Dommaraju 2016; Goli et al. 2013; IIPS & ICF 2017; Yeung et al. 2018). In addition, India continues to have one of the highest rates of arranged marriage in the world (Yeung et al. 2018). Both parents and young people alike report a strong preference for arranged marriage over love marriage (Netting 2010; Reed 2021; Twamley 2013a). Dating is seen as taboo in many social contexts in South Asia and so romantic relationships are often kept secret from the couple's family members (Aengst 2014; Huang 2018; Mody 2008). Those who do decide to have a love marriage sometimes face social stigma especially if the marriage crosses caste or religious boundaries (Chowdhry 2010; Mody 2008). As a result, love marriage remains uncommon in India. Only 6% of Indian women married in the 2000s described their marriage as a love marriage (Allendorf and Pandian 2016).

However, the story of the persistence of arranged marriage in India may not be as clear-cut as this statistic would seem to indicate. It may be inaccurate to dichotomize arranged and love marriage because recent evidence suggests that the distinction between them has become fuzzy. Increasingly marriages today may fall on a spectrum somewhere between arranged and love marriage, drawing on elements of parental authority as well as personal choice (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008; Hart 2007). Allendorf and Pandian (2016) document the rise of the "joint-arranged" marriage, a broadly defined term referring to when young adults play some role in selecting their marriage partner. Using data from the India

Human Development Survey, they find that joint arrangement was highest in India's metros (nearly 80% of marriages).

The existing literature is only beginning to piece together an understanding of what joint-arrangement looks like in practice. Interview studies suggest that most young urban Indians want an arranged marriage but also want to not feel compulsion, preferring instead a system of parent-arranged "introductions" where they are allowed to choose whether or not they want to proceed with marriage negotiations with the person after meeting them a few times (Netting 2010; Twamley 2013b). These modifications allow these new hybrid forms of arranged marriage to conform to norms of endogamy and respect for parental authority while also incorporating elements of choice for young people. In particular, parents in middle class families show a desire to prioritize emotional compatibility in addition to other requirements such as caste, education, and occupation (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008). Online matrimonial tools help families search for potential marriage partners together, allowing families to meet the goals of both parents and the young couple (Titzmann 2013). Recent survey data seems to suggest that most joint arranged marriages involve parents selecting their child's spouse but allowing them to "veto" options, often after meeting or speaking with the potential match a few times (Reed 2021).

This can be contrasted with another form of joint arranged marriage, what is commonly known as the "love-cum-arranged" marriage or "arranged love marriage" marriage. This form of marriage occurs when a couple who have been in a secret romantic relationship approach their parents for their approval to marry, a delicate process which may take years of negotiations to successfully achieve (De Neve 2016; Uberoi 2006). By doing so,

the couple brings their relationship under parental authority and control, allowing them to avoid some of the shame associated with love marriage (Mody 2008). The parents often choose to endorse the union and move forward as though the marriage were traditionally arranged and may even present it as an arranged marriage in public (Donner 2016; De Neve 2016). It is unclear how couples in these types of marriages will classify themselves on survey data as some research finds that they often refer to their marriage only as “arranged” (Donner 2016). They may or may not use terms like “semi-arranged”. The public usually makes a distinction between these types of unions and elopement love marriages done against parent's permission, with only the latter being seen as a breach of social norms (Mody 2008). However, Grover (2018) finds that arranged love marriages are also treated differently than more traditional arranged marriages. Women in these unions access less family support and assistance after marriage and may face heightened social scrutiny (Grover 2018; De Neve 2016).

Roka

This paper will focus on the social significance of the betrothal or engagement period for urban North Indian couples. While marriage practices vary dramatically across the diverse communities found in North India, it is common for families to signal the end of the arranged marriage spousal search with some form of ceremony or ritual. In much of North India this event is called a roka, a word which derives from the verb “to stop” in Hindi and Punjabi (Chadha 2005; Myrvold 2004). This event signals that the two families have officially agreed to the marriage match between their children and that they will stop their search for a groom or bride. Though the term “roka” is most often associated with Punjabi Hindu

marriage traditions, related practices are found across India and within Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Jain traditions. Other terms used for these types of betrothal rituals in North India include sagai, mangni, tilak, and thaka. While each of these betrothal rituals have unique elements and different practices, there is a commonality in how this event publicly signals the end of the marriage search process and begins a betrothal period of wedding planning. In this text, I will use the terms “roka” and “engagement” interchangeable to refer both to the event or ceremony and the time period between this event and the wedding.

Roka ceremonies are usually muted events often attended by only a few family members and taking place at home, in a temple, or in some public place like a restaurant (Chadha 2005). During a roka ceremony, gifts such as clothes, dried fruit, and jewelry are frequently exchanged between the bride and groom’s families (Chadha 2005; Myrvold 2004). Sometimes a roka ceremony involves the exchange of rings, though this is often done in a separate larger ceremony taking place after the roka called a shagan, mangni, or sagai. A religious leader may be present to give a blessing to the match, lead a prayer, or set an auspicious date for the wedding. India’s \$50 billion wedding industry (Vaidya 2019), wedding blogs, Bollywood and TV depictions, and news coverage of celebrity rokas have helped popularize and homogenize roka engagement practices across India. In recent years, there also appears to be a trend among the upper class of making the roka a more extravagant affair (for an example, see the finale of Netflix’s *Indian Matchmaking* which features a roka ceremony).

Historically, arranged marriage in India has meant that young people have little to no contact with their betrothed both before the marriage is fixed and during the engagement

period. Survey data found that 60% of women living in Indian metros who married in the 2000s report that they met their husband on the wedding day (Allendorf and Pandian 2016). Only a small share of those women also said that they had another form of contact with their husband such as speaking on the phone or communicating through email or chat before the wedding. Rates of meeting one's husband on the wedding day were highest in North India relative to other regions of the country (Allendorf and Pandian 2016).

However, emerging evidence suggests that contact between the betrothed is becoming increasingly common. A recent interview study in Nepal found examples of contact between the couple during their engagement, though women were often unwilling to admit the degree of contact for fear of stigma (Diamond-Smith et al. 2020). An ethnography among middle-class Vattima Brahmins in Tamil Nadu also found an increasing social acceptance of contact between the betrothed during their engagement period and an openness to calling off the engagement (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008). In interview studies, young unmarried Indians express a desire to begin developing a relationship with their betrothed during their engagement, with the option of calling off the engagement if they decide they are incompatible (Netting 2010; Twamley 2013b). Building on these studies, I will show how couples use their engagement period to blend different traditions and the cultural repertoires associated with love and arranged marriage.

Data and methods

This paper uses qualitative data from 48 semi-structured interviews and descriptive results from a survey. All interview respondents were part of the urban middle-class residing in the New Delhi metro region. The study focuses on the urban middle class because this

population navigates a wide range of competing cultural influences from Bollywood to Western media to conservative religious and caste institutions. Middle-class was defined as having or currently pursuing a college degree.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face between July 2018 and March 2019 with three groups: 1) recently married/engaged individuals; 2) unmarried young people; and 3) parents of unmarried young people. The aim in interviewing these three different groups was to gather a variety of perspectives on current marriage practices. Snowballing was used to recruit participants. Interview respondents were located through several means: 1) through cold-calling households with unmarried persons who had participated in the survey also used in this analysis; 2) through recruitment posts in closed Facebook Delhi neighborhood groups; 3) through recruitment texts shared on the WhatsApp messaging app; 4) by approaching college students near a local campus. The WhatsApp messages shared across the researcher's social network and the cold calls to survey participants generated the majority of the interview respondents. The interview respondents came from a wide range of caste and religious communities found in the Delhi middle-class including Hindus from both upper castes and lower status castes (including the oppressed caste group of Dalits as well as "Other Backward Classes" (OBCs)), Sikhs, Jains, and Muslims. While there are differences in marriage practices across these communities, they all have high rates of arranged marriage and most practice some form of roka-like engagement, though the practice often goes by different names.

Table 1 contains a description of the interviews conducted for this research. The largest group of interview respondents were the recently married or engaged, from which I draw case studies of different experiences with roka. Thirty recently married or engaged

people were interviewed including 16 women and 14 men from 16 different-sex couples. Two of the husbands refused participation in the study. The respondents were interviewed alone and separate from their spouse allowing them to speak freely about their marriage. The married and engaged respondents ranged in age from 23 to 35. Eleven of the couples described their marriage as primarily or completely arranged and the remaining five described their marriage as a love or arranged love marriage. All the couples had been married within the past four years, except one couple which was currently engaged at the time of the interview. Twelve of the 16 couples were dual earner. The married or engaged respondents, being part of the urban middle class, were primarily employed in professional occupations such as management, medicine, and information technology (IT).

Table 1: Description of interviews conducted in the New Delhi region, July 2018 – March 2019

	Number of Interviews	Participants
<i>Recently married/ engaged individuals from 16 different-sex couples</i>		
Individual interviews with married/engaged women	16	16
Individual interviews with married/engaged men	14	14
Total recently married/engaged individuals	30	30
<i>Unmarried people aged 18-29</i>		
Individual interviews with unmarried women	2	2
Individual interviews with unmarried men	4	4
Group interviews with unmarried women	3	8
Group interviews with unmarried men	1	3
Total unmarried people	10	17
<i>Parents of unmarried people aged 18-29</i>		
Individual interviews with mothers	3	3
Individual interviews with fathers	1	1
Group interviews with mother and father	4	8
Total parents	8	12
Grand total	48	59

The remaining 18 interviews were conducted with middle-class unmarried young adults and the parents of unmarried young adults living in the New Delhi region. As depicted in Table 1, ten interviews were conducted with unmarried young people aged 18-29 including six individual interviews and four interviews with small groups. The group interviews provide unique insights into how young adults speak to each other about marriage practices like roka. The groups interviewed included a group of brothers, a group of sisters, and two groups of female friends. Half of the young adults interviewed were women. Slightly over half were college students.

In addition, eight interviews were conducted with parents, including three interviews with mothers, one with a father, and four group interviews with both the mother and father together. Due to lower education levels in older cohorts, not all of the parents were college-educated but all of them had children who were college educated. Most of the mothers interviewed identified as a housewife though one of the mothers was a doctor. The fathers interviewed worked in retail, government service, and construction. The parents were asked about their plans and expectations for their unmarried children's marriages.

A semi-structured interview guide was used which included several questions on roka practices, in addition to other questions on marriage attitudes and experiences. Interviews took place either in the home of the respondent or a public place such as a coffee shop. The interviews were conducted in Hindi and/or English, depending on preference of the respondent. A local female research assistant attended and participated in all interviews with the author. All but one of the interviews were audio recorded. All interviews were transcribed, and, if relevant, translated by the research assistant. The interview data was

analyzed with the ATLAS.ti software using iterative waves of coding based on topics and themes. After carefully reading both the husband and wife interviews several times and searching for patterns and disconfirming evidence, each couple was classified by their experience with roka. The interviews with unmarried young people and parents were primarily used to provide context regarding social attitudes on roka engagements. In the text, pseudonyms are used for the study participants and some identifying details have been changed.

This interview data is supplemented with descriptive results from a representative household survey conducted in the Delhi National Capital Region (NCR) in 2016 and 2017 by the University of Pennsylvania's Center for the Advanced Study of India (CASI). The NCR is an urban agglomeration which includes the National Capital Territory of the capital city of Delhi (similar to the District of Columbia in the United States) as well as 18 adjacent districts from the states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan. The 2016 CASI Delhi NCR Survey sampled from the urban-classified areas in this region using the 2013 definition of regional boundaries, representing a total population of 30 million people according to the last census. The 2014 electoral rolls are used as the sampling frame from which the majority of the clustered random sample is drawn. The sample was also supplemented using a "random walk" method which aimed to capture potentially missing households on the electoral rolls (Sircar and Chakravorty 2021). Comparison of the sample to other existing datasets including the 2011 Census and the National Sample Survey suggest that the data yield a representative sample in terms of caste, religion, gender, and migrant status (Sircar and Chakravorty 2021).

The CASI Delhi NCR Survey is the first to ask about attitudes towards roka engagement practices, providing a unique opportunity to examine this topic systematically. In total 5,477 individuals were surveyed and there is complete data on attitudes towards *roka* from 5,379 of those respondents. Combining the interview and survey data provides a comprehensive look at attitudes towards roka in the New Delhi region. While the interview data is drawn from the urban middle-class, the survey results are representative of the urban population of the region across social and economic classes.

Today, couples are often in contact during their roka

Since there is no longitudinal data on roka engagement practices from surveys and only limited description of the practice in ethnographic accounts, it is not possible to definitively determine how the practice has changed over time in North India. However, most of those interviewed expressed a belief that the practice had indeed changed over the past several decades. It was common to hear the middle-class interview respondents say that, previously, little or no contact was allowed between the betrothed during their engagement; however, now this contact is considered socially acceptable by many families. Kumar, tailor and father of three unmarried sons in their twenties, explained that “according to the earlier rules, after the roka, the girl and the boy didn’t meet. They didn’t. But looking at conditions nowadays, once the roka... is done, the girl [and boy] meet each other.” Jayanti, an unmarried woman in her late 20s said:

Quite a few things have changed. Earlier they wouldn’t even show you the person you were marrying. Earlier... the parents would like someone and then you were supposed to get married to this person and you would only see them the actual day of the wedding. This has changed. Now you are shown the person. You are asked. Now people talk on the phone as well....

You end up meeting the person... once or twice before the wedding. This never happened earlier.

Jayanti's quote highlights how mobile phones facilitate contact between the betrothed that would not have previously been possible. While both Kumar and Jayanti's quotes suggest a level of social acceptability within the urban middle class of the betrothed talking during the engagement period, several respondents said that permission for contact between the betrothed is often not explicitly given by parents. Sumit, an unmarried graduate student in his late twenties described how parents give "unspoken permission" for couples to speak during their engagement:

[In our caste community], some people's parents don't have an issue with the children meeting each other [before the wedding], but most parents don't allow them to meet. However, there will be an unspoken permission. There will be someone in the house who will be supportive. This person will take the contact number. Suppose my ring ceremony is going to happen, and if I'm comfortable being frank with my sister-in-law... then I can tell her to ask for the girl's number. Once I have the number, I can talk to her, and then I can meet her outside somewhere. But parents can't be told, on either side. So basically, it isn't allowed.

While some parents may allow the couple to meet, many parents refuse to give legitimacy to this contact through explicitly endorsing it. The role of interlocuters who help facilitate clandestine contact between the betrothed during their roka came up in several interviews besides Sumit's. According to some respondents, it was common for female relatives such as a sister-in-law or aunt to play this role.

The survey data reveals that roka engagements, where the couple are in contact before their marriage, have become socially acceptable within many communities, not solely the middle class. Respondents to the 2016 CASI Delhi NCR Survey were asked whether it

was acceptable or right to have a roka engagement, also known as a sagai, where the couple communicate with each other during their betrothal. In total, 65.4% of respondents felt that a roka, where the couple are in contact before the wedding was an acceptable practice, whereas 23.1% did not think it was acceptable and 11.5% said they were not sure. Attitudes towards the acceptability of roka were similar across wealth and education levels, though those who expected young people in their family to participate in selecting their own spouse were more likely to say that roka was an acceptable practices (Reed 2021). Those who said that roka was an acceptable practice were also asked how long the engagement should ideally last. The most common response, which was given by nearly 20% of respondents, was 4 weeks. The mean number of weeks of engagement which respondents found desirable was 6.5. While the range was quite large, most respondents were clustered around the median of 4 weeks. In fact, 50% of respondents gave a response between two and six weeks.

The roka period as courtship for couples in arranged marriages

The interviews with middle-class married individuals suggest that many couples treat their roka period as a courtship where they get to know each other, test out their compatibility, and even develop a romantic relationship before their wedding. This section describes the experiences of two couples, Preeti and Arun and Nishita and Sagar, whose roka engagements illustrate typical experiences of middle-class couples in arranged marriages.

Preeti and Arun were married two years before our interviews in a lavish wedding attended by hundreds of guests. Preeti and Arun both worked in management. Preeti was 27 when they married, and Arun was 29. Around three years ago, a mutual contact between their families had suggested the match and so the two families arranged a meeting in a local

mall. In the thirty minutes that Preeti and Arun spoke to each other alone that day, Arun felt a connection. He explained that “one thing just clicked after another... we were comfortable talking to each other.” In the car ride home, he told his parents that he was ready to move forward with marrying Preeti. Preeti needed more time to decide. She found Arun on Facebook and they had several conversations on the phone and through Whatsapp messages over the span of two weeks. They even arranged a meeting alone. Preeti explained that “I want[ed] to discuss my priorities... so that we are on the same page.” After spending a day together discussing their families, friends, lifestyles, and life goals, Preeti was ready to say yes to Arun. Their roka took place two weeks later. Preeti and Arun’s roka ceremony was attended by 40 friends and family members. As part of the festivities, several gifts were exchanged. Preeti received diamond earrings from Arun’s family and Arun received a gold chain from Preeti’s family.

During the three-month period between their roka ceremony and wedding, Preeti and Arun continued their regular calls and messages, met each other’s friends, and planned romantic daylong dates. Arun described their roka period in detail, explaining how his emotions for Preeti deepened as they spent more time together. Arun described one special day with Preeti during their roka:

We went around for the whole day. We had lunch and then we had dinner... and that was where we got even more close because we went to some old fort... We sat over there. We talked for a really long time. It was the first time we kissed... so that became a connection spot itself. After that, everything else escalated.

Arun’s description of this date with Preeti highlights the romance of his engagement period. In addition to getting to know each other, they also explored physical intimacy. Arun did not

have much experience dating so he sought advice from his friend's wife on how he should act during his dates with Preeti. He explained:

I never had a close girlfriend. Most of my friends were boys... This was very new to me so I got help from my friend's wife. They had gotten a love marriage... At every point, I used to ask for her assistance... The first time I went to meet [Preeti], I asked her what should I take. I had some idea that I should take something. She said, 'take something normal, like a perfume.' So I took perfume and [Preeti] appreciated it...I didn't have much experience but I'm lucky that she didn't mind.

Arun and Preeti treated their roka as a courtship and therefore he sought advice on how to act with Preeti during his engagement from a confidant who had more experience with courtship, a friend who had a love marriage. Arun's description reveals that he experienced the excitement and anxieties that might be expected for couples at the beginning of a romantic relationship.

Preeti and Arun did not tell their parents about their meetings or conversations during their roka. While they were not openly dating, they did have a few confidants within their families who knew that they were in contact. Preeti confided in an aunt about her dates with Arun whereas Arun sought advice from a sister-in-law, in addition to the advice he received from the friend's wife described above. It was also important to Arun for Preeti to meet his friends. He explained:

The first time she met my friends was at a friend's house... Before that also, we had spoken on the phone through a common WhatsApp group.... I think it was a one-to-two-hour meeting, and then after that we went for dinner. She said, 'yeah, I like your friends. It'll be a good circle.'... When I dropped her off... it was like any two friends chatting... but I had that feeling also that I like her, I'm going to marry her.

Meeting each other's friends and making sure that they would be able to merge their social lives was important to many of the couples interviewed. Overall, Arun and Preeti's roka period was filled with the romantic moments, time spent getting to know one another, and a process of integration into each other's lives that was akin to romantic pre-marital courtship. Even though their marriage was arranged, Arun and Preeti were able to incorporate many elements of dating into their roka period. In doing so, they created a hybrid marriage form that drew from both the cultural scripts of traditional arranged marriage and those of romantic love.

Another couple, Nishita and Sagar, had a similar experience of courtship during their roka period. Nishita and Sagar had been married almost two years before the interview and had just recently had their first child together. Nishita was 24 when she married Sagar and left her office job after marriage. Sagar, who worked as a business owner, was 25 when he was married. Nishita and Sagar's roka took place on the same day that their families first met. Like Arun and Preeti, their match was suggested by a mutual family friend. Nishita explained that their families met at a local mall in the late morning and she and Sagar were given some time to speak privately to each other. Shortly after, they were asked if they wanted to move forward with the marriage and both agreed. A celebratory lunch was organized at a restaurant. That evening, the very same day that couple first met, the families met again at Sagar's family home for a small roka ceremony which involved the exchange of a few small gifts between the families.

Nishita and Sagar's roka set off an intensive period of getting to know each other in the two and a half months before the wedding. Unlike Preeti and Arun, Nishita and Sagar's

family knew that the couple was in contact and supported the couple as they got to know each other. Nishita even used the word “courtship” to describe her roka period. They met three to four times a week during their engagement at the mall food court for coffee and snacks. Nishita and Sagar even attended a wedding together with Sagar’s family while they were engaged. Nishita explained how she used the roka period to get to know her husband and his family through regular phone calls:

I used to talk to my in-laws on the phone every day, to mama (her mother-in-law), and to him, [Sagar]...I was really curious to know... what is the taste of the family, and what all will they like and dislike... what does their family believe in ... more than [Sagar] I think I spoke to my [mother-in-law] ... She’s actually very sweet. She used to tell me, ‘Your husband likes this type of food, I like that type of food’... [She told me] what is the [family’s] dressing sense, and what all they believe in and who all of the relatives are.

Nishita was eager to learn about what kind of family she would be joining after marriage and what their expectations would be for her as a daughter-in-law. Like Arun and Preeti, Nishita and Sagar used their roka to get to know each other and each other’s’ families. As a result, they entered their marriage with an already established relationship, a departure from the more traditional practice of getting to know each other only after marriage.

Many couples had private conversations during their roka period in which they shared information about their life or their past which was not divulged at the time of arranging the marriage. Most commonly this included a history of romantic relationships and whether they drink alcohol or consume non-vegetarian food. Since these things are often considered taboo, parents were sometimes unaware of these aspects of their child’s life. Thus, the couple exercise caution when divulging this information to their fiancé. Sagar had

previously been in a serious romantic relationship with a woman that he had wanted to marry. However, the relationship did not work out. Sagar explained how he shared this information with Nishita:

I told her, not exactly on the same day, but I thought she should know... anyone would feel bad, but I told her I think fifteen or twenty days before our marriage. I said, 'I'm hiding something from you, which I don't think is good. If you want to break [our roka], it's okay.'

While Nishita was initially surprised by Sagar's admission, she eventually accepted it and decided against calling off their engagement, often called "breaking the roka." She also had a secret she had kept from Sagar, that she occasionally drinks alcohol, something taboo in their community. Nishita explains how she told Sagar about her drinking:

During our roka we had a huge fight over [my drinking]. He told me that, 'you never told me that you drink!', and I said that I thought you'll feel bad, that's why I didn't tell you. There were actually a few fights in our roka time... he doesn't like it when something is hidden from him... my parents always told me, that whatever is in your past, don't tell your husband and I followed that blindly which actually disturbed my life a bit... that hurt him a lot.

Like many couples who spend a significant amount of time getting to know each other during their engagement, Nishita and Sagar experienced their first fights during their roka. Eventually, Nishita and Sagar learned to move past their conflicts. Nishita explained that "slowly, things came into place and our understanding increased, and of course eventually, the love increased also." Sharing private details of their lives and experiencing conflicts during the roka are part of treating the engagement as a courtship. Along with going on dates, exploring physical intimacy, and meeting each other's friends and family, these practices blur the lines between arranged and love marriage.

Finding incompatibility during the roka period

For some couples, the roka period does not go smoothly and they find themselves to be incompatible. Arjun and Deepika had been married for nearly two years when I interviewed them. When I met them, they already had a young daughter. Both Arjun and Deepika worked for multinational companies. Their families lived in the same region far from where Arjun and Deepika had built a home together in an apartment complex in the Delhi suburbs. Arjun was 29 when he got married and Deepika was 27. While visiting home two years ago, their parents arranged for them to meet alone at a local restaurant. Shortly after, Arjun and Deepika agreed to move forward with the marriage and an engagement ceremony took place a few weeks later. Arjun and Deepika's engagement period was longer than those of some couples. They were engaged for around six months before their wedding.

During their engagement, Arjun and Deepika spoke on the phone regularly and met many times, though without the knowledge of their parents. Initially, Deepika was working in another city. She planned a visit to Delhi to see Arjun. A few months into their engagement Arjun visited Deepika for a weekend visit. Anticipating her move to Delhi with her marriage, Deepika requested a transfer from her company and was relocated to the Delhi office several months before their wedding. After her move to Delhi, she met Arjun more regularly because they were living in the same city. Unfortunately, Arjun and Deepika encountered issues with compatibility during their engagement period. Deepika explained:

After the engagement there were a lot of differences between us. We both thought that we shouldn't get married...that we shouldn't go through with this marriage, but for our society, our family, once the engagement has happened, nothing can happen.

Deepika explained that their “mindsets weren’t matching” and they had frequent conflicts. Unfortunately, both agreed that breaking the engagement would be too stigmatizing for themselves and their families so they should continue with the marriage plans. Arjun draws a distinction between families which are more open towards calling off an engagement and his own family:

[For our families], it’s not like it was the Delhi-type concept where we would meet, talk to each other, find out the nature [of the person] in three months, and then in the fourth month we would say no... ‘No’ is a very big thing. I could have said ‘no.’ My parents also wouldn’t say anything, but it’s very difficult to do after the engagement... Whatever is in your destiny is what will happen, frankly speaking.

His community was more traditional, he explained, and a broken engagement would be scandalous and shameful for their families. The incompatibility that had emerged during the engagement continued into their marriage and both Arjun and Deepika described their marriage as not particularly happy. Deepika explained that “even now it comes to our minds that we should separate, but that’s not an option...that is not possible practically.”

Breaking a roka

Arjun and Deepika felt forced to move forward with their engagement due to a strong taboo within their community on breaking a roka. A number of respondents spoke about the stigma associated with a broken roka, both for the betrothed and also for their families. Surjan, a 29-year-old unmarried office worker, explained that the stigma of a broken roka is often primarily born by the woman who was engaged. He said, “rokas break a lot.. if any boy or girl’s roka breaks off, then finding another match for her, through a relative or a third person is difficult... even if one is found, people will call her names and say things about

her.” Several respondents made comments similar to Surjan’s that women whose roka had been broken have difficulty finding another partner and may face negative reputational consequences. These reputational consequences did not seem to also apply similarly to men in broken rokas. Another concern that may hold families back from breaking off an engagement is the money already spent on the roka and for the wedding, including deposits on a wedding venue, invitations, and other expenses that may not be refundable.

However, despite these costs and the potential stigma, some interview respondents agreed that it was still better to call off an engagement if it appears that the couple will be incompatible. Ruchita was a housewife who had already arranged her daughter’s marriage and was currently in the process of searching for a bride for her son. She explained:

If [my daughter] had told me that she didn’t like the boy and she didn’t want to marry him, then we would be more concerned with the child’s happiness, obviously. We’ve already told our children, I told her even on the day of the engagement, that she shouldn’t worry about how much money we have spent, we’re more interested in her happiness, so that later she shouldn’t accuse us of forcing her to do something, we would only agree if you’re absolutely sure.

Being open to their child deciding to break the engagement is part of the move towards a “joint-arranged” marriage where young people have a say in the decision. Ruchita did not want her daughter to feel “forced” into marriage. She also emphasizes the importance of her daughter’s happiness over the financial costs associated with breaking a roka.

The 2016 CASI Delhi NCR Survey also asked about whether a family should call off a wedding and break a roka if it becomes clear that the couple are incompatible and would have an unhappy marriage. The results are presented in Table 2. Only 48.5% of respondents

shared the view of Ruchita, that it is better to break the roka if the couple are incompatible. A fairly large proportion of respondents (25.1%) said they were not sure or didn't know what they thought about breaking a roka and 26.4% said that it was not right to break a roka due to incompatibility. Table 2 also presents the cross-tabulation of attitudes towards breaking a roka with attitudes towards whether roka, where the couple are in contact, is acceptable. The cross-tabulation reveals that those who think it's not right to break a roka were much less likely to support contact during the roka period. In fact, 61.9% of people who thought a couple should not be in contact before their marriage also said that it was not ok to call off an engagement in order to avoid an unhappy marriage. On the other hand, only 17.5% of those who found it acceptable for a betrothed couple to be in contact said that it was not ok to call off the engagement. This group was much more likely to say that it was better to break the roka than risk an unhappy marriage.

Table 2: Crosstabulation of attitudes towards breaking a roka and whether a roka where the couple are in contact is an acceptable practice

		It is ok to break a roka to avoid an unhappy marriage			Total
		Yes	No	Don't know	
Roka, where the couple are in contact, is an acceptable practice	Yes	63.2%	18.5%	19.3%	100.0%
	No	28.1%	61.9%	10.0%	100.0%
	Don't know	5.9%	5.4%	88.7%	100.0%
Full sample		48.5%	26.4%	25.1%	100.0%

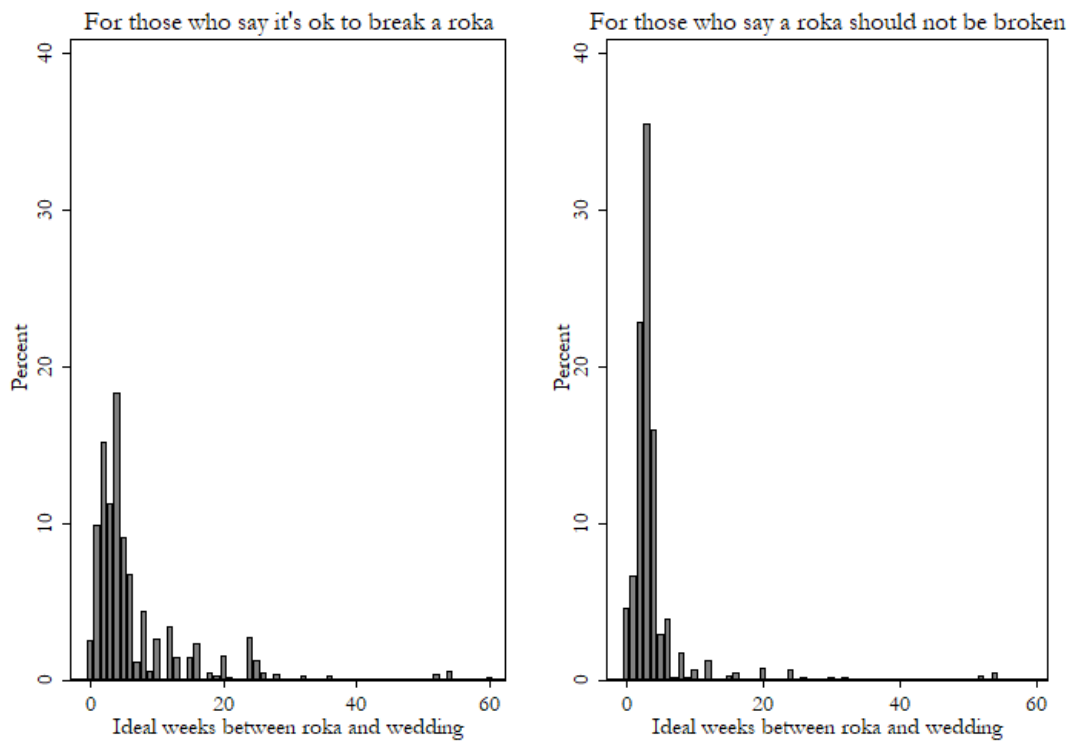
Notes: N = 5,379. Pearson's $X^2(4) = 2400$, $p < 0.001$

Source: CASI Delhi NCR Survey 2016

These results fit with the findings from the interviews with middle-class families which suggest that families which find breaking a roka unacceptable will also attempt to restrict couples from speaking during their engagement, for fear of the engagement being

called off. Those who more freely allow the couple to speak during their engagement may also be open to finding that the couple are incompatible which may necessitate calling off the wedding. This second group is more likely to see the roka period as a trial of the marriage whereas the former see the marriage as already finalized at the point of the roka, as Arjun and Deepika’s families did.

Figure 1: Ideal time between roka and wedding by attitudes towards breaking a roka



Notes: This question was only asked of respondents who indicated that it was socially acceptable for couples to have a roka where they are in contact during their engagement. N = 3,545.

Source: CASI Delhi NCR Survey 2016

Additionally, there was a strong relationship between attitudes towards breaking a roka and the ideal gap between the roka and the wedding among survey respondents. Figure

1 depicts two histograms of the ideal gap between the roka and the wedding by the attitude of the respondent towards broken rokas. Those who are more open to a broken roka thought a longer roka period was preferable. There was also greater variance in responses within this group. Those who did not think it was acceptable to break a roka thought the roka period should be very short, perhaps to prevent the possibility of the betrothed changing their mind. The mean roka gap for those who thought it was acceptable to break a roka was 7 weeks and the median was 4 weeks. For those who thought a roka should not be broken, the mean ideal gap between the roka and wedding was 4 weeks and the median was 3 weeks.

Many of the parents interviewed explained that they believed that engagement periods used to be longer in the past. According to them, families were now choosing to have shorter engagements because they feared that, with the couple speaking during the roka, the risk of breaking a roka had increased. Ruchita explains:

It used to be that way earlier, engagements would go on for a year or more, but now no one sticks around... It breaks if someone says something to the other or some relative says something... See, nowadays the boy and the girl talk to each other on the phone all the time, nothing wrong with that... the moment the engagement happens, the phone calls start. Someone says something, they fight, and they end up breaking the engagement.

Ruchita's quote emphasizes the role of the mobile phone in facilitating contact, and potentially conflict, between the betrothed during their engagement. Another mother, Vaishnavi, was a doctor with an unmarried son and daughter both studying in college. Vaishnavi expressed a similar sentiment to Ruchita:

I've seen a lot of negative effects of waiting so long, in many places. If it's a love marriage, it's fine to wait for a year or more, but in an arranged marriage set up, it's best not to. Because in a year, there are many things you find out about each other, good and bad, and then there's no interest left. The beauty of an arranged marriage is that there are so many things you learn only much later about each other, and whether they're good or bad, we can adapt to them, we can accept them. [With a long engagement], that gets over... The excitement is over.

Vaishnavi's revealing quote highlights the potential of long roka engagements to dramatically alter arranged marriage, where historically the couple know each other little before the wedding. Allowing the couple to meet during the engagement and being open to breaking a roka both reflect large expansions of the definition of arranged marriage to incorporate personal autonomy and choice into the process.

Roka as legitimacy for love marriages

Roka also has significance for couples in what are often called "arranged love marriages", where a couple in a romantic pre-marital relationship gets full endorsement of their marriage intentions from both sets of parents. This endorsement of parents for their children's self-chosen match allows them to treat the marriage as though it were arranged. For these couples, the roka ceremony is often an important symbolic gesture which signifies that the families of the bride and groom fully support the match and will move forward with the steps and customs associated with a traditional arranged marriage. In this way, couples combine the courtship of a love marriage with the family involvement and rituals of an arranged marriage.

Krishna and Shreya, who were married only a few months before our interview, were one couple who had what could be called an "arranged love marriage." They were both 26

when they married after nearly five years of dating. They had met in the office where they both worked in management for the same company. Krishna and Shreya had kept their relationship mostly secret from their family members until they were ready to approach their parents about marriage. Shreya explained the process:

He told his parents, and during our friend's wedding reception, I met his parents. But before meeting his parents, I made sure that I met my parents and informed them... I made sure that I told my mom and dad about the guy, about everything, and only once they approved [me meeting Krishna's parents], I decided that I'll meet his parents....[Shortly after the friend's wedding], my parents came to Delhi, and they met Krishna for the first time, and then both families met, and we decided that we want to do a roka.

Shreya had taken great care in approaching her parents for their approval of the marriage because she valued and respected their perspective. She explained:

I knew my father would have certain questions, so I already made sure that I had the answers to those questions and when I spoke to him, I was of course very nervous, but I thought that I will convince him...even if he has some doubts, he [can] learn more about the guy and the family, but he instantly said yes, so it, there was no challenge.

Shreya and Krishna were lucky to receive the wholehearted support of both of their parents for their marriage, even though it was an inter-caste relationship. Beginning from the roka ceremony, Shreya and Krishna's parents began planning the wedding jointly as though it were an arranged marriage, coordinating and planning the traditional rituals and festivities together. By following the traditions associated with arranged marriage, such as having a roka ceremony, Shreya and Krishna were able to transform their secret romantic relationship into a respectable joint-arranged marriage endorsed by both sets of parents.

Discussion

Transitional life stages, such as an engagement, are frequently a time for flexibility where individuals negotiate between competing cultural repertoires to make sense of their lives. For young couples in New Delhi, the roka engagement provides a cover to explore alternative marriage scripts such as those associated with romantic love. As a result, the roka engagement functions as a site for the hybridization of arranged and love marriage. This study makes an important contribution to the emerging literature on the rise of joint-arranged marriages in India by revealing how joint-arrangement actually works in practice using new interview and survey data.

In this study I show that, for those in arranged marriages, the roka engagement period is often one of courtship. This period of courtship allows couples to enact cultural scripts of romantic love and emotional intimacy by going on dates, sharing secrets, meeting each other's friends, having their first conflicts, and exploring physical intimacy. In many cases, roka engagements involve an intense amount of contact and relationship-building over a condensed period averaging only around two months. Some families appear to support their child speaking to their betrothed during the engagement and are open to calling off the wedding if the couple find themselves to be incompatible. This openness to young people's opinion of their marriage partner and respect for their right of refusal up until the wedding day reveals one way in which joint arranged marriage might manifest.

For individuals who have selected their own marriage partner, the roka can serve an entirely different function. In this situation, the roka is a source of legitimacy for their relationship within the structures of arranged marriage. Couples in these types of marriages

use a roka ceremony to signal their parents' full endorsement of their union thereby drawing from the cultural scripts of arranged marriage including respect for parental authority and Indian cultural tradition. There remains persistent taboo surrounding love marriage in India, even within the urban middle class (Mody 2002). Couples in "arranged love marriages", who have followed marriage traditions like roka and have the support of both families, may avoid some of the stigma associated with love marriage. These couples may even refer to their marriage as arranged, as a few respondents did. With time, the fact that the marriage was preceded by a romantic relationship may cease to hold much relevance.

The various ways in which families are modifying arranged marriage practices to incorporate romantic love, individualism, and autonomy is an important emerging area of research. The current study has examined this topic within the middle-class in New Delhi. Further research is needed to understand how engagements and other marriage practices in different arranged marriage contexts contribute to the hybridization of marriage forms. In addition, this study has only captured the experiences of young people at a specific point in time. It remains unclear if the current hybrid forms of joint-arranged marriage documented in this text are a transitional phase in the decline of arranged marriage or if they reflect a new more permanent family form. Future research which applies a longitudinal perspective is needed to understand the answer to this question.

Technology plays a central role in facilitating new forms of contact between betrothed couples. Interview respondents acknowledged that it has become nearly impossible for parents to prevent betrothed couples from contacting each other during their engagement. That is because young people in urban India have access to mobile phones,

internet, and social media which allow them to easily find and initiate contact with people, often without the knowledge of their parents. An estimated two-thirds of the urban Indian population are active internet users and the share is likely higher among those in their 20s (Kantar and IAMAI 2021). Though the intensive contact that is becoming common between betrothed couples in New Delhi transgresses traditional norms barring contact before the wedding, parents seem relatively powerless to stop it. While some parents appear to have responded by trying to shorten engagement periods, others have responded by shifting their own paradigm on what arranged marriage can and should look like.

Finally, the findings of this study suggest that researchers should use caution when interpreting survey data on marriage arrangement type. In the Indian context, this question suffers from social desirability bias due to a strong and persistent taboo on love marriage. Furthermore, this study provides further evidence that a dichotomy between love and arranged marriage may not be appropriate in capturing the nuance and complexity of different marriage arrangements styles found in India today. Even the third category of “joint-arranged” fails to capture the diverse ways in which couples are hybridizing arranged and love marriage. Other options such as asking the degree of involvement of parents in different parts of marriage decision-making (see Tsutsui 2013) may do a better job at measuring the experiences of couples in India today.

CHAPTER 4: THE GENDERED PRACTICES OF THE UPWARDLY MOBILE IN INDIA

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between economic mobility and the practice of female seclusion in Indian households using the India Human Development Survey (IHDS), a nationally representative panel survey. Women from households which became wealthier between survey waves had increased restrictions placed on their physical mobility as well as higher odds of practicing head-covering or purdah. These results held even after the inclusion of controls for changes in household composition, health of the woman, and her labor force participation. Stratified fixed effects regression analyses revealed that mobility-induced female seclusion was primarily practiced in poorer communities, in rural areas, and among the less-educated. The findings suggest that economically mobile households may use female seclusion as a strategy to signal household status.

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Female seclusion encompasses a variety of different practices of gender differentiation and segregation common in South Asia which could include veiling or head covering (sometimes known as purdah), restrictions on the physical mobility of women, the gendering of spaces (both inside and outside of the home), and withdrawal of women from the public sphere and the labor force (Derne 1995; Jacobsen 1982; Miller 1982; Papanek 1982). These gendered practices remains widespread and nearly 60% of Indian households report practicing some form of veiling or purdah (Desai and Andrist 2010; Desai and Temsah 2014; Stroope 2015). The discursive meaning of each seclusion practice varies significantly across different communities. For example, purdah may be used to enforce gender and age-based differentiation in the household (Papanek 1982), control women's sexuality and limit their social power (Devi and Kaur 2019; Jacobsen 1982; Jeffery 1979; Liddle and Joshi 1989; Vatuk 1982), build kin solidarity (Papanek 1982; Vatuk 1982), signal modesty/virtue (Devi and Kaur 2019; Masood 2019a), or identify oneself as part of a social or cultural group (Desai and Temsah 2014). To others it is a religious practice or even a tool of women's empowerment (Feldman and McCarthy 1983; Sultana, Jawan, and Hashim 2009; Thangarajah 2003).

In South Asia, female seclusion is also linked to socioeconomic and caste status. Women's bodies are often employed as symbols of family's honor with female seclusion used as a strategy to protect that honor (Derne 1994; Dube 2001; Jeffery 1979; Vatuk 1982). Culturally, female seclusion is sometimes associated with higher status communities who can afford both to forgo women's labor and to regulate women's movement outside the home (Amin 1997; Still 2011; Vatuk 1982). A classic literature documents how communities and individual households may adopt female seclusion practices, often along with other religious

and cultural practices, as they experience upward economic mobility (Srinivas 1952, 1989). Therefore, female seclusion may be used as a strategy to perform the household's newly achieved status. On the other hand, some groups, like the highly-educated and cosmopolitan city-dwellers, may use alternative scripts to perform their status which reject female seclusion as a status marker (Gould 1961; Srinivas 1956, 1989). Much of the literature on social mobility and female seclusion is based on historical evidence and older ethnographic accounts. It is thus unclear whether upwardly mobile households today still view female seclusion as a tool for signaling household status given the diversity of scripts for performing status now available. This study will investigate whether economic mobility is associated with the adoption of female seclusion in India. Using new nationally representative panel survey data from the India Human Development Survey (IHDS), I am the first to track how the practice of female seclusion changes over time within Indian households and whether those changes are associated with changes in household wealth. I then examine which sub-populations practice mobility-induced female seclusion by conducting stratified analyses by direction of mobility, caste/religion, initial class position, education, and rural/urban status.

The relationship between female seclusion and household status in India's diverse communities

Research from the intersectional tradition shows how gender is embedded in the power relations of other social identities (Choo and Ferree 2010; Collins 2000; Glenn 2002). In India, gender practices are an essential part of group identity construction and the maintenance of social boundaries by religion, caste, and social class. Because of their role as repositories of group status, "the onus of boundary maintenance falls on women" (Dube

1997, 89). The regulation of female sexuality through seclusion is important both in maintaining patrilineal succession and endogamy (Liddle and Joshi 1989; Vatuk 1982). Gender scripts which emphasize segregation and female modesty draw from larger cultural frameworks regarding ideal Indian womanhood that were influenced by the colonial experience (Chatterjee 1989; Liddle and Joshi 1989). However, education and urban residence may expose households through globalization to alternative scripts of family and social status, including those which reject female seclusion.

The practice of female seclusion varies across religious communities in India. Some dimensions of female seclusion, such as restricting women's physical mobility and participation in the labor market, are similar across different religious communities whereas purdah has different meanings within different populations. Muslims, who make up around 14 percent of the Indian population, have the highest prevalence of purdah practice. According to the IHDS, around 85 percent of Muslim women in India practice some form of veiling. Whereas Hindus tend to practice purdah after marriage to show respect to male members of the husband's family; Muslims often practice purdah after puberty in the presence of all non-relatives (Jacobsen 1982; Papanek 1982; Vatuk 1982). Many Muslim women in South Asia identify purdah, especially through the use of garments such as a burqa, niqab, or hijab, as part of their religious practice (Masood 2019a; Sultana et al. 2009). Around 55 percent of Hindu women report practicing some form of head covering, such as pallu or ghunghat, according to the IHDS. Despite significant differences in the discursive meaning of seclusion for Hindus and Muslims, there is evidence from both communities that the practice may signal household status. Jeffery (1979), whose ethnography focused on Muslims in Delhi, writes that purdah serves a "function of [signaling] the family's worth, in

an economic sense, but also [is] indicative of their social worth or their honor” (p. 25).

Thangarajah (2003) finds a similar pattern in Sri Lanka where Muslims families adopt gender segregation practices observed during their time working in the Middle East as a marker of household status.

Caste is another important social identity in the Indian context which intersects with gendered practices like female seclusion. There are two overlapping systems of caste in India: varna and jati. The varna system traces its origin to Vedic Hindu texts and outlines strata based roughly on traditional occupations (Vaid 2014). The group formerly known as “untouchables” are seen as outside of this classification system due to the impurity deriving from their traditional occupations. In addition, there are thousands of sub-castes or jatis whose correspondence to the varna hierarchy is both loose and contested (Vaid 2014). Caste is also a politically salient identity. India’s constitution outlaws the practice of untouchability and Indian law mandates quota-based affirmative action for the former-untouchables (known as Scheduled Castes or Dalits), tribal populations (Scheduled Tribes or Adivasis), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), a heterogenous group of communities which are also socially and educationally disadvantaged. Within the Hindu community, female seclusion has been associated with ideals of modesty, morality, and ritual purity (Dube 2001). As a result, female seclusion has culturally been associated with higher caste communities that are seen as more ritually pure, especially Brahmins, whose traditional occupation as priests places them at the top of the status hierarchy. The data from the IHDS, however, suggests that purdah is practiced at similar rates across the broad caste categories, with only slightly more Brahmins practicing it than other caste groups.

Caste becomes especially salient in the way that different communities have adopted female seclusion as part of the process of social mobility. Srinivas (1952) coined the term “Sanskritization” to refer to cultural processes of change observed in rural India where groups, particularly those from marginalized caste communities, emulated the rites, beliefs, and values of “Sanskritic” Hinduism as a strategy for upward social mobility. This imitation often includes adopting practices such as vegetarianism, temperance, dowry, and female seclusion which are culturally associated with the Brahmin community (Srinivas 1952, 1956). A number of ethnographies have documented how Dalit families adopt greater restrictions on the mobility of young women in their families as the household experiences upward economic mobility (Heyer 2014; Still 2011). While much of the literature on Sanskritization focuses on its practice in Dalit and Adivasi communities, they are not the only groups to be influenced by Sanskritization as other communities may also seek to make moral claims to status by adopting these practices (Shah 2010). At the same time, there are popular social movements which actively reject Sanskritization, seeing the practice as rooted in the system of caste oppression. Those who identify with these movements may reject female seclusion as a marker of status. Dalit social leader and architect of the Indian constitution, B.R. Ambedkar argued against female seclusion practices along with his promotion of conversion to Buddhism and inter-caste marriage as strategies in the fight against caste oppression. The Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu also promoted gender egalitarianism over segregation as a strategy for uplifting marginalized communities and as a way to challenge the power of the Brahmin community (Hodges 2012).

Social class, education, and urban cosmopolitanism shape exposure to cultural scripts of status through female seclusion as well as alternative ways of claiming status. Data from

the IHDS shows that the poorest quintile (by asset wealth) are the most likely to practice purdah while the wealthiest quintile are the least likely. Researchers have documented how India's growing middle class may look outside of India for cultural frameworks of value and gender relations, a process sometimes called "Westernization" (Berreman 1993; Gould 1961; Srinivas 1989). For example, upwardly mobile middle-class families may view wearing international brands as a more powerful status marker than purdah (Wilson 2013). In addition to Westernization, evidence suggests that elite and middle class families are constructing new ways of doing gender, status, and family that reflect the complexity of different cultural scripts available to modern Indian families and a hybridization of "traditional" and "modern" practices (Bhandari 2017; Fernandes 2006; Radhakrishnan 2011; Shah 2014; Uberoi 2006; Vijayakumar 2013; Wilson 2013).

Education is another important factor which may influence a household's views on female seclusion. A large literature links educational institutions to the spread of values such as individualism, secularism, and gender egalitarianism which may challenge cultural scripts of social status through the seclusion of women (Ahearn 2001; Axinn and Barber 2001; Caldwell, Reddy, and Caldwell 1983; Thornton, Ghimire, and Mitchell 2012). The evidence of education impacting seclusion practices in South Asia, however, is mixed. Women from more educated households were found to have less physical mobility in rural Bangladesh than those from households with limited education (Balk 1997). However, the latest IHDS data, suggests that it is the least educated who are more likely to practice purdah.

Much of the ethnographic literature documenting households using female seclusion to signal status is based on evidence from rural areas. Caste-based discrimination is more

prevalent in rural areas along with the beliefs regarding purity and modesty that are sometimes associated with female seclusion practices (Coffey et al. 2018; Kapur et al. 2010). Those who reject these cultural scripts may migrate to cities. In fact, migration to cities has long been a strategy employed by Dalits to escape caste-based violence and marginalization in their village (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998). According to the IHDS data, purdah is more prevalent in rural areas. However, female seclusion norms remain salient in cities. A smaller share of women in urban areas are in the labor force compared to rural areas (Chatterjee, Desai, and Vanneman 2018). For those urban women in the labor force, research suggests they often must navigate around seclusion norms in order to participate in economic activity in the city (Feldman and McCarthy 1983; Kantor 2002). Urban families, however, may be exposed more to globalization as well as greater diversity which could introduce them alternative status markers such as Westernization.

In a country as large and diverse as India, there can never be one single cultural framework of gender and social status. To some communities, female seclusion may be a positive signal of social status, while in other communities it may have the opposite association. It depends on the cultural scripts influencing the household and their community. This paper will examine the link between female seclusion and household status using a fixed effects modeling approach and panel survey data. I test whether the economically mobile are adopting female seclusion as they experience economic mobility by asset wealth. Then I investigate how that association varies by the direction of mobility, caste/religion, initial economic position, education, and rural/urban status.

Methods

Data

This paper uses data from the two completed waves of the India Human Development Survey (IHDS). The IHDS, jointly organized by researchers from the University of Maryland and the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) in New Delhi, is one of the first large-scale nationally representative panel studies of households in India (Desai, Vanneman, and National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) 2019). The first wave of the survey (IHDS I) was conducted in 2004-5 and the second wave (IHDS II) was conducted in 2011-12.

The ‘Eligible Women’ module of the IHDS was used for the analysis. This section of the survey was completed with one woman per household who was aged 15-49 and had ever been married. The survey team was able to re-interview 76% of the initial IHDS I Eligible Women respondents. IHDS II re-interviewed households that split apart between the waves if their resultant households were located within the same are but did not follow migrants if they moved outside of the sampled village or urban block between IHDS I and II. The re-contact rate of 76% meets desired re-contact thresholds (Kristman, Manno, and Côté 2004). Only those women who were married and present in both waves of the survey are included in the analysis. Case-wise deletion is used to adjust for missingness on any independent or dependent variable in the analysis in either survey wave (37.5% of the sample). This leaves a total sample of 14,641 women for the analysis (29,282 total observations). Analyses conducted without full case-wise deletion retained a higher proportion of the sample but revealed similar results.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics

	IHDS I	IHDS II	Percent with increase	Percent with decrease
	(percent unless otherwise indicated)			
<i>Dependent variables</i>				
Places respondent requires chaperone to go (0-3)	0.7	0.5*	20.1	26.6
Places respondent requires permission to go (0-3)	2.1	2.1*	28.9	32.0
Respondent practices veiling (<i>purdah/ghunghat/pallu</i>)	52.6	54.3*	12.7	11.0
<i>Independent variables</i>				
Mean absolute asset wealth (of 30 items)	11.8	15.2*	80.4	12.3
Mean relative assets wealth (z-score)	0	0	47.3	52.7
<i>Control variables</i>				
Respondent does paid work	24.5	30.5*	14.8	8.9
Respondent does unpaid work	39.4	43.1*	15.2	11.5
Husband of respondent is absent (outmigration)	3.1	4.7*	2.9	1.4
Respondent is senior or only married woman in house	67.8	77.2*	12.7	3.2
Elder (aged 60+) man present in house	15.0	18.1*	10.7	7.6
Respondent has at least one living son	81.2	88.1*	7.6	.7
Respondent reports being in poor health	5.5	8.2*	7.1	4.4
<i>Fixed characteristics (for stratified analyses)</i>				
<i>Caste/religious community</i>				
Brahmin	4.6			
Other forward caste	15.8			
Other Backward Class (OBC)	35.1			
Dalit	22.6			
Adivasi	8.7			
Muslim	10.8			
Sikh, Jain, Christian, or other	2.5			
<i>Initial class position (by asset wealth quintile)</i>				
Poor	28.7			
Lower middle class	23.0			
Upper middle class	28.0			
Rich	20.4			
<i>Highest completed education level of respondent</i>				
No education	46.8			
Primary (up to 9 th standard)	36.0			
Secondary or higher	17.2			
<i>Type of residence</i>				
Rural	68.0			
Urban	32.0			

* Indicates a statistically significant change in means between IHDS I and II ($\alpha = .05$).

Notes: Household asset wealth is measured through a count of 30 common household assets and measures of housing infrastructure. Relative asset wealth is a wave-specific z-score of this measure. The measure is normalized by survey wave. N = 14,641.

Source: India Human Development Survey I (2004/5) and II (2011/12)

Measures

Descriptive statistics on the variables used in the analysis can be found in Table 3. The survey includes three measures of the practice of female seclusion which have been used previously in the literature (see Desai and Andrist 2010; Desai and Temsah 2014; Stroope 2015). These three measures serve as the main dependent variables of analysis. The first dependent variable is a dichotomous measure indicating that the respondent practices some form of veiling (pallu, purdah, or ghunghut). While the overall proportion of households practicing purdah remains relatively similar across the two waves of the survey, 23.7% of respondents reported a change in practice. Purdah is not a single institution and its practice varies dramatically across different groups. It may involve a norm that women cover their head in the presence of males from their husband's family or that they cover their head whenever in public settings. It may include the use of the burqa, niqab, or hijab and the use of one's scarf, dupatta, or sari to cover part or all of the face and neck (Desai and Andrist 2010).

Restrictions on physical mobility are another dimension of female seclusion covered in the IHDS. Two different measures capture important aspects of the regulation of women's movement. The first measure is the count of the number of places the woman reported she could not go alone from a list of three common locations including: 1) the local health center, 2) the home of a relative or friend, and 3) the grocery store. The count of these places created a measure of the number of places the woman requires a chaperone with possible values of 0, 1, 2, or 3. This scale measure has a Chronbach's alpha score of .80 indicating high internal consistency of the scale questions. The second measure of mobility

comes from a count of the number of places that the woman reports that she “has to ask permission” of her husband or a senior family member to go from the same list of three common locations, regardless of whether she can go alone to those places. While in IHDS I respondents could only answer yes or no to the permission questions, in IHDS II they were also able to give a third response that they “must inform” but do not require permission. This response was classified as not needing permission. The permission-asking mobility scale has values ranging from 0 to 3 and a Chronbach’s alpha score of .81. As Table 3 indicates, there is significant variation in both the prevalence and rate of change over time for each of the three measures of female seclusion indicating that these measures capture different dimensions of this complex and variegated practice.

The main independent variable is relative asset wealth. Assets were selected as a measure of economic position because research has suggested that assets may be superior to consumption and income in capturing economic welfare and poverty especially in developing country contexts (Sahn and Stifel 2003). In India, asset ownership is less likely than income or consumption to change due to short-term shocks, thus making it a better measure of a household’s true economic position. It is also less subject to misreporting. The IHDS data team constructed an asset wealth index variable, common across the two survey waves, which is the count from 30 dichotomous measures of household assets and indicators of housing infrastructure. This wealth index has already been used and validated in many studies using the IHDS (see Stroope 2015; E. Chatterjee and Desai 2019; Lei, Desai, and Vanneman 2019; Lei, Desai, and Chen 2020). The scale has a Chronbach’s alpha score of internal consistency of .91. Assets include household items such as an air conditioner, washing machine, pressure cooker, and color TV. The measures of housing quality included

piped indoor water, a separate kitchen, flush toilet, electricity, liquid petroleum gas, and a finished/permanent (pucca) wall, roof, and floor. There is an increase in the mean assets index score between the two survey waves from 11.8 to 15.2. For ease of interpretation, I have normalized the distribution of the assets score for each survey wave by calculating a z-score of asset wealth. Each household has an IHDS I and IHDS II z-score reflecting their relative position on the wealth distribution of all surveyed households in each survey wave. Thus, economic mobility is defined as a change in wealth z-score. Presenting the results as z-scores allows an interpretation of the coefficients based on standard deviation increases in wealth over time. As a robustness check in Table 6, I also conduct the analysis using the unstandardized raw asset wealth (count) measure and find the same general results.

Several control and stratifying variables are also used in the analysis. Three types of time-variant control variables are included to control for changes in the respondent's labor force participation, the composition of her household, and her health. In addition, variables capturing fixed characteristics of the respondent or her household are used in stratified analyses of the results. This allows for a test of whether the economic mobility effects vary by sub-populations.

First, the analysis will control for the respondent's labor force participation to isolate the effects which are due specifically to changes in the wealth of the household. Some literature on female seclusion has examined the way that withdrawal of women from the labor force is one means through which households practice female seclusion (Amin 1997; Still 2011). Unfortunately, it is difficult to examine the relationship between household economic mobility and this dimension of female seclusion because women's paid labor is

intrinsically linked with the household's economic position. Removing a worker from the paid labor force will reduce a household's income and may also impact household wealth. Because of this complicated relationship between women's labor force participation and household economic status, I have elected to focus on other dimensions of female seclusion in this analysis, which do not suffer from this ambiguity, and treat labor force participation as a control variable. In Table 7, however, I examine the relationship between household wealth and female employment, finding results which broadly support the theory. Two dichotomous variables capture whether the respondent is in the paid or unpaid labor force at least part-time, which is equivalent to around five hours per week for the past year. Paid work was defined as any work for wages or a salary. I also examine unpaid non-domestic work which includes animal husbandry, family farming, or contributions to a family business for which the worker is not compensated financially. These forms of work, though uncompensated, may also take women outside of the home and in mixed gender settings.

Household composition is a competing explanation for changes in gender practices and therefore controls are included in the models to capture these changes. Multi-generational households could practice more female seclusion either because they are more traditional or because the seclusion practices are used to reinforce age hierarchies in the home. Especially in Hindu households, women may be expected to practice *purdah* in the presence of specific relatives such as their husband's elder male kin (Devi and Kaur 2019; Jacobsen 1982; Vatuk 1982). Though perhaps less common, there is also documented evidence of South Asian Muslim women practicing veiling around their husband's elder male kin (Jeffery 1979; Vatuk 1982). In addition, older women present in the household, such as the mother-in-law may enforce certain forms of female seclusion (Derne 1995; Jeffery 1979).

Previous literature has also suggested that women may enjoy benefits after having a son which could include a relaxation of restrictions on her mobility (Kishore and Spears 2014). Four dichotomous variables are included to control for these dimensions of household or family composition. A dichotomous variable was created to indicate that the respondent was the senior (in age) or only married woman in the household. If the husband of the respondent was listed as non-resident due to migration, then the respondent was classified as having an “absent” husband. A dichotomous control variable captures whether there are any elder men in the household aged 60 or older. Another control variable captures whether the woman has any living sons.

Finally, a dichotomous control variable is included in the model to indicate whether the respondent reports being in poor or very poor health. If the respondent becomes ill, it is possible that some dimensions of female seclusion may be relaxed to accommodate her care. Furthermore, serious illness may also limit physical mobility.

Table 3 also includes data on fixed characteristics of the respondent or her household which are used as stratifying variables in the analysis. The respondent’s response in IHDS I is used to construct variables indicating the household’s initial economic position, caste or religious community, education level of the respondent, and rural/urban status. Initial economic position is constructed by creating quartiles from the IHDS I asset wealth measure. The caste or religious community variable uses broad government definitions of subgroups. Another stratifying variable is constructed to indicate whether the respondent’s household experiences upward or downward mobility between IHDS I and II, by differencing the respondent’s z-score in IHDS II and IHDS I. If the household’s position (z-

score) increased, they were classified as upwardly mobile; whereas if their position decreased, they were classified as downwardly mobile.

Analytical strategy

The IHDS provides one of the first opportunities to systematically examine changing patterns of female seclusion over time within the same households. The availability of multiple time periods permits the use of a fixed effects methodology which focuses on within-individual variation across the two survey waves. This paper employs individual fixed effects Poisson and logistic regressions to capture how changes in relative household wealth are associated with changing gender practices.

Fixed effects models control for “fixed” characteristics of an individual and therefore, only examine variation within the same respondent over time. By controlling for time-invariant characteristics of the individual, fixed effects models remove much of the omitted variable bias and are considered more robust (Allison 2009). In the analysis that follows, the “wealth effect” can be interpreted as the effect that a change in household relative wealth has on changes in women’s responses to measures of female seclusion.

Fixed effects logistic regressions are used for the dichotomous dependent variable measuring the practice of purdah; whereas, fixed effects Poisson regressions are used for the two count-based physical mobility dependent variables which have values ranging from 0 to 3. With fixed effects modeling, not all cases in the sample are used for the regression. In fixed effects logistic regressions, the cases contributing to the coefficients come only from those individuals who change on the outcome variable (Allison 2009). This means that, for

the purdah regressions, only those respondents who change their purdah practice contribute to the coefficients, even though the whole sample is used in the analysis. For the fixed effects Poisson regression, individuals who report a value of 0 in both survey waves are dropped from the analytical sample during the analysis (Allison 2009). Bootstrap standard errors made through 1,000 replications are used for all models. Using bootstrap standard errors helps adjust for the issue of overdispersion which can skew standard error estimates in a fixed effects Poisson regression (Allison 2009).

I also examine how the wealth effects on female seclusion vary by subpopulation, by completing stratified analyses. Separate fixed effects regressions are run on sub-samples defined by the direction of economic mobility between the survey waves, caste/religion, initial economic position, education, and rural/urban status. Stratified regression analyses are preferred in this case to interactions because nonlinear models like the logit and Poisson present unique challenges in interpreting interaction effects (Mize 2019). Presenting results as predicted probabilities or marginal effects, the most common approach used to address this issue, is not feasible for fixed effects models in short panel datasets like IHDS because of a well-known incidental parameter problem (Greene 2004). Stratified regression analysis avoids both the interaction interpretation issues as well as the incidental parameters problem. The significance level and sign of the coefficients can be compared across the different stratified regressions to uncover which populations are practicing mobility-induced female seclusion. While the magnitudes of the coefficients cannot be directly compared, this does not hinder my analysis, which hinges on determining the presence of positive or negative wealth effect in different subgroups rather than ranking their relative magnitudes.

Hypotheses

In the analysis, I test five hypotheses regarding the relationship between economic mobility and female seclusion and how these associations are stratified across groups. The first hypothesis is that economic mobility, as measured by household asset wealth, will be associated with female seclusion practices. To further understand the effects, I examine whether the fixed effects results are driven by the upwardly mobile or downwardly mobile by running stratified regressions on the two groups separately. I do not expect downwardly mobile households to change their gender practices and instead anticipate the results will be driven by the status-anxious upwardly mobile. Next, I use stratified regressions to identify which, if any, sub-populations change their practice of female seclusion as they experience economic mobility. The second hypothesis states that the positive wealth effects on female seclusion will be restricted to only lower or middle status groups (Dalits, Adivasis, and OBCs). These groups are the ones most often discussed in the literature on Sanskritization and may see female seclusion as a strategy to assert status within this framework of moral claims-making. For the third hypothesis, I will examine how wealth effects on female seclusion vary by initial economic position. I anticipate that positive wealth effects will be present for households in the poorest quintiles while negative or non-significant effects will be present for households in the wealthiest quintile. Status anxiety and a desire to assert status are expected to be more powerful drivers for those leaving poverty. Furthermore, the literature suggests that wealthy segments of Indian society may follow alternative cultural scripts such as status through “Westernization” (Berreman 1993; Srinivas 1956). Relatedly, the fourth hypothesis is that the positive wealth effects will only be found for the least educated respondents. Negative wealth effects are expected for the most educated women

because their education may signal that their household values female education and may not subscribe to cultural script of female seclusion as a status marker. In addition, those with more education may reject female seclusion if their education was co-educational and included explicit teaching on gender egalitarianism. Finally, the fifth hypothesis is that the positive wealth effects on female seclusion will only be present in rural areas. Those in more cosmopolitan urban areas may subscribe to alternative gender scripts which do not valorize female seclusion.

Results

Evidence of wealth effects on female seclusion

The results presented in Table 4 provide a test of the first hypothesis, that economic mobility is associated with the practice of female seclusion. Models 1-4 depict asset wealth (z-score) coefficients from individual fixed effects Poisson regressions on the physical mobility measures. Model 1 shows that a one standard deviation increase in asset wealth between the survey waves is associated with an increase in the number of places that the respondent reports that she requires a chaperone to visit by .126. This result is statistically significant even after controlling for labor force participation, household composition, and health as shown in Model 2. Similarly, Model 4 shows that, holding all other variables constant, an increase in relative asset wealth is associated with a statistically significant increase in the number of places that a respondent requires permission to go. Finally, Models 5 and 6 examine the association between asset wealth and the practice of purdah using a fixed effects logistic regression. Exponentiating the coefficient in Model 6 reveals that the odds of practicing purdah increase by 13% for households which experienced a one standard

deviation increase in household wealth. This result is statistically significant, and the magnitude is not impacted by the inclusion of control variables. These results clearly show a positive relationship between household wealth and the practice of female seclusion across all three measures.

Table 4: Coefficients from individual fixed effects Poisson and logistic regressions

	Number of places (of 3) respondent requires a chaperone to go		respondent requires permission to go		Respondent practices purdah	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Asset wealth (z-score)	0.126*** (0.031)	0.105*** (0.031)	0.036** (0.011)	0.032** (0.011)	0.126* (0.060)	0.126* (0.060)
Paid work		-0.102** (0.038)		-0.008 (0.012)		-0.193** (0.071)
Unpaid work		-0.109** (0.034)		-0.008 (0.012)		0.149* (0.067)
Husband absent		-0.530*** (0.092)		-0.384*** (0.038)		0.226 (0.184)
Respondent is senior woman		-0.172*** (0.047)		-0.060*** (0.016)		-0.131 (0.095)
Elder man in household		0.118** (0.042)		-0.021 (0.015)		0.078 (0.086)
Has son(s)		-0.293*** (0.061)		-0.015 (0.021)		0.265* (0.134)
In poor health		0.201*** (0.051)		0.016 (0.019)		0.161 (0.094)
Wave II	-0.246*** (0.019)	-0.186*** (0.021)	-0.034*** (0.006)	-0.020** (0.007)	0.140*** (0.033)	0.129** (0.037)
Observations	14,924	14,924	28,248	28,248	6,938	6,938
AIC	18,569	18,395	37,812	37,732	4,791	4,781
AIC in null	18,591	18,591	37,816	37,816	4,794	4,794

Bootstrap standard errors in parenthesis; *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Notes: Coefficients are from fixed effects Poisson regressions for Models 1-4 and a fixed effects logistic regression for Model 5 and 6. The fixed effects Poisson regression drops cases where all outcomes are zero. The fixed effects logistic regression estimation procedure does not incorporate information about women who did not change their response to the question. The number of observations varies by outcome variable due to these restrictions. AIC is the Akaike Information Criterion statistic. AIC in null is the AIC statistic for the model with individual and time fixed effects but no covariates. Total N = 14,641 women (29,282 observations).

Source: As for Table 3.

Table 5: Relative wealth coefficients from individual fixed effect Poisson and logistic regressions stratified by sub-population

Sub-population (each cell is a separate regression)	Number of places (of 3) that the respondent requires a chaperone to go						Respondent practices purdah		
	Wealth Coeff.	S.E.	Obs.	Wealth Coeff.	S.E.	Obs.	Wealth Coeff.	S.E.	Obs.
<i>Direction of mobility</i>									
Upwardly mobile	0.178*	0.077	6,984	-0.009	0.025	13,362	0.118	0.132	3,212
Downwardly mobile	0.009	0.069	7,940	0.006	0.025	14,886	-0.098	0.138	3,726
<i>Caste and/or religion</i>									
Muslim	-0.082	0.087	1,838	0.043	0.031	3,046	0.178	0.199	772
Adivasi	0.091	0.102	1,488	0.011	0.036	2,494	-0.004	0.210	696
Dalit	0.169*	0.073	3,316	0.112***	0.022	6,384	-0.153	0.130	1,490
Other Backward Class	0.180***	0.050	5,538	-0.004	0.018	9,966	0.196	0.109	2,166
Other forward caste	0.085	0.091	2,018	0.008	0.030	4,398	0.350*	0.141	1,310
Brahmin	-0.430*	0.211	498	-0.01	0.062	1,262	0.089	0.374	370
<i>Initial class position</i>									
Poorest	0.325***	0.053	5,074	0.067***	0.019	8,166	0.243*	0.113	1,890
Lower middle class	0.033	0.063	3,690	0.074***	0.022	6,576	0.061	0.127	1,550
Upper middle class	0.075	0.069	3,830	0.071**	0.022	7,886	0.153	0.127	1,980
Rich	0.043	0.111	2,330	0.004	0.032	5,620	-0.013	0.167	1,518
<i>Respondent's highest completed education</i>									
No education	0.066	0.042	7,954	0.065***	0.015	13,382	0.254**	0.092	2,916
Primary school	0.166**	0.054	5,054	0.009	0.019	10,082	0.117	0.094	2,778
Secondary school +	0.152	0.104	1,916	0.022	0.032	4,784	-0.194	0.151	1,244
<i>Type of residence</i>									
Rural	0.154***	0.037	10,898	0.034*	0.013	19,362	0.305***	0.077	4,396
Urban	-0.032	0.068	4,026	0.046*	0.022	8,886	-0.215*	0.108	2,542

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Notes: Each cell shows the wealth coefficient from a separate regression on a sub-population for a total of 54 regressions. Coefficients are from fixed effects Poisson regressions for the mobility measures and a fixed effects logistic regression for the purdah variable. Bootstrap standard errors reported. The results for the “other” category by caste/religion have been excluded due to small sample size and non-significant results. All models include controls shown in Table 4 for labor force participation, family composition, and health. Total N = 14,641 women (29,282 observations).

Source: As for Table 3.

To examine whether these results are driven by upward or downward mobility, stratified regressions were conducted on the upwardly and downwardly mobile as two separate sub-samples. Table 5 displays the wealth coefficient, standard error, and sample size from separate fixed effects regressions on these two samples. For the measure of the number of places that the respondent requires a chaperone, there is only a statistically significant wealth effect for the upwardly mobile. The non-significant coefficient for the downwardly mobile subsample suggests that a household's decrease in wealth has no impact on the number of places that the respondent required a chaperone to visit. In the remaining regressions, however, neither the coefficient for the upwardly nor the downwardly mobile reach statistical significance. Therefore, there is only partial evidence that the results are driven by the upwardly mobile. I cannot rule out that the coefficients in Table 4 are also picking up on the behavior of downwardly mobile households which may be casting aside female seclusion practices as they become poorer.

As a test of the robustness of these results, the same models were run using the absolute asset scale instead of the relative measure (z-score). The findings with this asset scale, presented in Table 6, reveal similar results to those in Table 4. An increase in absolute wealth between IHDS I and II is associated with the respondent reporting more places that she requires a chaperone and permission to go as well as increased likelihood of practicing purdah.

Several of the control variables show statistically significant results. The respondent's labor force participation, household composition, and health are significantly associated with some of the measures of female seclusion as shown in Table 4. The absence of the

respondent's husband and being the senior married woman in the household are both associated with fewer restrictions on a woman's physical mobility. The presence of an elder man in the household is associated with more places that require a chaperone but has no effect on the other measures. Having a son is associated with less requirement for a chaperone but more likelihood of practicing purdah. Both paid and unpaid work are associated with less requirement for a chaperone; however, there are no effects on permission-asking behavior. Paid work is negatively associated with the practice of purdah.

The withdrawal of women from the labor force may sometimes manifest as a form of female seclusion. In the primary analysis, I have included labor force participation as a control; but in Table 7, I examine the relationship between relative asset wealth and women's participation in the paid and unpaid labor force. I find a negative relationship between wealth and the respondent's participation in the paid labor force and no statistically significant relationship between wealth and participation in unpaid (non-domestic) work. The findings indicate that increased wealth between IHDS I and II is associated with withdrawal of women from the paid labor force. This result is quite striking given that women's labor force participation is also linked to the household economic position directly through her income.

Table 6: Coefficients from individual fixed effects Poisson and logistic regressions using absolute asset wealth scale

	Number of places (of 3) the respondent requires		Respondent practices purdah (3)
	a chaperone to go (1)	permission to go (2)	
Asset wealth (absolute scale 0-30)	0.017*** (0.005)	0.005** (0.002)	0.021* (0.010)
Paid work	-0.102** (0.038)	-0.008 (0.012)	-0.193** (0.071)
Unpaid work	-0.109** (0.034)	-0.008 (0.012)	0.149* (0.067)
Husband absent	-0.531*** (0.092)	-0.384*** (0.038)	0.226 (0.184)
Respondent is senior woman	-0.172*** (0.047)	-0.060*** (0.016)	-0.131 (0.095)
Elder man in household	0.118** (0.042)	-0.021 (0.015)	0.079 (0.086)
Has son(s)	-0.293*** (0.061)	-0.015 (0.021)	0.265* (0.134)
In poor health	0.201*** (0.051)	0.016 (0.019)	0.161 (0.094)
Wave II	-0.243*** (0.028)	-0.038*** (0.009)	0.061 (0.049)
Observations	14,924	28,248	6,938

Bootstrap standard errors in parenthesis; *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Notes: Coefficients are from fixed effects Poisson regressions for Models 1 and 2 and a fixed effect logistic regression for Model 3. The fixed effects Total N = 14,641 women (29,282 observations).

Source: As for Table 3.

Table 7: Coefficients from fixed effects logistic regressions depicting the relationship between asset wealth and labor force participation

	Respondent does paid work (1)	Respondent does unpaid non-domestic work (2)
Asset wealth (z-score)	-0.337*** (0.063)	-0.085 (0.054)
Paid work		-0.130* (0.063)
Unpaid work	-0.147* (0.065)	
Husband absent	0.209 (0.186)	-0.014 (0.156)
Senior woman in household	0.125 (0.092)	-0.078 (0.083)
Elder man in household	-0.352*** (0.086)	-0.161* (0.077)
Has son(s)	-0.006 (0.136)	0.396*** (0.116)
In poor health	-0.439*** (0.099)	-0.122 (0.089)
Wave II	0.554*** (0.039)	0.278*** (0.035)
Observations	6,938	7,826

Bootstrap standard errors in parenthesis; *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Notes: Labor force participation is defined as working at least 250 hours (roughly part-time) in the past year. Paid work includes wage or salary positions. Unpaid work includes animal husbandry, contributions to a family business, or unpaid agricultural labor. The fixed effects logistic regression estimation procedure does not incorporate information about women who did not change their response to the question. The number of observations varies by outcome variable due to these restrictions. Total N = 14,641 women (29,282 observations).

Source: As for Table 3.

Results by sub-populations

To test hypotheses 2 through 5, separate fixed effects regressions were conducted on stratified samples. The asset wealth (z-score) coefficients from these stratified regressions which include all controls are presented in Table 4. The table can be used to assess which

sub-populations have statistically significant wealth effects; however, the magnitudes of the coefficients across the different stratified samples should not be directly compared.

The results stratified by caste and religious community present mixed results across the three female seclusion measures. There are no statistically significant wealth effects on female seclusion found for Muslims and Adivasis. Dalit households have statistically significant positive wealth effects on both measures of women's physical mobility but non-significant wealth effects on purdah. The OBC population has significant positive wealth effects on whether women require a chaperone but non-significant results on the other measures. Non-Brahmin forward (upper) castes have positive and statistically significant wealth effects on purdah practice but non-significant effects for the physical mobility measures. Brahmins have negative wealth effects on both measures of physical mobility but the effect only reaches statistical significance in the case of requiring a chaperone. Negative wealth effects would suggest that upward economic mobility is associated with decreasing restrictions on women's physical mobility.

Table 5 also reveals how the wealth mobility effects are stratified by initial wealth. Statistically significant wealth effects are only found in the poorest quartile for the requirement of a chaperone and purdah. For the measure capturing the number of places that a respondent requires permission to go, all wealth quartiles have positive and statistically significant wealth effects except for the wealthiest group.

The effects stratified by the education level of the female respondent are also presented in Table 5. For the chaperone variable, the effects only reach statistical significance for women who have primary school education. This effect is positive

suggesting that women with this level of education report more restrictions on the number of places they require a chaperone after their household experiences economic mobility. For the purdah and permission requirement measures, the fixed effect logistic results are only statistically significant for women who report having no education. The effects for this group are positive. Women with higher levels of education (some secondary school or higher) did not have statistically significant wealth effects on any of the female seclusion measures.

The final set of results compare the effects for women in rural and urban areas. For the permission asking measure, there are positive and statistically significant wealth effects for both rural and urban women. Rural women see a positive and statistically significant wealth effect on their likelihood of practicing purdah whereas urban women experience a negative and statistically significant wealth effect on their likelihood of practicing purdah. There are only statistically significant wealth effects on the number of places the woman requires a chaperone for rural women. This effect is in a positive direction meaning that increased wealth was associated with more places which require a chaperone in rural areas.

Discussion

This paper has studied the relationship between household economic mobility and the practice of female seclusion in India using nationally representative panel data. Following households over time reveals that gender practices like female seclusion are not always static features of a household. Instead, the panel data shows that women report significant changes in restrictions on their physical mobility and the practice of purdah within the seven years between IHDS I and II.

There was robust evidence in favor of hypothesis 1 that changes in female seclusion practices were associated with changes in the household's economic position. Households experiencing an increase in relative wealth increased their likelihood of practicing purdah and placed more restrictions on the physical mobility of women in the household. These results held even after the inclusion of controls for changes in household composition, health of the woman, and her labor force participation. At least for the requirement of a chaperone, these effects appear to be driven by the behaviors of the upwardly mobile rather than the downwardly mobile. The results validate the observations of ethnographers and classic theories like Sanskritization which suggest that upwardly mobile households may adopt female seclusion to signal social status.

However, mobility-induced female seclusion was not found in all of India's diverse communities. Stratified analyses presented in Table 5 were used to test hypotheses related to how wealth effects on female seclusion vary by sub-populations. Limited evidence was found to support hypothesis 2 which anticipated the effects being concentrated in low and medium status caste groups. Muslims and Adivasis, groups which may have different cultural norms on gender practices, did not have any significant wealth effects on female seclusion. Dalits had statistically significant positive wealth effects on both physical mobility measures and OBCs had statistically significant positive wealth effects on one of those measures. Interestingly, it was only non-Brahmin other forward castes which had positive wealth effects on purdah suggesting that this practice may not have the same perceived association with status outside of the high-caste community. Most of the literature on female seclusion as a status marker in South Asia focuses on the practice within the Hindu community so it was not surprising to find that the predominantly Hindu groups of Dalit, OBC, and non-

Brahmin forward castes were the ones adopting female seclusion as they experienced economic mobility. However, the results were mixed across the different measures of female seclusion, suggesting that the discursive meaning of these practices may vary across different communities.

Hypotheses 3 was supported by the evidence. Households who started out with lower wealth changed their practice of female seclusion as they experienced economic mobility. Those already in the highest wealth quintile did not change their gender practices when they experienced upward mobility. The results by wealth were more consistent across measures than those by caste and religion suggesting that economic class may be a more important predictor of this behavior than caste. Analyzing female seclusion by asset wealth in the cross section reveals an inverse relationship with wealthier households less likely to practice seclusion. Therefore, the regression results suggest that the process of social mobility itself is what triggers the adoption of female seclusion and not imitation of the middle or upper classes. Economic mobility may trigger status anxiety in households as they seek to assert their new social position. Status through the regulation of women's bodies provide a cultural script through which they can assert their new social position using a language of moral virtue and female modesty. This explains why the upwardly mobile, whose position remains contested, may behave differently than those in their new social class, whose position is already established.

There was also evidence to support hypothesis 4 which expected the effects to be concentrated in the households of women with lower education levels. Women with at least some secondary school education did not observe any statistically significant wealth effects

on the female seclusion measures. The results could be both reflective of selection into higher education levels as well as the effect of educational institutions on the values of families. Families which value women's education do not appear to subscribe to the view that female seclusion is a positive status marker.

There was also partial evidence that wealth effects on female seclusion were a rural phenomenon. For the permission measure, there were significant positive wealth effects in both rural and urban areas; but for purdah, the wealth effects were negative and significant in cities suggesting that upwardly mobile urban households reduce their practice of purdah. While dominant in rural areas, urban areas may have more competing scripts related to gender and social status, including Westernization. The negative sign for the wealth effects in cities suggests that some urban families may ditch female seclusion practices as they advance economically.

There are several limitations to this study. While fixed effects regression modeling removes much of the omitted variable bias by focusing on within-individual changes over time, there remains a possibility that a key time-varying confound has not been included in the model. In addition, the analysis has only included married women between the ages of 15 and 56 (in IHDS II). The impact of economic mobility on female seclusion practices would likely be different for girls, older women, and women who are widowed or divorced.

Female seclusion is also a complex and variegated practice which is difficult to summarize in a quantitative scale or indicator. Each measure used in the analysis captures a slightly different dimension of female seclusion which explains why the results are not always consistent across the three measures for each sub-population. For example, Dalits had

wealth effects on both physical mobility measures but not on purdah. Purdah is a complex practice that individuals and families may choose to adopt for a variety of different social, cultural, or religious reasons. In addition, the permission measure suffers from an additional limitation in that the questions used to form the scale were asked slightly differently in IHDS II. In the second survey wave, respondents were given a third option which may have introduced some noise into this measure. This could possibly explain why the results from this variable sometimes deviate from those of the other two measures.

Finally, the survey data does not permit me to make any claims regarding who within the household is directing the changing gender practices or what these changes mean to the families. I am unable to document household disagreement, acts of resistance related to these practices, or how women feel about the practice. However, qualitative studies have shown that female seclusion may be imposed by men but also sometimes by women within the household; furthermore, some women have reported that they personally gain from the heightened status associated with female seclusion (Mumtaz and Salway 2005; Still 2011). Future qualitative research can help fill in gaps in our understanding of the discursive meaning of these practices for women and their families.

Conclusion

The cultural script of status through female seclusion remains a powerful social ideal in India. The evidence suggest that this cultural framework is especially appealing to some of the most marginalized groups, including the poor, those living in rural areas, Dalits, and those with less education. If these groups see their behavior as imitating the ideals of high-status groups, as Sanskritization theory would suggest, they may be imitating an ideal which

the elite appear to have discarded (assuming they ever practiced it at higher rates). There are no significant positive relationships between economic mobility and female seclusion for any of the highest-status groups by caste or class. In fact, for some of the highest-status groups, the effects are in the negative direction signaling that these groups are moving away from seclusion practices. High status groups may have no choice but to seek out alternative scripts to differentiate their status as lower status groups begin using the cultural schema of Sanskritization to make moral claims to status (Gould 1961).

India has experienced rapid economic development and a growing middle class over the past several decades. There has also been an increase in occupational mobility and a decrease in intergenerational educational persistence for lower caste groups (Azam 2015; Azam and Bhatt 2015). The findings of this paper suggest that the growing upwardly mobile population may reach towards female seclusion as a strategy to perform their new status, including through the withdrawal of women from the labor force. The relationship between household economic mobility and women's exit from the labor force, as suggested in Table 7, could help explain India's low and declining rate of female labor force participation over the recent period of rapid economic growth (Chatterjee et al. 2018; Lahoti and Swaminathan 2016). What remains to be seen, however, is whether the increase in female seclusion after a family experiences upward economic mobility will stick. If status anxiety is the cause of changes in household gender practices, then it may fade as the family becomes comfortable in their new class position. Also, they may begin to adapt to the gender norms of the Indian middle class where female seclusion may be less normative. Future research can answer this question when longitudinal data is available for longer time periods.

The findings from this paper document how improvements in the economic position of the household may have adverse effects on the physical mobility of women in that household. In addition to the possible implications for women's empowerment, female seclusion may also exacerbate health inequalities. Research has documented that much of the gap in hypertension between men and women in India can be explained by seclusion practices (Stroope 2015) and that women who practice seclusion report lower health knowledge (Paul 2020). Because gender practices are an essential part of constructing social boundaries and contesting group status, women often bear a unique burden in performing household status. It is important for researchers to understand the complex implications that economic changes may have for gender and family dynamics within the household.

CHAPTER 5: WORKING WOMEN ON INDIA'S URBAN MARRIAGE MARKET

Abstract

Many marriages in India follow a male breadwinner model resulting in India having one of the lowest rates of female labor force participation in the world. Despite this pattern, there is evidence of growing labor force participation among the highest educated women in India's metros. This study uses data from 46 interviews conducted in New Delhi to examine how the urban middle class makes sense of the competing cultural ideals of male breadwinning and dual earner marriage. Men married to working women frequently report that they were explicitly looking for a working woman on the arranged marriage market. Women's careers were seen as essential to some families because the second income could help insure against financial instability. Working women, on the other hand, report that they want to work because their careers provide them with autonomy and a sense of accomplishment. Countering narratives which idealize the breadwinning household model, dual earning couples argued that working women make better partners and that shared career experience helps facilitate a companionate marriage. There was less willingness, however, to challenge gender roles in the division of household and care work. Dual earner couples employed patchwork of different strategies to manage household labor including employing domestic workers and relying on the labor of other female household members.

How women's careers impact their experience in finding a marriage partner and their propensity to marry is an important area of research. An extensive body of research shows that, in the United States, women's employment and income are associated with higher probability of marriage (Van Bavel, Schwartz, and Esteve 2018; Oppenheimer 1997; Sweeney 2002; White and Rogers 2000). While previously debated, the literature now clearly shows a pattern of convergence in mate preferences across genders. Both men and women in heterosexual couples, on average, prefer a partner who is employed and high earning. This trend suggests a decline in the male breadwinner household model as many families switch to dual earner households. Despite these changes, evidence continues to show that women do more housework and care work than men, even in dual earner households and among those who endorse the ideals of gender egalitarianism, and that this gap increases after the couple have children (Daming 2020; Fuwa 2004; Milkie et al. 2002).

The relationship between women's careers and their experience on the marriage market, while studied extensively in Western industrialized countries, is less understood in some other social contexts such as in setting where arranged marriage is dominant. Arranged marriage, where parents or other kin select their child's marriage partner, remains common in many African and Asian countries. In arranged marriages, characteristics such as women's occupation and their intention to work after marriage may be used as filters to sort potential matches. Rather than being a topic that is negotiated within a couple in a romantic relationship, women's career intentions may serve as a prerequisite to initiating plans for marriage.

This study examines how the urban middle class in India think about the post-marriage careers of highly skilled women on the marriage market. India is an interesting setting to study working women not only because arranged marriage is widely practiced in India; but also, because the country has one of the lowest rates of female labor force participation in the world. Less than a third of Indian women are in the labor force (Lahoti and Swaminathan 2016). Highly skilled dual earner couples are a tiny minority of the overall Indian population. These couples must contend with a dominant cultural narrative of male breadwinning and gender specialization within marriage. Using interviews with dual career couples, supplemented with interviews with unmarried people and parents, this study seeks to understand how this segment of the urban middle class thinks about women's careers. This chapter documents why some of New Delhi's middle class choose dual breadwinning and how dual career families manage work and family responsibilities.

Women's labor force participation in India

Compared to other countries, India ranks among the bottom in terms of percent of women in the labor force due to the fact that there has been no growth in the female workforce for several decades (Lahoti and Swaminathan 2016). Conservative social norms which restrict women to the home have frequently been examined as a primary driver of the low rates of women's employment (Bernhardt et al. 2018; Jayachandran 2020); however, several quantitative studies have found limited evidence that norms are the primary factor keeping women out of the labor force (Das and Desai 2003; Deshpande and Kabeer 2019). Other important factors limiting women's labor force participation documented in the literature include discrimination, low demand for women's labor, transportation/safety concerns, and

gender segregation of the labor market (Chatterjee and Vanneman 2022; Das and Desai 2003; Deshpande and Singh 2021; Lei et al. 2019; Sarkar, Sahoo, and Klasen 2019).

In addition, there is a widely documented U-shaped relationship between women's education and labor force participation in India (Chatterjee et al. 2018; Chatterjee and Vanneman 2022). The highest rates of female labor force participation are found among the lowest and highest educated women. The unusually low rates of labor force participation of the growing population of moderately educated women appear to be driven by occupation segregation as women are often excluded from the white-collar clerical and sales jobs that are common for people with this skill level (Chatterjee and Vanneman 2022). College educated women have higher rates of labor force participation and there is evidence of growth in their labor force participation over time (Datta Gupta et al. 2020). The expansion of modern services like Information Technology (IT) and financial intermediation in large metros like New Delhi has contributed to a growing female high-skilled labor force (Mehrotra and Parida 2017). Despite overall lower rates of female labor force participation in urban areas, college educated women in cities have relatively high participation. Data from the India Human Development Survey shows that labor force participation increased for college educated married women aged 29-59 in the Delhi metro from 20.9% in 2004-5 to 29.1% in 2011-12. While this rate of participation is low by international standards, it is substantially higher than the participation of non-college educated women. In the same time period and region, the labor force participation of non-college educated married women aged 29-59 increased from only 12.4% to 17.2%.

Marriage and women's careers

Marital status is one of the most important predictors of women's labor force participation in the Indian context. Marriage is associated with a larger decline in Indian women's labor force participation than motherhood (Deshpande and Kabeer 2019; Deshpande and Singh 2021; Fletcher et al. 2018). In fact, there is limited evidence of a motherhood penalty on wages for Indian women (Deshpande and Singh 2021). The importance of marriage in suppressing women's labor force participation suggests that many families embrace a breadwinner-housewife household model. Qualitative studies from rural India have documented strong preferences for a male breadwinner household model to such an extent that both husband and wife may downplay women's work outside of the home (Rao 2012). Studies in urban and semi-urban areas have documented that women are often willing to give up their careers at the time of marriage to conform to ideals of respectable femininity through the prioritization of family over career (Radhakrishnan 2009; Vijayakumar 2013).

Survey evidence suggests that the male breadwinner household model is supported by a sizeable minority of the Indian population. A recent study by Pew found that 43% of Indians felt that only men should be responsible for earning for the household (Pew Research Center 2022). A majority of households supported the idea that earning money was the responsibility of both men and women. Those with higher education were more likely see women as also responsible for household earnings. Only 33% of college educated Indians supported the idea that men were responsible for earning (Pew Research Center 2022).

Given the importance of marriage in suppressing women's employment, it is valuable to examine how working women fair on the marriage market. In the early 2000s as many as 90% of Indian marriages were either arranged or semi-arranged (Allendorf and Pandian 2016). Increasingly, families use online matrimonial websites to sort and filter potential marriage partners by characteristics such as caste, occupation, income, family background, and physical appearance (Kaur and Dhanda 2014). An analysis of online arranged marriage matrimonial profiles found that many women present themselves in their profiles as both career- and family-oriented, combining traditional and modern values (Titzmann 2011). And yet, a recent survey experiment using online matrimonial profiles found that women who indicated a desire to work after marriage received less interest for their profiles (Dhar 2021). This suggests that the portion of potential grooms looking for a working woman as a partner might be smaller than the portion who prefer women to not work after marriage.

However, career experience and training may still hold value to grooms even if women do not continue their career after marriage. An ethnographic study from Pakistan found that women with medical credentials are highly valued on the marriage market; but that some men do not want their doctor brides to work after marriage (Masood 2019b). While doctors potential earnings are a factor in their desirability, men and their families were sometimes more interested in the cultural and social capital that she may bring to her marital home because of her medical training (Masood 2019b). Doctors were also seen as less quarrelsome and more respectable than other women on the marriage market (Masood 2019b). In India, analysis also suggests that some women may be completing higher levels of

education to increase their position on the marriage market rather than the labor market (Klasen and Pieters 2013).

Since much of the literature on how women's careers impact their position on the marriage market uses quantitative data, little is known about how men and their families actually think about women's careers and weigh the pros and cons of her employment after marriage. In addition, much of the literature has focused on the problems of stagnating or declining labor force participation in rural areas and among moderately skilled women. Less attention has been given to understanding the attitudes of the highly skilled urban middle class, among which higher rates of dual earning couples can be found. This study aims to fill these gaps by focusing on the experiences of dual earner middle class couples in New Delhi and the attitudes of the middle class towards these less-traditional family work arrangements.

Data and methods

Data for this study comes from 46 semi-structured interviews conducted with middle-class people residing in the New Delhi metro region, including recently married or engaged people, unmarried people, and parents. For the purpose of this study, middle class was defined as the respondent or child(ren) of the respondent, in the case of the parents, having or currently pursuing a college degree. The majority of the interviews were conducted with recently married or engaged individuals (28 interviews) from 15 different sex couples where the woman was either currently working or searching for employment. In addition, 18 interviews with parents and young people approaching marriageable age provided valuable additional perspectives on the topic of women's careers. A separate semi-structured interview schedule was used for each of the three populations interviewed which covered

attitudes towards and experiences with marriage. Respondents were asked about their beliefs regarding the household division of labor, women's careers, and what they were looking for in a marriage partner.

Respondents were recruited through a number of different strategies. Unmarried young people and parents were recruited primarily through contacting households which had participated in a 2016 representative survey in the Delhi metro region. In addition, a few unmarried respondents were recruited through approaching young people near a college campus. Some of the unmarried young adult and parent interviews were conducted with the respondent alone; but, in other cases, respondents were interviewed in small groups. The groups included when the mother and father were interviewed together and also small groups of unmarried siblings or friends who asked to be interviewed as a group. These group interviews provided additional insights into how people spoke with each other about the topics of marriage and women's careers. The unmarried young people interviewed ranged in age from 18 to 29 and half were women. The parents interviewed included 7 mothers and 5 fathers.

Recruitment of recently married or engaged individuals required a different approach. College-educated different-sex couples who had been married or engaged within the past four years were identified through snowballing. Recruitment texts were shared on the WhatsApp messaging app widely across the researcher's social network. In addition, recruitment posts were made in a number of closed Facebook Delhi neighborhood groups. Interview respondents also suggested other couples they knew who had recently married. This chapter focuses on the experiences of 15 couples where the woman partner was either

currently employed or searching for employment. From these couples, 15 women and 13 men agreed to be interviewed regarding their marriage and beliefs about women's work. Each individual was interviewed alone and separate from their spouse. While the majority of the 15 couples self-described their marriage as arranged or semi-arranged, five of the couples described their marriage as a "love marriage," a term used in India for marriages preceded by a romantic relationship. Most of the couples were dual earner; however, two of the women were currently unemployed but planning to re-enter the workforce once they found a position in their industry. In addition, in one couple, the husband was not currently employed but currently pursuing studies. Many of the couples had been married less than a year so, while most couples reported plans for children, only four couples had any children at the time of the interview.

This study focuses on the college-educated middle class. The recently married respondents had at least a bachelor's degree and some had obtained higher levels of education. Not all of the parents had college degrees, but they had all provided a college education to their children. About half of the unmarried respondents were current college students. The interview respondents were primarily employed in white collar professions such as medicine, IT, management, business, and law. The participants in the study reflect the diversity of the urban middle class in Delhi in terms of caste and religion. The plurality of respondents were upper caste Hindus. There were also several respondents each from the Sikh, Muslim, and Jain religion as well as Hindus from lower status castes including the oppressed caste community of Dalits (also known as Scheduled Castes), and Other Backward Classes (a government defined category often referred to as OBC). Gender norms

and rates of female employment vary by caste and religion in India; however, this paper focuses on findings that were not restricted to one religious or caste community interviewed.

All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face between July 2018 and March 2019 in either Hindi or English. A female Indian research assistant attended all interviews with the author. Most interviews took place either in the home of the respondent or in a coffee shop. All but one of the interviews were audio-recorded. The audio data was then transcribed and translated into English by the research assistant. The transcripts were analyzed using the ATLAS.ti software. First, all sections of the interviews relating to gender and work were coded thematically. Next, the coded data was analyzed and grouped into themes such as “working women are better partners” and “using women’s income” to identify emerging findings. I then examined the data for disconfirming evidence on the key emerging findings. In the text, pseudonyms are used, and small details (like place names) have also been changed to protect study participant privacy.

Looking for a second income on the marriage market

Many middle-class men and parents were explicitly searching for a working woman on the marriage market. They often expressed a desire for a dual-earner household because of the lifestyle that the second income would facilitate. Ruchita was a mother of one unmarried son who described herself as a housewife. In regard to what she was looking for in a wife for her son, she explained that “for me, it’s most important that she have a job, and that the both of them work and earn together so that they can run a nice household for themselves. ... All I want is a girl who works, I don’t want anything else.” Ruchita later went on to explain that her preference for a working daughter-in-law even superseded her desire to find a spouse

within their caste. However, she did have limits to her caste openness; “We won’t go too low, though” she clarified. While she was willing to consider options outside of their caste if the woman was working, she explained that she would not accept a match from a Dalit (oppressed caste) or Adivasi (tribal/indigenous) community.

The men interviewed, whose wives were all working or searching for employment, mostly expressed that they intentionally sought a dual earner relationship. In fact, many of the men interviewed said that a woman’s career was the primary factor in their search for a marriage partner. Like the parents interviewed, many men discussed the value that a second income could have for their lifestyle. Danish, who had an arranged marriage, had explicitly sought out a working woman explaining, “I have no preferences for beauty, no preferences for anything, but the only preference was that she should be educated, and she should be working, that’s it.” He and his wife both worked in the management sector and, though they planned for it, had not yet had any children. Danish explained his reasoning for looking for a wife who would work after marriage:

If I got married, is it possible for me to fulfill our dreams or requirements with this much of salary? I think no... I just don’t want to compromise on anything because such things may create a problem later on because we can’t buy this, we can’t buy that because of financial reasons. I just don’t want that.

Without a second income, Danish feared that he would not be able to live the lifestyle he wanted to live. He further explained that it did not matter to him if the income came from himself or his wife. The only important thing to Danish was the lifestyle that their combined income afforded.

Amar, who also had an arranged marriage, felt similarly about having a second income for the household. He had been married for over two years and had one child with his wife, Tripti, who had a management position at a large Indian corporation. Amar was a medical professional who ran a small neighborhood clinic. Like Danish, Amar said that a woman's career was the primary criteria he used while searching for a wife. When asked the reason why a woman's career was his primary criteria, he said, "the income would be double... in Delhi you have to... You can manage in a small place, but... in a metropolitan city, you need a working woman, and then, what is she going to do at home? If I'm in my native place then there are lots of things to do, here there isn't as much work [in the home]." Amar's skepticism about whether there was enough housework to justify keeping his wife out of the labor force was shared by other respondents and is described later in this chapter.

The interviews with recently married women also echoed this view that working women were valuable on the marriage market because of their income. Tripti, who was married to Amar, explained that potential grooms "were happy...because I was earning good, so [my] money was not a thing that [harmed me on the marriage market], rather it was something that made them want to marry me." Tripti, who was the primary earner in her household due to her high-powered position at a large Indian corporation, recognized that her high income was seen as an asset by potential grooms and their parents. To many middle-class families, women's income was viewed as integral to achieving a comfortable middle-class lifestyle in the increasingly expensive city.

Men in love marriages spoke similarly about the value of women's careers, including how a second income would increase their household's standard of living. When Siddharth, a

lawyer who had married his girlfriend of eight years, was asked about whether there was ever any discussion about his wife not working after marriage, he laughed. He said, “I always wanted her to work. It’s a good thing. Income will come in... two extra bucks.” Since they had graduated college together, both Siddharth and his partner Apurva had worked full-time. The thought of her leaving the labor force and them relying solely on his income was something he explained that he “never” wanted.

Women’s income as protection from negative economic shocks

In addition to elevating the overall standard of living of the household, several men and parents expressed the necessity of a second earner as a form of protection from financial precarity. Their justification of this view often centered on fears about the instability and unpredictability of the economy especially for those employed in India’s growing private sector. Vaishnavi, a doctor and mother of an unmarried son and daughter, did not feel that it was necessary for her son’s wife to work. Instead, she said, “it’s definitely very important that she be educated enough that, if they go through bad times, God forbid that happen... she should be able to help out.”

Both men and their parents rejected the idea that men were solely responsible for the finances of the household. Nimrit, a housewife and mother of three unmarried sons, shared a similar sentiment to Vaishnavi. She said, “if the children have any problems, any troubles in the future, she should be able to support them. It shouldn’t be like if the man is facing problems, the woman can’t do anything except sit silently at home.” While neither mother felt that employment was necessary, in contrast to other mothers like Ruchita, both

Vaishnavi and Nimrit felt that it was essential that their daughter-in-law be able to contribute to the household financially if the family faced financial distress.

Concerns about financial instability were often influenced by the respondents' own experiences or those of people they knew. Danish, who was quoted above discussing how a second income could help him to live the lifestyle he wanted in Delhi, explained that his beliefs about the value of women's careers were influenced by experiences within his family. He said:

One of my uncles died... he was the only earning member... they had two kids... after that my grandfather... had to take care of each and every thing... the kids have suffered a lot because they don't have that much money. I have seen that they can't celebrate birthdays because [of money] ... my aunt is a homemaker... she doesn't have a strong education... she was not having the [qualifications required for] someone to hire her... I thought that if something happens to me, I don't want my wife to suffer just because she can't work and is not educated... I can bear anything, but I don't want that situation to occur to my wife.

His aunt's experience left a large impression on Danish, leading him to shape his whole search for a partner around finding a career woman. Despite these limited criteria, Danish encountered some issues in finding a working woman on the arranged marriage market as some women he met seemed to not be interested in maintaining a career after marriage. He even rejected one potential match because he felt her short-term contractual job signaled that she was not very attached to the labor force. Ultimately, he found the perfect partner in his wife Reena, a woman with a well-established career in management who even worked in the same neighborhood of multi-national corporate offices where he was employed.

Women see employment as providing autonomy and self-fulfillment

While men and parents often spoke about the financial value of women's careers for the household, employed women emphasized the value of their careers as providing a sense of personal satisfaction and autonomy. The women interviewed rarely discussed the financial aspects of dual-career households. When they did discuss finances, they often spoke about how they wanted to have their own income which they would have full discretion over. Many women, like Kavita, an 18-year-old unmarried college, wanted to be able to give money to her parents:

I really want to have a career before I get married. I want to stand on my own two feet, because I don't want to depend on anyone... I want to do my own business, and then I want to earn enough money to take care of [my parents], and that way my husband can't say anything to me, because if I use his money, he'll tell me that I'm spending his money on my parents, that I'm not spending time with his parents... when one is earning one's own money, we can come and go as we like, spend time with our family whenever we want to.

Kavita saw employment as closely tied to power dynamics within a marriage. One of the reasons she wanted to have a career was so that she could have the autonomy to make her own decisions and control her own finances.

Historically, there have been taboos on parents accepting financial support from their daughters since this was seen as the responsibility of sons. As fertility has declined in India, there is evidence of increasing social acceptability of receiving financial assistance from daughters (Allendorf 2020). However, several working women interviewed still felt that their desire to give money to their parents was not accepted by many potential grooms on the marriage market. Jyoti, a doctor, explained that one of the most common reasons that

potential husbands rejected her was that they refused to allow her to support her parents financially after marriage. Jyoti explained why she chose her current husband for an arranged marriage, saying “I’m an only child, I don’t have any sibling... so I talked to him [about how I didn’t want to get married] because I think I should take responsibility for my parents... he said... I will take care of your parents as well, and if you earn, whatever you will earn, you can give that money to your parents.” This promise of support to her parents as they aged was a major factor in why Jyoti elected to marry her husband.

In addition to having control over their own income, the employed women interviewed frequently expressed that, through their career, they could feel empowered and find a sense of accomplishment. Bhavna, a woman who had an arranged marriage only a month before our interview, explained that she wanted to work after her marriage, “I want to have that freedom. That feels good, to have your own money, that gives you... independence... and a sense of stability, that you have something of your own, it gives you a self-satisfaction.” Bhavna’s marriage had led to her relocating to New Delhi from a smaller city. While she had not yet found a job in the city, she said that she had spoken with her husband before their marriage about her desire to work. One of the things she had liked about him as a potential husband was that he told her that he did not want her to “waste her talents” from her training in accounting and business.

A career was also described as a way to develop an identity separate from their husbands. Preeti, a woman who had an arranged marriage, had left her manager position at the time of marriage because she had to relocate to New Delhi. Shortly after marriage, she

began working full-time to manage the business her husband had recently opened. However, she recently decided to leave this job and get another job in management explaining:

I wanted to do something of my own. I don't want to ask for money from my parents or my husband, that is why I started [a new job]. I have [our business], ... but it is considered a joint [business venture between my husband and I]...there is nothing of my own [in the business], so that is why I want something only of my own.

Preeti hoped that her new job and separate salary would give her something that was all her own, not tied to her husband or her husband's family.

While some men and their families preferred a working woman, many others would refuse potential brides who insisted on maintaining their career after marriage. For some women and their families, this made the search for a suitable groom a difficult one. Kavya had been married in an arranged marriage and had one child. She had faced difficulty on the marriage market in finding a husband who would accept her law career within her conservative caste community. This struggle to find the right person led her search for a partner to extend until she was 31 when she finally married Aditya, a man from her caste who supported her decision to work after marriage. She explained that many potential matches rejected her because of her insistence on continuing to practice law after marriage. According to her, "they were not [agreeing to] let me work because they said that we have enough money so why do you want to work? I said money is not the matter, I want to go out from the house." Ultimately her insistence on working after marriage led her to turn down marriage proposals from a few wealthy families because they came with the stipulation that she would not be allowed to work outside of the home. She decided, instead, to accept a proposal from Aditya, who was not employed at the time of their marriage. She explained

that “I would rather eat less. I don’t want to be with the richest person... I want to earn for myself.” For Kavya and many of the working women interviewed, maintaining their careers was about personal autonomy and self-fulfillment and not necessarily about increasing their standard of living.

Working women are viewed as better partners

One thing that both employed women and their partners frequently agreed on was that working women made better partners. This belief was common in dual-earner households that were established through either love or arranged marriage. Countering narratives which idealize traditional gender roles, these couples argued that a shared understanding, fostered by similar career experiences, was a stronger basis for a successful marriage. Some men emphasized the importance of finding a partner who could relate to the high-pressure environment of their careers in the corporate sector. Kartik was a management professional who had been married in a hybrid love/arranged marriage. His wife also worked in management. He said that he wanted a woman who would be “independent” and understood the pressures of his career:

I don’t want a housewife.... I want to share everything with her... she can complement me...I work in a corporate culture... I have to do something of my own, but I need some person who can pat me on the back, who can give me support....I had that idea in my mind, like I have to find some independent girl, so maybe she will understand me better.

According to Kartik, he had two lives, one with his parents in their hometown, where his parents had no understanding of the aspirations and pressures of his corporate job, and a second life in Delhi where his life was often consumed by work. He wanted a partner to

share his life in Delhi, especially through providing comfort and encouragement during times of work stress. He was convinced that only a woman also working in the corporate sector could empathize with his experiences. He elected for a love marriage because he felt that his parents would not be able to find a woman to match him career-wise and in life outlook. Though he had faced some hurdles to marrying his longtime girlfriend Naina, he was happy with his choice to fight for the relationship because he felt that, in her, he had found the ideal partner who understood him.

In addition to being able to provide better emotional support, working women were believed to be more understanding of their husband's work commitments than housewives. Arjun, who worked in the management sector who had an arranged marriage to a woman also working in management, said that "in your professional life, she can understand the problems you face, like I'm not coming home on time, or I am stuck in some office calls, or other office issues, a working women will understand you better than a non-working [woman.]"

For some men, the desire to find a woman with a career also meant that they sought to find a woman working in the same field as them. To Pranav, an unmarried man studying medicine, it was very important to find a wife who also practiced medicine. Pranav explained that he would feel more "comfortable with [my] own profession" because "if she is from a different profession, she won't understand how emergencies work and if I'm getting late in the night, she will get angry at me." Pranav went on to explain that his cousin was often "crying and shouting" at her husband for missing family events because of his unpredictable

schedule as a hospital-based doctor. He felt that through choosing a fellow doctor for his wife, he could avoid the issues that he had seen in his cousin's marriage.

Women also spoke about how shared work experience could help build understanding between a couple. Reena, who was married to Danish quoted earlier, worked in the fast-paced management sector. She shared that:

I think... working...helps you to build a relationship with your husband... because he understands the situation you are going through with office pressure and he knows everything because he is also working. But when you are staying at home and you are a housewife, your husband never knows how many things you are doing, what work you have done, whatever you are going through, because he is never at home while you are working... if the girl is working, then the marriage probably would go better... if she is a housewife, sometime [there are] some conflicts... if she is working, she is very confident about everything, she can fight... so that would be good I think.

From Reena's perspective, a working woman would have more confidence and ability to speak directly with her husband and advocate for herself. Not only do respondents like Reena prefer a dual career marriage, but as Reena's quote reveals, they think the more traditional marriage based on gender specialization will be less successful than the one based on shared career experiences.

Some people interviewed held negative opinions about housewives which contrasted with their positive opinions of employed women. Some respondents spoke about housewives in a dismissive way, stating that housewives were idle or "sitting at home" all day. A few shared anecdotes of unhappy or "drama"-prone housewives, often used to justify their view that employed women made better partners. For example, Veer explained that:

I don't want any housewife, because a person gets very lonely... all day you have to sit here, waiting for when I will come... an empty mind is the devil's workshop... I always wanted my partner to work somewhere... My sister-in-law doesn't work.... All the time she is sitting at home, so she's always like thinking negative.

Veer described his views on his sister-in-law, who he explained had experienced interpersonal conflicts with her husband and in-laws when her husband lost his business. The experience had made an impact on Veer's family and their views on working women. Veer's wife Piya explained in her interview that she believed the experience had made them more open to Veer's inter-religious love marriage to a working woman. Veer and Piya met at work where they were both employed for the same large company. Veer was a Sikh and Piya was a Hindu. According to Piya, Veer's family felt that:

If [Veer's sister-in-law] would have been working then she would have supported her husband in the situation where he was in a [financial] loss, then she could have done something for her husband, but she didn't. So that was the reason [Veer's parents] wanted us to be independent. The wanted me... and Veer to work so that we could support each other.

Piya's description of the impact of Veer's brothers' financial struggles again emphasizes the concern that single-earner households are too vulnerable to economic shocks. To them, dual breadwinning was seen as a way to insure against financial precarity.

Traditional gender roles persist in the distribution of housework and care work

The couples interviewed all deviated from a breadwinner housewife ideal through embracing women's careers; however, in many of the couples, housework and care work continued to be seen as the responsibility of women. Dual earner couples employed a number of strategies to manage their careers with the demands of home life. The most common

strategies utilized by the urban middle-class families interviewed were employing domestic workers in the home and having other relatives of the husband do the bulk of the household work. In both cases, this labor remained feminized as the domestic workers and family members who did this work were usually women. The reliance of the Indian urban middle class on hired domestic helpers, who are primarily lower class and caste women, has been documented by Ray and Qayum (2009). In some households, however, husbands made meaningful contributions to the household work or childcare.

Some dual earner couples rely on the husband's mother to do most or all of the household labor and childcare during weekdays. Shreya, a woman recently married in a love marriage, was employed in the management sector. She described herself as very ambitious in her career. In describing herself and what she was looking for in a marriage, she explained that "I need a guy who is as much career-oriented as I am. I am self-driven, I'm an independent person." Shreya described how she had already created a checklist of what she needed in a husband in order for her career to not be negatively impacted by marriage and having children. The most important criteria she was looking for was a joint family, a family structure where they would live with her husband's parents. She explained that:

In my situation it was a little easy because they already have a daughter-in-law of the elder brother and she's already working and there's a child also, so they were kind of already equipped... I already have parents who can look after my kid...that was the major reason why I wanted to get married into a joint family...my kids can have that kind of a, you know, family support so that they don't have to go to a creche... someone who... would take care of my kids as much as I would, so that's one of my major checklist points.

Shreya, who was an only child and grew up in a nuclear family, wanted to marry into a joint-family with multi-generational co-residence because she felt that the built-in support from the in-laws for childcare would be essential to her being able to stay in the labor force after having children. She had come to this conclusion after having watched some women in her company forced to leave their jobs after having children because they could not manage the demands of childcare. Shreya's household also employed domestic workers for more routinized household cleaning and cooking tasks. She explained that the men in her family, including her husband, contributed little to nothing in terms of household tasks so the support of her mother-in-law was essential. Khanna and Pandey (2020) also found evidence in survey data that mothers-in-law often facilitate their daughter-in-law's career through sharing the burden of household production.

Many couples interviewed employed a similar strategy to Shreya's family, where household and care work tasks were divided between female household members and an employed domestic helper. Vinay and Sunita had relocated to Delhi for Vinay's job in the media industry. They had been married recently after dating for ten years and overcoming opposition from Sunita's parents to their inter-caste love marriage. Sunita was currently searching for full-time employment in her industry. She was trained as a scientist and had previously worked in a laboratory before moving to New Delhi. Vinay's older sister and her child were also living with them. His sister's husband was working outside of the country. Vinay and Sunita did not yet have any children. When asked about who does household work, Vinay explained that

“The housework is actually divided between the two of them. I don't do a lot of housework... I do some of it. I'm lazy about it, but I do some of it.

[Sunita] is crazy about housework, 'this should be like this, this should be like that'... I do very little, but then the maid is there, my sister is there, so there isn't actually a lot of housework."

Vinay and Sunita's household division of labor, where all of the women in the household share the housework but men contribute little, was common among the dual earner couples interviewed.

In some dual earner couples, however, men make meaningful contributions to the household and care work. Tripti was employed in a management position in a large Indian corporation. She had been married to Amar, quoted earlier, in an arranged marriage a few years before our interview. They had one child together. Amar's career in medicine, where he managed a private clinic, was more flexible and involved fewer hours of work than his wife's. Tripti, who was the primary earner in her household, explained how Amar and his parents had stepped up to take on more of the household responsibilities to support Tripti's career:

[I spend] three point five hours me on road [commuting every day]. I leave by 7 o'clock, so I wanted someone who'll [help out], so he'll wake up, he'll cook breakfast for us, he'll pack breakfast for me... so he'll do everything for me in the morning, then he'll sleep again, then he'll wake up and pack his own breakfast... I wanted somebody who could do these things on his own... most people would expect this from the wife... it would have been very difficult for me, doing both the things,... because when I am outside my house for around thirteen to fourteen hours [a day], it is difficult to give equal time and effort to the family also, when my in-laws come, my mother-in-law... doesn't expect me to cook ... she helps me with most of the things... I wanted somebody who could understand this and help out.

By prioritizing her career, Amar and his parents deviate from traditional norms which dictate that respectable women place their family first and career second.

Another couple with a fairly equal division of household labor were Ayesha and Rahul, an interreligious couple who had a love marriage several years prior to our interviews. They did not have any children yet but planned to have them in the future. Ayesha was an artist entrepreneur and Rahul worked in business. Ayesha described their division of household labor:

The kitchen is my department, because he doesn't know how to do anything, but he helps me to cut vegetables, and everything else, tidying the house, washing the clothes, whatever other chores are there, [Rahul] does them. I've never washed clothes in my whole life, before my marriage, my father used to wash my clothes, and after marriage, [Rahul] washes them.

Ayesha and Rahul did not employ any domestic helpers in their home because, as Rahul explained, they did not like food cooked by other people. Instead, they managed their household labor through assigning specific tasks to each other. This continued a pattern of division of labor that Ayesha had grown up seeing between her parents.

While many women, such as Ayesha, reported being satisfied with the division of household labor in the home, other women were extremely frustrated by the struggle to juggle career and household responsibilities. Geeta, a woman working in IT who had been married in an arranged marriage for over a year, felt burdened by extra work in the home. She described what she saw as an unfair situation for today's working women on the marriage market:

Now what they want is that financially she should contribute equally, plus, she should have housewife qualities as well, so the combination is not good, in today's scenario... I think, that is not [fair] for a girl...it is difficult, because we are working equally, we are earning equally, why would we do extra?

Geeta, who had left her high paying job on an employment visa in the United States to marry Neel and return to India where her earnings were lower, was frustrated with Neel's unwillingness to do any household chores. While they did employ a cook in their home, Geeta was still tasked with a number of household responsibilities including supervising and managing the cook's work. The management of domestic helpers has been identified in other studies as a responsibility primarily delegated to women (Cheung and Lui 2021). Geeta also complained that, though he made more money than her, Neel's job in management required fewer work hours than her software development job. She was angry that she had to do household tasks after her long workdays while Neel was able to relax. While Neel agreed that many things had changed in India in terms of gender relations, he admitted that:

I still feel that there are many things, in India,... that should be handled by men, handled by us, and having said that, that in no way should hinder the professional life of a woman... but I think the [home] management piece has to be by the woman, it necessarily doesn't mean cooking part because these days everyone has cooks and all that stuff but to manage them itself is a task.

Geeta and Neel differed in their views on the gender division of labor in the household which had led to significant tensions and dissatisfaction with the marriage. However, Geeta said that she had no intention to ever leave the labor force, even after having children:

Financial independence and the work thing, that ... is very important to me. No matter how many responsibilities or domestic chores get dumped into my shoulder... it's that financially having a different identity, by your own name, is very important, so that I'll always do, even... after kids.

Geeta, like many of the interview respondents, had not yet had any children so it remains unclear how childrearing would impact her career. However, she indicated that she was

determined to remain in the labor force after having children because of how much she valued the independence that her career provided her.

Discussion

This study has focused on the experiences and attitudes of a small minority of the Indian population, dual earner couples in the urban middle class. Using interviews with these couples, supplemented with interviews with unmarried people and parents, this study reveals how families manage work and family responsibilities and how they explain their preference for dual breadwinning within the wider Indian context where gender specialization and male breadwinning norms are strong. For some men and their parents, women's career intentions after marriage appear to be a major factor on which families sort and filter potential options on the arranged marriage market. Some even reported that women's employment was the most important trait they were looking for in a wife. This is because women's careers could provide their household with both a second income and insurance in case of financial instability. For employed women, their desire to work after marriage rarely had to do with the household standard of living. Instead, they reported that they valued their careers because it gave them autonomy and a sense of accomplishment.

The popularity of the dual earner household described by the respondents should be considered within the context of dramatic changes to the economic circumstance of the Indian middle class. Not only has the size of the middle class expanded but it has also become less economically stable since the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991. Over the past few decades, the share of the middle class employed in the government sector has dwindled as the share working for private companies or self-employed has increased

(Kapur 2020). In the past, the coveted government job, with its lifetime job security, health insurance and old age pension, easily supported a male breadwinner household model. The new economic reality of the growing middle class is one of instability and precarity (Kapur 2017). It is becoming increasingly difficult for the high-skilled professional middle class in cities like New Delhi to maintain a male-breadwinner-style household. Economic precarity and fear of losing class status create a context of middle class anxiety in urban India (Dickey 2012).

This concern for economic precarity comes out clearly in the interviews from both men and their parents. To them, women's incomes are often needed in order to keep up with the increasingly costly middle-class lifestyle within India's urbanizing metros. More importantly, families hoped that a second income could help insure against job loss or other negative economic shocks. Often their views on women's careers were influenced by watching families in their community struggle to weather economic shocks with a single income-earner. To many middle-class families, college-educated women employed in Delhi's growing IT and financial services sector are especially attractive on the arranged marriage market because of their high earnings.

This study has also contributed to a growing literature on the rise of an ideology of companionate marriage within the urban middle class in India. Several authors have documented the hybridization of arranged and love marriage practices as families increasingly value emotional compatibility between the partners (Donner 2016; Fuller and Narasimhan 2008; Netting 2010). Within the urban middle class in Hyderabad, Gilbertson (Gilbertson 2014) finds a move away from marriage as a hierarchical relationship into one

based on friendship. This study adds to this literature by showing that, to many in the Delhi middle-class, women's careers are believed to help facilitate companionate marriage by setting up a relationship based on shared experiences and equality. Countering a traditional narrative which idealizes housewives and gender specialization, many of the middle-class respondents characterized working women as better partners. In particular, career women were portrayed as better able to empathize with the stresses of men's jobs in the increasingly cut-throat private sector.

The interviews suggested that the urban middle class may be less willing to challenge gender roles in the distribution of household and care work than they are willing to accept women's paid employment after marriage. In some of dual earner households, often those where women were high-earning, men contributed to the household and care work. This finding fits with the work of Luke et al. (2014) which documented that women's earnings and employment altered household bargaining over the distribution of housework tasks. However, overall, men's contributions were small and, in many cases, nonexistent. Women were viewed as responsible for the management of the household work. To manage the competing responsibilities at work and home, women in the urban middle class employ female domestic workers and lean on the help of other female household members. In doing so, the gendered nature of this labor remains unchallenged.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Using data from 48 interviews and two different surveys, this study presents new findings related to partner selection and gender dynamics within Indian families. The dissertation is divided into two parts. Chapters 2 and 3, which form the first part of the dissertation, provide context to understand India's outlier status in terms of the persistence of arranged marriage. Much of the current sociological literature on arranged marriage focuses on documenting and explaining the decline of arranged marriage, often due to ideational diffusion and globalization (Allendorf 2013; Hoelter et al. 2004; Nedoluzhko and Agadjanian 2015; Thornton 2005; Thornton et al. 1994). Despite the widespread influence of globalization in India, especially among the urban middle class studied in this dissertation, there is little evidence of an increase in popularity or prevalence of love marriage (Allendorf and Pandian 2016).

Chapter 2 focuses on the attitudes of middle class urban young adults towards marriage, especially the choice between arranged and love marriage. It shows how stigma and social taboos on divorce, cohabitation, love marriage, and inter-marriage make it difficult for young people to deviate from the accepted parent-arranged model of marriage. Interviews with young people reveal that they see marriage as fraught with serious risks, uncertainties, and costs. They respond with an approach of marital pragmatism, framing their marriage decisions in terms of risk management. Most young people choose arranged marriage because it comes with an important form of insurance in the event of a "bad marriage." That insurance is the support that they expect to receive from their parents in working through issues or conflicts within their marriage. These findings highlight the value

that young people place on their relationship with parents and how this shapes their preference for arranged marriage.

Even though young people often summarily reject love marriage in their discourse, a closer look at marriage practices reveal significant hybridization between love and arranged marriage. One important site for hybridization discussed in Chapter 3 is the roka marriage engagement. The roka provides cover for young people to explore alternative marriage scripts. For those in an arranged marriage, this often means using the engagement period to test out the relationship through courtship. Alternatively, those who were in a pre-marital romantic relationship use the roka engagement as a way to secure parental endorsement of the match, a form of legitimization of their relationship within the structures of arranged marriage. Increased prioritization of compatibility is especially evident in people's attitudes towards breaking off an engagement. Survey data suggests that around half of Delhi-ites are open to breaking a roka if the couple find themselves to be incompatible. Chapter 3 suggests that arranged marriage in India has been reconceived to incorporate elements of romantic love, individualism, and autonomy.

The second part of this dissertation focuses on the careers and physical mobility of married Indian women. India is a unique context to examine these topics because the country has one of the lowest rates of female labor force participation in the world (Lahoti and Swaminathan 2016). Furthermore, qualitative studies have suggested that the practice of female seclusion, including the segregation and gendering of spaces, is often linked to household social status within the Indian context (Heyer 2014; Srinivas 1952, 1956; Still 2011). As the middle class expands with India's economic growth, many households may be

withdrawing women from public spaces and the labor force as a way to perform their newly achieved status. Chapter 4 uses nationally representative panel survey data to test classic theories of how households perform status through female seclusion. Fixed effect regressions reveal that households which experience upward economic mobility also increased their restrictions on women's physical mobility and were more likely to report practicing purdah and the withdrawal of women from the labor force. These results were primarily found in rural areas and among less educated and lower-class households. The relationship between household economic mobility and women's exit from the labor force uncovered in Chapter 4 could help explain India's low rate of female labor force participation over the recent period of rapid economic growth.

The final chapter shifted focus to the relatively small population of dual earner households in the urban middle class. Interviews revealed that a segment of the professional class is rejecting the male breadwinner household model. Working women were portrayed as better partners both because they could bring a second income to the household and also because they are seen as more understanding of their husbands. Some people argued that that a fulfilling companionate marriage was more easily facilitated within a dual breadwinning relationship than in those based on gender specialization. While these findings suggest a change in beliefs about gender roles in society, many families were not willing to consider alternate divisions of labor within the household. Only a minority of men in dual earner households contribute to household and care work. Many dual earner couples rely on the labor of female family members, especially mothers-in-law, and employed domestic workers.

Key themes

Four key themes emerged from the findings of this dissertation. These themes also suggest important directions for future research. First, this dissertation has highlighted the central role of the family in marriage decision-making. Even as young people gain new means of exercising autonomy through their careers and within marriage decision-making, parents and other extended kin continue to shape the set of viable choices for marriage and family life. Chapter 2 shows that young people frequently prioritize their relationship with parents over relationships with a romantic partner. Because of the central role of parents in marriage decision-making, changes to marriage norms within a community only become possible when parents and other senior family members change their perspectives, such as through increased openness to love marriage. Thus, products of globalization such as Developmental Idealism should be seen as influential primarily through how they influence parents as recent research by Allendorf (2019) helps show. Furthermore, patrilocality also shapes the decisions and practices of couples after marriage. Chapter 5 reveals that, after marriage, mothers-in-law and other female kin often facilitate women's careers by providing childcare and taking responsibility for much of the household labor. Quotes from some women suggest that their ability to continue their careers after marriage hinges on their ability to shore up support for household and care work from other female household members, domestic workers, and their husbands. Future research should not neglect the important role of parental relationships and parental attitudes in shaping the behaviors of young people.

Second, the issue of concealment and secrecy also came forward as a central theme in the interviews. Chapter 3 documents that betrothed couples often engage in clandestine

meetings during their engagement, where they may explore physical intimacy and share private details about their lives that they have hidden from their parents. Even before their engagement, as we see in Chapter 2, many young people in the urban middle class already have a dating history, kept secret from their parents. The secrecy with which young people approach romantic relationships is a response to significant taboos and stigmas regarding love marriage, dating, cohabitation, and sexuality present in Indian society (Aengst 2014; Huang 2018; Krishnan 2021). Decisions regarding concealment and disclosure interact with social hierarchies and kin relationships in complex ways. Individuals may disclose information about their romantic relationship to friends, a sister-in-law, or an aunt but not to their parents. Furthermore, parents may tacitly condone courtship during the engagement but not explicitly discuss it.

The consequence of all of this secrecy is that much of the complexity and diversity of relationship and marriage experiences get concealed, not only from parents but also frequently from the researcher. The interview data suggest that partner selection practices are often far more complex than the survey data show. Stigma can impact disclosure within both survey and interview data. The way a question is asked, and the comfort level of the respondent can dramatically impact responses as documented by Bell and Bishai (2021) through examining survey para data in India. Survey data, especially on sensitive subjects such as marriage and romantic relationships, can suffer from a social desirability bias. Furthermore, the categories and questions used in surveys can conceal the diversity and complexity of marriage practices. While few Indians would classify their marriage as a love marriage because of the stigma associated with that term, a larger share may be willing to reveal how they and their parents were involved in different stages of the decision-making

process. Using multi-question survey prompts to gauge parental involvement, such as those employed by Tsutsui (2013), is one direction for future survey research on arranged marriage. There is also an important need for more qualitative work on family decision-making regarding arranged or joint-arranged marriage. This dissertation has provided an important example of how qualitative methods can be used to uncover patterns of attitudes and practices that are often hidden due to social taboos.

Relatedly, this dissertation has highlighted the performativity of many family behaviors in India. This dissertation suggests that arranged marriage is a powerful social ideal that symbolizes many values important to Indian families including the continuation of tradition and respect for parents. However, the power of this social ideal is exactly what makes it so difficult to define as almost everyone seeks the social legitimacy that the label “arranged” brings. Chapter 3 revealed how couples in romantic relationships go to great lengths to have their marriage plans conform to the traditions and rituals of arranged marriage. The so-called “arranged love marriage” allows couples who selected their own partner through dating to publicly perform the customs of arranged marriage such as the roka ceremony. By doing so, they are attempting to signal their respect for the values associated with arranged marriage. Performance was also an important theme of Chapter 4 which found that upwardly mobile households adopt new gendered practices as a way to signal household status. Status through female seclusion appears to be a powerful cultural script shaping the behavior of some populations within India. Chapter 4 highlights how gender and social class intersect as families seek to perform a newly achieved class position through the performance of a version of idealized femininity.

Finally, one of the most important contributions of this dissertation has been to center the role of precarity and risk in marriage decision-making. The young people quoted in Chapter 2 approach marriage decision-making with pragmatism because they are concerned about ending up stuck in a bad marriage. Much of their justification of their marriage decisions are framed around reducing risks in marriage outcomes. Chapter 5 shows that, within the urban middle class, men and their parents are worried about economic instability and losing class status. The professional middle class is now primarily employed in the private sector or self-employed which means they face greater precarity as these jobs do not come with the job security, benefits, and pensions that previous generations of the middle class enjoyed. In response to this precarity, some middle-class families are rejecting the male breadwinner household model in favor of a dual earner household structure. Furthermore, women quoted in this dissertation express fears about the risks of both love and arranged marriage, including becoming stuck in an abusive marriage or losing key family ties. In response they approach marriage decision-making with pragmatism and often prioritize building an independent identity through their career. Drawing our attention towards the role of precarity is an important contribution of this dissertation. More research is needed on how risk and economic precarity shape family behaviors in non-Western contexts.

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