WOMEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES IN EXOGAMOUS MARRIAGES WITHIN SYED AND NON-SYED COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Inter-caste marriages, particularly those involving the Syed and non-Syed communities in Punjab, Pakistan, offer a unique lens through which to investigate the links between gender, religion, and caste. The Syed community, claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad, holds a significant religious and social status within Islamic societies, including Pakistan. This status often influences social interactions and marriage practices, leading to complex dynamics when it intersects with non-Syed communities. This research aims to explore the lived experiences of women in inter-caste marriages between Syed and non-Syed individuals in Punjab, Pakistan. By examining their personal narratives, the study seeks to understand how these women negotiate their identities and familial relationships amidst the intersecting pressures of gender, caste, and religion. The focus on real-life experiences provides a nuanced understanding of the cultural and familial dynamics at play, contributing to the broader discourse on social stratification and gender in South Asia. The conclusion of this study illustrate the complex intersections of gender, caste, religion, and class that shape challenges and opportunities faced by women in these marriages. The respondent's Syed identity, which confers significant religious and social status, creates unique expectations and pressures regarding her marriage and family life. As a woman, she navigates additional gendered expectations and limitations imposed by her family and community. Despite the initial resistance from her family, the respondent was able to assert her agency and make the choice to marry her non-Syed husband, whom she loves. The study's further recommends inclusion and promoting intersectional awareness and sensitivity, strengthening legal and institutional protections, empowering women through education and economic opportunities, engaging with religious and community leaders, and fostering intergenerational dialogue and change. These conclusion give to the growing amount of literature on women intersecting experiences in inter-caste marriages, with implications for policymakers, community leaders, and social service providers striving to give these women with surrounding that are more welcoming and encouraging.

Keywords: Inter-caste Marriages, Syed Community, Gender, Caste, Religion

Introduction

Inter-caste marriages, especially those involving Syed and Non-Syed individuals in Punjab, Pakistan, offer a unique lens through which to investigate the way in which gender intersect, religion, and caste. The Syed community, claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad, holds a significant religious and social status within Islamic societies, including Pakistan. This status often influences social interactions and marriage practices, leading to complex dynamics when it intersects with non-Syed communities. Punjab, a province rich in cultural diversity and tradition, provides a compelling backdrop for studying these inter-caste

marriages. The societal norms and family structures in Punjab are deeply influenced by caste and religious identities, which in turn shape the experiences of women in these unions. According to Ahmed (2012), caste and religious identities are not only social markers but also pivotal in defining personal and familial relationships within Pakistani society. Inter-caste marriages challenge traditional caste boundaries and bring to the fore issues of identity, acceptance, and belonging. Women in these marriages often navigate a complex web of cultural expectations and familial pressures. These experiences are further complicated by the intersections of gender and class, which add additional layers of complexity to their lives. As noted by Shaheed (2010), the intersectionality of caste, gender and class plays a crucial part in determining women's experiences and opportunities within Pakistani society.

This research seeks to explore into the lived experiences of women in inter-caste marriages between Syed and Non-Syed individuals in Punjab, Pakistan. By examining their personal narratives, this study seeks to understand how these women negotiate their identities and familial relationships amidst the intersecting pressures of gender, caste, and religion. The focus on real-life experiences provides a nuanced understanding of the cultural and familial dynamics at play, contributing to the broader discourse on social stratification and gender in South Asia. Furthermore, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on intersectionality, particularly in the context of South Asian societies. As Crenshaw (2008) articulated, the framework of intersectionality for understanding how multiple social identities intersect to produce distinctive modes of discrimination and privilege. By applying this structure to the study of inter-caste marriages in Punjab allows for a deeper exploration of how gender, caste, and class collectively impact women's lives.

In Pakistan Punjab province 52.9% of population, who are split up across hundreds of castes, live in Punjab province (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Marriage customs in South Asian contexts, especially in areas like Pakistan that are known for complex social hierarchies, frequently mirror ingrained traditions pertaining to caste, ancestry, and social standing. Within this paradigm, the idea of exogamous marriages between people who select partners who are not members of their social or familial group represents an intriguing field for research, particularly when it comes to the lived experiences of women.

Punjab's culture is rife with caste-based endogamy, which is the custom of marrying within one's own caste while rejecting others on the grounds of perceived differences. This custom affects people's status and possibilities, especially in marriage, by maintaining social hierarchies and maintaining caste purity. In Punjab, a state rich in cultural traditions, the institution of marriage has frequently served as a mirror reflecting the intricate social structures that exist within its culture. Among these, interpersonal relationships and social structures are significantly shaped by the caste system. With an emphasis on the disparate experiences of Syed and Non-Syed communities, this study seeks to explore the complex experiences of women who have married into inter-caste marriages and traversed the limits of caste. Syeds are considered to be descended from the Prophet Muhammad and are highly esteemed in Punjab's Muslim social structure. This society frequently expects marriages to follow rigorous endogamous customs in order to preserve the perceived purity of genealogy. On the other hand, non-Syed communities, which comprise a wide range of caste groupings, do not have the same lineage-based status and as a result, they face different marriage-related societal expectations and difficulties. In order to bring a human perspective to the conversation, the study would probably examine case studies or firsthand recollections of inter-caste marriages. These stories would highlight the practical ramifications of choosing a spouse outside of one's caste.

The motive of this comparison study is to learn more about the real-life experiences of women who have married outside of their caste. It will look at how these partnerships are viewed by society, how families work things out, how people's identities change, and how they affect people psychologically. The research intends to contribute to a greater understanding of how caste issues influence women's roles, relationships, and sense of self within the Punjabi environment by contrasting the experiences of women from Syed and Non-Syed families.

The goal of this investigation is to provide a thorough understanding of how caste, gender, and married life interact in contemporary Punjab. A platform for the voices of women who have stepped across traditional caste boundaries in pursuit of marital union.

The goal of this study is to offer a thorough grasp of the opportunities and challenges encountered by women in Syed and Non-Syed inter-caste marriages. It seeks to highlight the resilience and agency of these women as they navigate their complex social landscapes, offering valuable insights into the interplay of tradition and modernity in contemporary Pakistan.

Inter-caste Marriages and the Syed Community in Punjab, Pakistan

Inter-caste marriages, especially those involving Syed and non-Syed individuals in Punjab, Pakistan, offer a unique lens through which to explore the intersections of gender, religion, and caste. The Syed community, claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad, holds a significant religious and social status within Islamic societies, including Pakistan (Ahmed, 2012). This status often influences social interactions and marriage practices, leading to complex dynamics when it intersects with non-Syed communities.

Punjab, a province rich in cultural diversity and tradition, provides a compelling backdrop for studying these inter-caste marriages. The societal norms and family structures in Punjab are deeply influenced by caste and religious identities, which in turn shape the experiences of women in these unions (Shaheed, 2010). According to Ahmed (2012), caste and religious identities are not only social markers but also pivotal in defining personal and familial relationships within Pakistani society.

Challenging Caste Boundaries and Navigating Identities

Inter-caste marriages challenge traditional caste boundaries and bring to the fore issues of identity, acceptance, and belonging. Women in these marriages often navigate a complex web of cultural expectations and familial pressures (Shaheed, 2010). These experiences are further complicated by the intersections of gender and class, which add additional layers of complexity to their lives (Crenshaw, 2008). The Syed and Pir castes were reliant on the shawl trade, land and agricultural management, and served as mutawallis, or shrine guardians, in addition to being landlords and primary providers of legal services in the city. In their capacity as guardians, they would be able to receive donations from tourists as well as the income from the cities and villages that are connected to the shrines (Zutshi, 2011, p. 128). The Syed, Pirzada, and Shah families were involved in the shawl trade and maintained strong ties with European businessmen and officials. They were known as the "merchant princes of Kashmir," according to British army commander Henry Torrens' narrative (Torrens, 1862/2014). European traders and officials would particularly go to their homes to see the opulent way of life that the Kashmiri aristocracy led. The Pirzada and Syed castes turned to state services in the late 19th and early 20th centuries due to the growing economic slump, changes in state administration, and uncertainty in commerce and agriculture-related companies. The necessity to look for work in government departments was growing more and more critical as government services turned into more solid, long-term employment opportunities. But since they were so focused on other facets of the economy, like trade, commerce, and religious economy, they had not made significant investments in contemporary education. Muslim upper castes like the Syeds, Pirzadas, and Shahs needed to look into alternative sources of income due to a decline in the shawl trade in the later 19th century following the closure of the French shawl market in the wake of the Franco-Prussian war and additional disputes over sacred spaces, as has been discussed in the later section of this paper. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as their concern grew, they demanded that the J&K darbar provide economic possibilities and educational improvements.

Intersectionality and the South Asian Context

Furthermore, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on intersectionality, particularly in the context of South Asian societies. As Crenshaw (2008) articulated, intersectionality is a critical framework for understanding how multiple social identities intersect to create unique modes of

discrimination and privilege. Applying this framework to the study of inter-caste marriages in Punjab allows for a deeper exploration of how gender, caste, and class collectively impact women's lives.

We study the multi-layered concerns and challenges that twenty South Asian origin, Muslim, female leaders, managers, and supervisors in the United Kingdom experience when pursuing leadership roles and employment. Our research is based on qualitative interviews with these individuals. Gender, ethnicity, religion, and family status are interconnected and overlapping factors that impact not only the issues and challenges these women face in the labour market, but also their individual agency and the strategies they employ to overcome any barriers to their employment and career. The paper offers an intersectional perspective on these issues. The impact of race or ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic level on the math achievement score and intention to pursue higher education among female Southeast Asian students. According to this study, Southeast Asian pupils' math achievement levels were noticeably higher than those of students from other racial or cultural backgrounds. However, compared to Southeast Asian male students, the intention of Southeast Asian female students to pursue higher education was much lower, and it was the lowest of all female students. The study's use of school organizational characteristics failed to moderate or distinguish between the intersectionality's pertaining to female Southeast Asian pupils. The trends persisted in all educational situations.

Demographic Context: Punjab, Pakistan

In Pakistan, Punjab province is home to 52.9% of the population, who are split across hundreds of castes (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Marriage customs in South Asian contexts, especially in areas like Pakistan that are known for complex social hierarchies, frequently mirror ingrained traditions pertaining to caste, ancestry, and social standing. Within this paradigm, the idea of exogamous marriages between people who select partners who are not members of their social or familial group represents an intriguing field for research, particularly when it comes to the lived experiences of women.

Statement of the Problem

In Punjab, especially in rural areas, we see that there is a culture which people prioritize marrying in to their caste the main factor behind that some castes belief that they are superior to the other caste. Inter-caste weddings are a prominent sociocultural phenomenon in Punjab, Pakistan, where they connect with deeply rooted identities, customs, and conventions. Nevertheless, despite their widespread occurrence, there is a paucity of thorough studies investigating the actual experiences of women in these marriages, especially when considering caste and gender relations. By performing a comparative analysis of women's experiences in inter-caste marriages and concentrating on the Syed and Non-Syed communities in Punjab, this study seeks to close this disparity. The issue stems from a lack of knowledge about the many opportunities, obstacles, and negotiations that women in inter- caste marriages must navigate as well as the unique effects that caste identification has on their day-to-day lives. Furthermore, a lot of current research ignores the ways that gender, caste, and class connect within the framework of marriage, which restricts our understanding of the many aspects of these relationship.

The experiences of women in inter- caste marriages are further complicated by society beliefs, familial expectations, and traditional gender roles, which may exacerbate problems with autonomy, agency, and social acceptance. In order to promote gender equity, social inclusion, and cultural sensitivity within Pakistani society especially in the context of Punjab policy, practices, and interventions pertaining to women in inter-caste marriages must be informed by a thorough analysis of the lived experiences of these women.

Despite the growing body of literature on inter-caste marriages and intersectionality, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific lived experiences of women in Syed and Non-Syed inter-caste marriages within Punjab, Pakistan. Most existing research tends to focus on broader societal and cultural dynamics without delving deeply into the nuanced, personal experiences of women navigating these complex social landscapes. One significant gap in the literature is the lack of focused studies on the intersection of caste and gender within the context of Syed and Non-Syed marriages. While there are studies that explore

inter-caste marriages in general (Jassal, 2012; Das, 2014), there is limited research specifically examining how the unique religious and social status of the Syed community impacts these marriages. This gap is crucial because the Syed identity carries specific cultural and religious connotations that significantly influence marital relationships and family dynamics. Furthermore, while intersectionality has been widely discussed in feminist literature (Crenshaw, 2008; Collins, 2009), its application to the context of South Asian inter-caste marriages, particularly within Punjab, is relatively sparse. Intersectional analysis is essential to understand how multiple social identities, including gender, caste, and religion, intersect to shape the experiences of women. This study aims to fill this gap by applying an intersectional framework to analyse the lived experiences of women in Syed and Non-Syed inter-caste marriages.

There is a substantial vacuum in the literature because previous studies on inter-caste weddings in Punjab, Pakistan, have mainly ignored the complex experiences of the girls involved in these relationships. Studies do recognize the wider sociocultural effects of inter-caste marriages, but they notably neglect to examine the unique difficulties, chances, and compromises that girls encounter particularly when it comes to the confluence of caste, gender, and family relations. Furthermore, our comprehension of the varied experiences within inter-caste marriages is further restricted by the underrepresentation of viewpoints from both Syed and non-Syed populations. This study seeks to close these gaps by offering a thorough examination of the life experiences of females in inter-caste marriages in Punjab, Pakistan, both Syed and non-Syed, helping to provide a more detailed understanding of the intricacies involved in these relationships.

Research Objectives

i. To look into how the intersections of gender, religion, and caste impact the lived experiences of women in inter-caste marriages between Syed and Non-Syed individuals in Punjab, Pakistan

ii. To Contrast and compare the real-life experiences of women in inter-caste marriages between Syed and Non-Syed people, with an emphasis on cultural perspective and family dynamics.

Research Questions

i. What are the differences in the experiences of women in Syed and Non-Syed inter-caste marriages in Punjab, Pakistan?

ii. What possibilities and obstacles do women in Syed inter-caste marriages have as they navigate cultural expectations, familial bonds, and their own identities?

iii. What effects do gender, caste, and class intersections have on women's experiences in Punjab, Pakistan, inter-caste marriages?

Significance of the Study

This research holds significant value in its exploration of the intersectional experiences of women in inter-caste marriages between Syed and non-Syed communities in Punjab, Pakistan. By delving into the personal narratives of these women, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how the intersections of gender, caste, religion, and class shape their lived realities, a contribution that is particularly valuable as intersectionality remains an underexplored area in the context of South Asian societies. The focus on the experiences of women in inter-caste marriages challenges the prevailing narratives that regularly refuse. The complexities and struggles faced by these individuals, offering a counterpoint to the prevailing societal discourses that may marginalize or oversimplify their experiences. Furthermore, the findings of this study have the potential to inform policy decisions and community-level interventions aimed at supporting women in inter-caste marriages, guiding the development of legal protections, social support services, and awareness-raising initiatives that address the unique challenges faced by these women. Ultimately, this study amplifies the voices of women in inter-caste marriages, a group that has often been marginalized or overlooked in both academic and societal discourses, contributing to the broader effort of giving visibility and agency to individuals who navigate the intersections of multiple, often conflicting, and social identities.

The focus on the experiences of women in inter-caste marriages challenges the dominant narratives that often overlook the complexities and struggles faced by these individuals. By centring the voices and

perspectives of the women themselves, the study offers a counterpoint to the prevailing societal discourses that may marginalize or oversimplify their experiences. This approach gives agency and visibility to a group that has historically been marginalized, providing a platform for their stories to be heard and acknowledged. The findings of this study have the potential to inform policy decisions and community-level interventions aimed at supporting women in inter-caste marriages. The recommendations derived from the study can guide the development of legal protections, social support services, and awareness-raising initiatives that address the unique challenges faced by these women. This can contribute to the creation of more inclusive and equitable environments for individuals in inter-caste unions, ensuring that their rights and well-being are safeguarded.

This research study adds to the growing body of literature on intersectionality, gender, and social stratification in South Asia. By exploring the experiences of women in Syed and non-Syed inter-caste marriages, the study expands the scholarly discourse beyond the traditional focus on caste and gender dynamics, offering a more holistic understanding of the complex interplay of various social identities. This contribution can inspire further research and dialogue on the intersectional experiences of marginalized groups within the South Asian context.

Ultimately, this study amplifies the voices of women in inter-caste marriages, a group that has often been marginalized or overlooked in both academic and societal discourses. By centering their narratives and experiences, the study contributes to the broader effort of giving visibility and agency to individuals who navigate the intersections of multiple, often conflicting, and social identities. This approach challenges the dominant power structures and hierarchies, paving the way for more inclusive and equitable representations of diverse lived experiences.

Literature Review

The study of inter-caste marriages, particularly between Syed and Non-Syed communities in Punjab, Pakistan, intersects multiple social dimensions, including gender, religion, caste, and class. The Syed community, which holds a unique religious and social status, introduces additional layers of complexity to the dynamics of inter-caste marriages. This literature review aims to explore existing scholarship on inter-caste marriages, the application of intersectionality theory, and the socio-cultural dynamics affecting women's experiences in these unions. By synthesizing relevant literature, this review will identify gaps in the current research and establish a framework for understanding the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women in Syed and Non-Syed inter-caste marriages.

Inter-Caste Marriages in South Asia

In South Asia Inter-caste marriages have been widely studied due to their potential to disrupt traditional social hierarchies. Researchers like Jassal (2012) and Das (2014) have examined the cultural and social implications of these marriages in India, noting the significant resistance and challenges couples face. These studies provide insights into the broader context of inter-caste marriages but often overlook specific communities such as the Syeds, whose religious and social status brings unique challenges to these unions. Although there is considerable diversity among rules of descent and marriage and systems of kin classification in South Asia, especially as regards the contrast between North and South India, other features of Indian and Sinhalese social structure remain constant. Certain aspects of the internal structure of castes also are ordered by the principle of hierarchy, expressed in this context in the sphere of marriage and affinity (Carter, 1973). Leach, for example, has argued that kinship is internal to caste while political, economic, and ritual relations are external. He also argues that 'the kinship systems of caste-ordered societies vary, but all types are readily duplicated in other societies historically unconnected with the south Asian countries. Recent research suggests that such global comparisons are subject to limitations resulting from important connections between caste and kinship and that other useful results can be obtained by controlled comparison and paradigmatic analysis within the Indian region (Dumont, 1957). Throughout south Asia, in other words, in this theory, the caste system is comparable to a bilateral, endogamous kindred.

Internally, however, the Indian paradigm permits greater variation depending upon whether status is regarded as transmitted primarily patrilineal or matrilineal and as best preserved and enhanced by isogamy or hypergamy (Thomas, 2018). Since ancient times, people have used ethnic endogamy to solidify the boundaries between their clans, communities, or tribes (Davis, 1941; Basin & Verdier, 2000). Endogamy plays a crucial role in the caste system in South Asia as well. Since most South Asian castes are endogamous, breaking caste rules is frequently met with societal rejection (Bidner & Eswaran, 2015, Chowdhry, 1997, Kaur, 2010). It is also one of the caste system's most durable customs to this day. Even in 2011, the percentage of marriages between members of the same caste was only 5.82%, and during the previous forty years, there has been no upward trend in this rate. Inter-caste marriages have the potential to immediately undermine the underpinnings of the caste system, as caste endogamy is the cornerstone of the system (Bidner & Eswaran, 2015). Additionally, there is evidence of the beneficial effects of intermarriages, though not specifically for caste. For instance, in the context of Australia, Canada, and the USA, respectively, intermarriages between native-born people and immigrants of diverse ethnic backgrounds are linked to higher immigrant earnings (Meng and Gregory, 2005) and a higher supply of female labour (Gevrek et al., 2013, Wong, 2014).

The Syed Community and Martial Practices

The Syed community claims direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad, which confers a distinct religious and social status. Ahmad (2012) explores how this identity influences social interactions and marital choices, emphasizing the community's preference for endogamous marriages to maintain religious purity and social prestige. This focus on preserving social and religious status significantly impacts women who marry into or out of the Syed community, as they must navigate stringent familial and societal expectations.

There has been some interest in Islamic intersectarian marriages, but not much empirical study has been done in this area. According to the different scholars, Muslim Shia women fear that their wellness and the general quality of life of their families would suffer from their intersectarian marriages to the Sunni men, and that this will also lead to the conflict for future offspring (Cappucci in J Muslim Minor Aff 36(4): 561-568, 2016). Research around the world indicates that married couples who share the same religious and sectarian views are more committed to their marriage and have less conflict (Goodman et al., 2013; Immanuel et al., 2017; Hwang et al., 2019). When two persons who practice the same religion (Islam) but have different sectarian identities (Shia versus Sunni sects, for example), they are said to be married in an intersectarian marriage (Raab & Holligan, 2012). Intersectarian marriages are becoming more common in Western nations where religious distinctions are less pronounced because social and economic class divides are narrowing (Bumpass 1970). Nonetheless, research indicates that intersectarian unions might be detrimental to the health of each individual family member and to the family as a whole (Blau et al., 1984). This is due to the fact that religious differences can result in values and communication styles that differ, increasing the likelihood of marital conflict and even divorce (Kalmijn et al., 2005). Additionally, research indicates that the likelihood of marital conflict stemming from sectarian differences and increasing later-life religious practice adoption increases with the length of a marriage (Tuttle & Davis, 2015).

Women must dress modestly according to Islamic law, especially when they are in public (Kabir, 2010). But according to Ahmed and Sardar (2012), women are expected to dress a certain way in some organizations, such wearing a skirt and shirt. Senior co-workers and staff members occasionally disapprove of Muslim women for their attire choices, particularly when it comes to the headscarf (Jones, 2013). For instance, Ms. Farrah, an employee, filed a claim against her former employer, Global Luggage Co., alleging unfair dismissal and direct discrimination based on religion since the firm transferred her to a distant location when she began to wear the hijab in order to preserve its Btrendy image. She had an extended lunch break and was compelled to resign a few months later. The employment tribunal determined that the employee's coerced resignation was actually caused by her wearing the hijab to work, and that the employer had used an episode of misconduct as a justification for firing her (Furness, 2012). This implies that Muslim women are still negatively impacted by cultural issues. Still, some employers refuse to accept diversity in ethnicity or

religion at work because they regard religion as an annoyance (Ahmed & Sardar 2012). When it comes to cultural requirements, some companies choose to select people who align with the culture instead of considering their qualifications, experience, and skill set (Zempi & Chakraborti 2014). This implies that, regardless of how competent and experienced a candidate is for the position, the employer would select someone based only on how well they fit the organization's norms, which are typically based on Western culture. Because Islam is such a taboo form of identity, some Muslim women would rather not work than risk being looked down upon or thought to be going against their own religious principles.

Intersectarian marriages in the Islam, a religion of almost over 70 sects, has been the area of interest, but with very few empirical research to be the found (Shanneik 2017). With the population of approximately 2 billion people around the world, two predominant sects of the Islam are the Sunnis and Shias (Bennett-Jones, 2022). Both the Sunni and Shia and sects believe in the five pillars of the Islam- declaring the monotheistic faith in only one God (Allah) and believing that the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) is last messenger. Inter-marriages within Suni and Shia and sects are not unheard of, though some of the sectarian clerks and families prohibit it. (Alatas, 2022). In most of the circumstances intersectarian unions between Sunnis and Shias happen as the consequence of the love, and parents barely arrange such match for their children (Alghafli et al., 2014; Cheema, 2014). There are major social and community-level issues involved in the Shia-Sunni intersectarian marriages, such as the resistance and the estrangement by families, and shaming by friends and relatives (Perazzo, 2012; Alatas, 2022). Moreover, there can be the legal issues that may affect the married couple later on during their own marital life (Khuri, 1987), such as the differences in laws for dissolution of marriage, fostering and adoption, inheritance, and interpretation of the Quran and Prophetic traditions for the family-life and the child socialization (Bani & Pate, 2015; Khalid & Shahid, 2024; Sabaruddin & Rasyid, 2023; Usama et al., 2022). Several research reports suggest that Muslim women, regardless of their own sect, face pressure, and even many form of the abuse to change their own religious views and practices post marriage, resulting in very little Muslim women opting for the intersectarian marriages (Research Directorate, 2005).

Gender, Caste, and Class in Pakistani Society

In Pakistani society, the intersection of gender, caste, and class significantly shapes women's experiences, especially in the context of marriage. Research by Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987) and Zia (2013) highlighted how these social categories intersect to limit women's autonomy and opportunities. These studies emphasize the patriarchal structures and caste hierarchies that influence women's lives, underscoring the need for a nuanced understanding of these intersecting factors.

One of the most distinguishing features of rural Pakistan's ancient caste system is caste-based endogamy. Members of different quoms do not intermarry, or at least prefer not to marry outside of their quom. While social acceptance of inter-quom weddings among different landowning quoms is growing in Punjabi communities, inter-quom marriages between landowning quoms and service providers are still strictly prohibited. As a result, members of landowning and service providing quoms do not create kinship relationships, which perpetuates them as two mutually exclusive social groups, with landowning quoms having a higher status and service providing quoms having a lower status.

One of the most distinguishing features of rural Pakistan's ancient caste system is caste-based endogamy. Members of different quoms do not intermarry, or at least prefer not to marry outside of their quom. While social acceptance of inter-quom weddings among different landowning quoms is growing in Punjabi communities, inter-quom marriages between landowning quoms and service providers are still strictly prohibited. As a result, landowners quoms and sery. Caste-based status inequalities between landowning and service-providing quoms, as well as an emphasis on community living in rural settings, are viewed as the primary causes of caste-based endogamy. The educational, economic, or professional accomplishments of members of service giving quoms have no effect on the caste structure in Punjabi villages. Though there have been a few cases of elopement marriages between landowning quoms and service providers, such marriages

are rarely socially acceptable (Aisha, 2020). Rural Punjab is divided into landowning and service-providing quoms, and the dynamics of their social relationships are traditionally organised around birth-ascribed status in a quom, occupational specialisations associated with different quoms by parentage, endogamy and kinship system (biradari), hierarchical positioning of different quoms, and labour relations (Ahmad, 2014; Eglar, 2018; Lyon, 2004; Nadvi & Robinson, 2004). However, the caste system in rural Punjab has evolved over time, and some aspects, such as work relations, require reform (Chaudhary, 2001; Lyon, 2003). The ancient labour relationship between zamindars and kammi is called as the Seyp system, in which kammi worked as labour for zamindars while also serving the villagers with their hereditary crafts. Kammi made their living mostly through caste-based jobs (Eglar, 2008).

Different studies have found that kammi caste-based vocations are declining due to the availability of alternative career possibilities, such as industrial and government work. Furthermore, there is a growing trend among kammi to travel to cities and abroad nations for economic reasons. As a result, traditional labour interactions between kammi and zamindars have evolved and are gradually dissolving (Chaudhary, 2009; Hooper and Hamid, 2010). However, it is crucial to highlight that, while kammi in contemporary rural Punjab are increasingly pursuing various professions, they are always defined in the village environment by their lineage jobs, such as barber, carpenter, and so on (Lyon, 2004). A few kammi in a Punjabi hamlet may possess land and farm it. Nonetheless, they are not awarded the status of zamindars because this status is associated with quom membership rather than monetary possessions (Eglar, 2008; Lyon 2004). The above discussion demonstrates how at least two major aspects of the old caste system practiced in Punjabi villages have evolved over time: occupational specialisations of kammi and labour relations. Consequently, there is now less of an economic reliance on zamindars by kammi, and the dynamics of the unequal relationship between kammi and zamindar quoms in the village domain have altered (Chaudhary, 2001). However, rather than by the jobs they choose later in life, zamindars and kammi are constantly identified and distinguished from one another in the village context based on their parentage, employment, and quom membership. It implies that the caste occupations are still important for defining identity in rural Punjab, where birth-ascribed status is still the core component of the caste system (Lyon, 2004).

In addition to the previously listed traits, one important aspect of the old caste system that is used in rural Punjab is that various communities are endogamous groups (Eglar, 2004). Studies examining the shifting dynamics of caste-based endogamy among kammi and zamindars, and therefore the alterations in their kinship relationships, or biradari formation, are scarce, nevertheless. Conversely, Sharma (2004) noted an increase in inter-caste marriages in his discussion of the shifting caste dynamics in contemporary India. However, Sharma also emphasized that, even in modern Hindu societies, where endogamous weddings are practiced as a way to maintain caste purity, inter-caste marriages are not considered sacred. In a similar vein, caste-based endogamy is also prevalent in rural Pakistan, where individuals from various quoms either do not marry each other or do not desire to marry outside of their quom (Alavi, 2001, Barth, 2004; Eglar, 2008; Leach, 2010). Eglar made the observation that a child's early socialisation includes learning about caste-based endogamy in a Punjabi hamlet. There is no evidence in the literature about marriages between landowning quoms and service-providing quoms, despite some other research' suggestions that the various landowning quoms in rural Pakistan intermarry (Blood, 1994; Nadvi & Robinson, 2004). The goal of the current study is to better understand the dynamics of caste-based endogamy and kinship formation within the kammi and zamindari quoms in modern rural Punjab, Pakistan.

Cultural Expectations and Familial Dynamics

Cultural expectations and familial dynamics play a critical role in shaping the experiences of women in Syed and Non-Syed inter-caste marriages. Ballard (2008) and Werbner (2005) discuss the importance of family honor and traditional values in South Asian cultures, noting how these factors can create significant pressures for women in inter-caste marriages. These studies highlight the complex interplay of cultural norms and familial expectations, which can either support or hinder women in these unions.

In many South Asian cultures, family honour (often referred to as "izzat" in Urdu and Punjabi) is of paramount importance. Marriages are not merely unions between individuals but are seen as alliances between families. Inter-caste marriages, especially those involving Syeds who hold a high religious status, can be perceived as a threat to family honour and social standing. Women who marry outside their caste often face intense scrutiny and pressure to conform to traditional norms to preserve family honour (Ballard, 2008). The Syed community's claim to descent from the Prophet Muhammad carries significant religious weight. Marriages within the Syed community are often seen as a way to maintain religious purity and uphold the family's spiritual lineage. Women marrying into or out of the Syed community must navigate these religious expectations, which can impose additional restrictions on their behaviour and choices (Shaheed, 2010). Traditional gender roles in South Asian societies often dictate that women should prioritize family needs over personal aspirations. Women in inter-caste marriages may face heightened expectations to uphold cultural traditions and fulfil their roles as dutiful wives and daughters-in-law. This can limit their autonomy and agency, forcing them to conform to prescribed roles (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 2015).

Familial dynamics in the context of inter-caste marriages are complex and multifaceted, often influenced by a combination of cultural, religious, and social factors. These dynamics can significantly impact the experiences of women in Syed and Non-Syed inter-caste marriages. Families may exhibit varying degrees of resistance or acceptance towards inter-caste marriages. Syed families, in particular, may resist such unions due to the importance placed on maintaining caste and religious purity. This resistance can manifest in various forms, including emotional pressure, social ostracism, or even coercion. Conversely, some families may gradually accept the marriage, though this acceptance often comes with conditions and expectations that the couple must adhere to (Charsley, 2013). Women in inter-caste marriages often find themselves negotiating multiple identities to navigate familial expectations. They must balance their roles within their natal and marital families, managing the expectations of both sides. This negotiation can involve adopting or rejecting certain cultural practices, modifying their behaviour to align with family expectations, and finding ways to assert their individual identity within the constraints imposed by family dynamics (Werbner, 2005).

According to Crenshaw (1989), feminism is not a one-size-fits-all concept and that women must deal with a variety of complex aspects of life. This study shows that while certain ethnic minority women may experience greater racism and sexism than others, not all of them will encounter these forms of discrimination. For instance, our research has shown that Muslim women who prefer to wear the hijab or follow their religious beliefs at work typically have greater difficulties than women who choose to dress more traditionally western or mainstream. There are, however, a few instances of Muslim women who faced discrimination for assimilating into western society as well as women who were given employment possibilities because of their racial or religious affiliation.

The level of support or conflict within families can significantly influence women's experiences in inter-caste marriages. Supportive families can provide emotional and practical assistance, helping women navigate the challenges of inter-caste unions. On the other hand, conflict within families, particularly over issues of caste and honour, can create additional stress and hardship for women. Such conflicts can strain relationships, leading to isolation or even estrangement from family members (Ballard, 2008). Power dynamics within families can also affect women's experiences in inter-caste marriages. Patriarchal structures often place decision-making power in the hands of male family members, limiting women's agency. Women may have to navigate these power dynamics carefully, seeking allies within the family or leveraging their relationships to assert their choices. This often involves a delicate balance between asserting their autonomy and maintaining familial harmony (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 2015).

Ethnic minority women in leadership roles are likely to face significantly greater obstacles and prejudice than White women in leadership roles, according to Porter and Sweetman (2005), who take intersectionality into account. But ethnic minority women are likely to feel more alone in the absence of mentors or a support system, and they may find it more difficult to get the assistance they require when faced

with extreme obstacles in leadership roles, according to Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010). According to recent studies, women from Bangladesh and Pakistan have experienced discrimination at work because of their religious attire, and Black Caribbean women feel that they must put in more effort than White women do to achieve high positions due to their gender and ethnicity (Kumra and Manfredi 2012). According to the current data, Muslim women are probably going to experience more pressure from their families and the local society, which will probably hinder their advancement at work. Our research also reveals that, despite the fact that Muslim women are more likely than ever to pursue higher education, the assumption is that they would marry and start a family as soon as they graduate. This implies that a portion of these women may not even be given the chance to enter the workforce. Muslim women were prohibited from engaging in some activities, even if their families supported them. Some Muslim women in our survey, for instance, said that they were prohibited from leaving the country until they were married. These problems, however, did not deter these women from joining the workforce; on the contrary, they employed a variety of tactics and tools to advance in their professions.

Assumptions

Based on the literature review provided above following assumptions were drawn: Traditional social hierarchies in South Asia are being challenged by inter-caste marriages. The Syed community prioritizes social status and religious chastity through endogamous unions. In Pakistani society, women's experiences are shaped by the intersections of gender, caste, and class. In Punjab, inter-caste marriages present particular difficulties for the Syed and Non-Syed populations. Social stigma, resistance from family members, and trouble integrating into the larger community are some of these obstacles. These marriages have important cultural and societal ramifications.

When it comes to marriage, cultural traditions place a higher value on family honour than personal preference. Inter-caste marriages provide unique difficulties for the Syed and Non-Syed communities in Punjab. Previous studies on inter-caste marriages have not always taken particular religious communities like the Syeds into account. Social and familial expectations have a big impact on the decisions and experiences that couples have throughout their marriage. Women's autonomy is restricted by patriarchal institutions in contexts of marriage and family.

Concerns about preserving caste identity are a primary driver of opposition to inter-caste marriages. Socioeconomic factors significantly influence the acceptance of these unions. Religious and sectarian divisions within families further complicate inter-caste marriages, often leading to familial conflict.

Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality, a concept introduced by Crenshaw (1991), provides a conceptual model for understand the ways in which various social identities, like gender, caste, religion, and class intersect to create unique modes of discrimination and privilege. In order to examine the ways in which many social identities overlap to produce distinct forms of privilege and discrimination, Crenshaw developed intersectionality theory in the late 1980s. Crenshaw, a well-known expert in feminist jurisprudence and critical race theory, created the term "intersectionality" to describe the ways in which gender and race interact to influence Black women's unique experiences. Her ground-breaking research demonstrated how conventional approaches to social justice frequently ignore the intricate relationships between several social categories, including race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and others.

Application of Theory

Intersection of Gender and Caste. In the context of inter-caste marriages between Syed and Non-Syed individuals, gender and caste are intertwined in ways that profoundly affect women's experiences. The Syed caste, with its elevated religious status, imposes distinct expectations and norms on women, both within and outside the community. Women marrying into or out of the Syed caste must navigate these expectations, which are often more stringent due to the religious and cultural significance attributed to the Syed identity

(Shaheed, 2010). The intersection of gender and caste thus creates a unique set of challenges for women, as they must reconcile their roles and identities within these intersecting social hierarchies.

Intersection of Gender and Religion. Religion plays a critical role in shaping the dynamics of Syed and Non-Syed inter-caste marriages. The Syed community's claim to religious authority and purity adds another layer of complexity to these marriages. Women in these unions must navigate religious expectations and norms that can influence everything from familial relationships to personal behaviour and identity. The religious connotations associated with the Syed caste often lead to heightened scrutiny and expectations for women, affecting their autonomy and agency (Ahmad, 2012). This intersection of gender and religion highlights how religious identities and beliefs can compound the gendered experiences of women in inter-caste marriages.

Intersection of Gender, Caste, and Class. Class further complicates the intersectionality of gender and caste in Syed and Non-Syed inter-caste marriages. Economic status can either exacerbate or mitigate the challenges faced by women in these unions. For instance, women from lower economic backgrounds may face additional pressures and limited resources when dealing with familial and societal expectations. Conversely, women from more affluent backgrounds might have greater access to resources and support systems, which can influence their ability to navigate the challenges of inter-caste marriage (Collins, 2000). The interplay of class with gender and caste thus adds another dimension to the lived experiences of women, affecting their opportunities, choices, and overall well-being.

Cultural Expectations and Familial Bonds. The cultural context of Punjab, with its strong emphasis on family honour and traditional values, significantly impacts women in Syed and Non-Syed inter-caste marriages. Cultural expectations often dictate the behaviour and roles of women, influencing their relationships and social standing within both their natal and marital families. The intersectionality framework helps to understand how these cultural norms interact with gender, caste, and religion, creating complex dynamics that women must navigate. For example, women may face resistance or ostracization from their families and communities due to marrying outside their caste, highlighting the intersectional pressures they face (Kumar, 2015).

Identity Negotiation. Women in Syed and Non-Syed inter-caste marriages often engage in a continuous process of identity negotiation. This process involves balancing their individual identities with the collective identities imposed by their families and communities. Intersectionality theory illuminates how these women must constantly negotiate their gender, caste, and religious identities to navigate their social worlds effectively. This negotiation is influenced by the multiple and intersecting social identities they embody, making their lived experiences unique and complex (Crenshaw, 1991).

Proposition. The theory of intersectionality, put out by Crenshaw (1991), provides a framework for comprehending how different social identities, such as gender, caste, religion, and class, interact to influence people's chances and experiences. Intersectionality highlights the complex interplay of gender, caste, religion, and class in shaping women's experiences within inter-caste marriages between Syed and Non-Syed communities in Punjab, Pakistan. Women in these contexts face unique challenges due to the overlapping pressures of adhering to both gender and caste norms, further complicated by religious expectations and varying socioeconomic circumstances. These factors significantly impact women's agency and decision-making within their families and communities.

For women, the interlocking identities of caste, religion, gender, and class present serious challenges. Social exclusion, rejection from family, reliance on one's finances, and restricted independence are a few of them. Identity problems and psychological stress can result from the need to live up to several, sometimes contradictory expectations.

Figure 1

Theory of Intersection
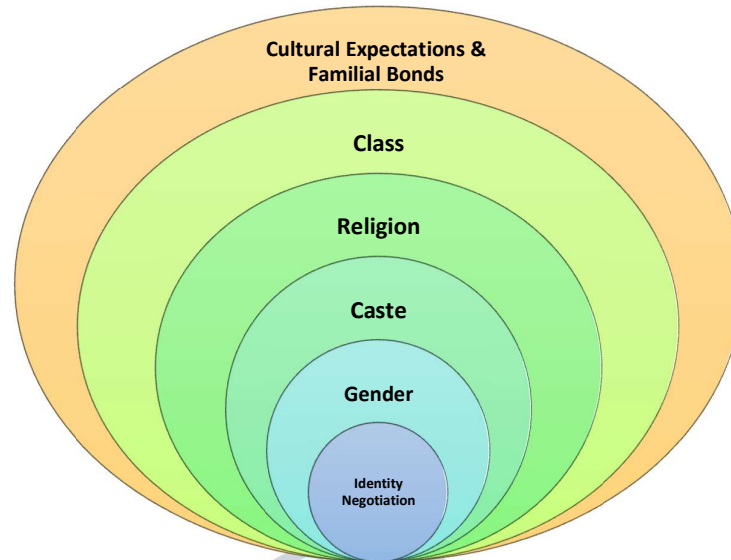
Conceptualization and Operationalization

The conceptualization and operationalization aspects of the research are discussed in this chapter. To lay down the foundation of the study, the researcher has incorporated specific ideas while considering the body of literature already written on the subject matter. In addition, the researcher has addressed the operationalization of the topics covered in this chapter considering prior research.

Conceptualization

Conceptualization is the process of creating definitions of concepts for abstract ideas (Neuman, 2014:2024). Conceptualization is the process of identifying and making sense of abstract concepts to create a shared knowledge that may guide discussion and further research. This entails identifying and defining important terms associated with higher education in the context of institutions. This procedure aids in providing exact definitions for terms that are essential to the study. Since the topic of research at hand is "Exploring the dynamics of paid academic writing services in Pakistani and Foreign universities", the researcher has carefully introduced two concepts in this chapter which go by paid academic writing and universities.

Exogamous Marriages

Exogamy is a social phenomenon of marrying outside one's own community, tribe or social group. It is exactly opposite of the endogamous marriage wherein an individual marries another individual strictly inside his/her own social group. The term exogamy came from the Greek word 'exo' which means outside and 'gamy' which means mating. The reason behind practicing exogamy as a type of marriage is to avoid the ill effects of inbreeding between close relatives who are related with bloodline or genetics. It has been noted that many royal families and tribes who did not follow the practice of exogamous marriage faced serious health issues because of which they refrained from producing further generations. Edward Westermarck was the one who gave the scientific angle to the origin of exogamy and also a biological basis to exogamy, he states that the probability of faulty genes in exogamy is much less than the endogamous type of marriages. Due to the recombination of different sets of gene pool, non-identical and non-regressive genes are passed onto the next generations ergo limiting the chances of transfer of deleterious genes in the offspring's.

An exogamous marriage is a union where partners are selected from outside their own social group, community, or tribe. This practice is often encouraged to broaden alliances and reduce in-group conflicts.

Exogamous marriage refers to the practice of marrying outside one's social, cultural, or ethnic group, contrasting with endogamous marriage, where individuals marry within their own group. This form of marriage serves several social functions, such as strengthening alliances between different groups, increasing genetic diversity, and promoting social cohesion. The norms surrounding exogamy vary significantly across cultures and are often influenced by social structures, religious beliefs, and historical contexts. Notable anthropological works, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss's Structural Anthropology and George P. Murdock's Social Structure, explore the implications of exogamous practices, highlighting their importance in kinship systems and social organization.

Exogamy, derived from 'exo' (outer) and 'gamy' (marriage), mandates marriage outside one's own social group. This practice is evident among the Inuit, where individuals must marry into the opposing moiety (kinship group). Exogamy is prevalent in kinship-based societies, like indigenous communities in Australia and North America, as it helps maintain lineages and minimize genetic risks. For instance, the Inuit are divided into totems, and marriage is strictly between members of different totems.

Operationalization

Operationalization is the process of shifting from the conceptual definition of a construct to operations or actions that enable a scientist to empirically observe it (Neuman: 207). In this section of the research report, the researcher develops ideas based on the literature and concepts presented above which serve as the basis or construct of the research.

Exogamous Marriages

"Exogamous marriage is defined as a marital union in which at least one partner comes from a different social, cultural, or ethnic group than the other. This definition can be operationalized by identifying the specific characteristics that categorize individuals into distinct groups, such as ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status, and assessing the marital relationships based on these criteria."

Exogamous marriage involves partners from different social, cultural, or ethnic groups. This can include variations in ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status. One benefit of exogamous marriage is improved risk management, particularly in agricultural communities. By marrying outside their immediate village, individuals can diversify their income sources and better withstand economic shocks. However, exogamy also presents challenges. It can lead to social isolation for one or both partners, difficulties in adapting to a new environment, and potential power imbalances within the marriage.

Exogamous marriage is operationally defined as a marital union in which at least one partner originates from a different social, cultural, or ethnic group than the other. This definition encompasses a variety of dimensions, including not just specific to ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, and cultural background. In the context of this study, exogamous marriage is operationally defined as a marital union in which at least one partner originates from a different social, cultural, or ethnic group than the other. This definition encompasses various dimensions, including ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, and cultural background. To identify and categorize exogamous marriages, specific criteria will be utilized: partners will be classified based on their self-identified ethnic or cultural backgrounds, such as a union between a Hispanic and a Caucasian individual.

Research Methodology

Research Design

On the topic of Women's Lived Experiences in Exogamous Marriages within Syed and Non-Syed Communities, the research design for this topic is qualitative research, exploratory study utilizing cases studies understand experiences and perspective of women in Mandi Bahauddin, Punjab.

Population of the study

The population of the study is city Mandi Bahauddin, it is located in the Punjab province of Pakistan. It is known for its agricultural significance, producing crops like wheat, rice, and sugarcane. The city also

features a diverse cultural heritage, with various communities and traditional practices. The researcher aimed to capture the experiences of women in exogamous marriages in Syed and non-Syed communities

Unit of analysis

The study's unit of analysis consists of individual women from various villages who have married outside their caste in different areas in Mandi Bahauddin. Their individual experiences, viewpoints, and the sociocultural dynamics of these marriages are the main subjects of the study.

Sampling technique

Purposive sampling is the sample technique employed in this investigation. This strategy was used to ensure that the sample is pertinent and capable of providing rich, in-depth data on the subject by carefully choosing individuals who have personally experienced inter-caste weddings in Mandi Bahauddin.

Sample size

This study has a sample size of 08 people. These individuals were chosen to offer a variety of viewpoints and experiences about inter-caste weddings in Mandi Bahauddin.

Tool for Data Collection

The tool we used for data collection in this study was in-depth interviews. These in-depth and intimate interviews with people who have gone through inter-caste marriages in Mandi Bahauddin provided insights into their viewpoints, struggles, and experiences.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were the method used to collect data, which was qualitative in nature. With this strategy, the researcher was able to thoroughly examine the experiences and viewpoints of the participants while still having the freedom to go deeper in response to their comments.

Data Analysis

For analysis the verbatim transcription of the interview audio recordings were translated into English. Using a thematic analysis approach and explore the key themes emerging from data.

There are following steps of analysis process:

- **Gaining familiarity with Data:** The researcher read the transcripts back to front and again to fully to become submerge in the data and identify initial patterns and themes.
- **Coding:** The transcripts were coded systematically; relevant segments were assigned to descriptive codes that encapsulated the main point of the data.
- **Development of the themes:** The codes were then subsequently arranged into more comprehensive themes that embodied the essential element of the participants' experiences and perspectives.
- **Theme refinement:** The themes were examined, arranged, and improved to ensure they appropriately presented the data and addressed the objectives of the study.
- **Interpretation and synthesis:** The themes were further analyzed and interpreted to facilitate the development of a thorough knowledge of experiences of the participants' experiences and the broader implications of the findings.

Ethical Concerns

We have placed a high priority on ethical issues when conducting my research on inter-caste marriages between Syed and Non-Syed populations in Punjab, Pakistan, especially with regard to privacy and secrecy. Participants' identity and responses must be kept private due to the delicate nature of the subject. Strict confidentiality guarantees that the personal data and contributions made by study participants will be kept private and anonymous in any reports or publications. This strategy aids in mitigating possible harm, such as social stigma or negative effects on their communities. By placing a strong emphasis on privacy and confidentiality, we hope to maintain participants' respect and confidence while reducing any potential detrimental effects of their participation in my study.

Limitations of the Study

The topic of research at hand is diverse in nature as it covers a large amount of data demographically which is not possible to be collected at this level. The perceptions and experiences of women in exogamous marriages can be deeply influenced by cultural norms and values. Researchers must navigate these sensitivities carefully, which may limit the depth of data collected or lead to biased responses. Women's experiences are inherently subjective and can vary widely even within the same community. This subjectivity may complicate the analysis and interpretation of data, making it challenging to draw definitive conclusions. Participants may alter their responses to align with perceived social norms or expectations, especially regarding sensitive topics like marriage and family dynamics. This bias can skew the data and affect the authenticity of the findings. While the study centres on women's experiences, neglecting the perspectives of their partners or families may result in an incomplete understanding of the dynamics within exogamous marriages. The experiences of women in exogamous marriages may change over time due to evolving social norms and conditions. A study conducted at a specific time may not capture these shifts, limiting its relevance in the future. The study is geographically limited to specific regions, the findings may not be applicable to women in other areas with different cultural or social dynamics. Discussing personal and sensitive issues related to marriage may raise ethical concerns, particularly regarding confidentiality and the emotional well-being of participants. This could limit the depth of information shared.

Results

The findings from the interviews were stored in word files which were input into NVivo 12, a software for qualitative analysis. After that codes were developed based on research questions set in chapter 1 of this study and then the themes were developed. In this chapter the results have been displayed according to the codes and interview extracts have also been provided.

Table 1

Comparative Demographic Profile

Sr. No.	Age	Village	Education	Profession	Husband's Profession	Wife's Community	Husband's Community	Marriage Duration
1	33	Shana Lok	Bachelors	Teacher	Business	Syed	Non Syed	8 years
2	30	Kotli Afghana	Mphil	Lecturer	Farming	Syed	Malik	6 years
3	35	Samo Pur	Matric	Housewife	Lawyer	Non Syed	Syed	12 years
4	30	Shana Lok	Bachelors	Housewife	Mechanic	Syed	Non Syed	6 years
5	34	Challianwala	Graduation	Housewife	Farming	Non Syed	Syed	11 years
6	37	Dhok Shani	Masters	Housewife	Business	Pathan	Syed	8 years
7	37	Samo Pur	Bachelors	Teacher	Teacher	Hazarvi	Punjabi	12 years
8	22	Kothera	Bachelors	Student	Farming	Syed	Non Syed	3 years

Socio Economic Influences on Relationships

According to my research and the answers of respondents over the interview questions, the major challenges observed by the both wife and husband are the socio-economic challenges.

One of the respondent from socio-economic influence on relationship stated that:

> "My source of income is teaching, and a little bit help from my husband from his business, so basically, I took the responsibility of financing my home"

The other respondent stated that:

> "My husband family is finically not strong and they are uneducated. So, the responsibility to manage expenses is totally through my earning and whatever my husband earns"

While having conversation with these respondents, it was cleared that the practices now in her household were not being practiced in her family previously. Which is a biggest challenge for her to solely contribute to her household. According to Amato (2019), financial difficulties are a common source of tension in relationships, contributing to dissatisfaction and potential dissolution.

While having conversation with this respondent, it was cleared that the practices now in her household were not being practiced in her family previously. Which is a biggest challenge for her to solely contribute to her household.

In another conversation with the respondent, it was observed that due to having Childs and belonging to middle class family, the expenses are getting out of hand and it is becoming more complicated and difficult to survive in such inflation.

"We belong to same social backgrounds. Socio economic responsibilities are becoming difficult day by day, especially after babies. As marriage is a name of responsibilities"

A study by Doss et al. (2009) highlights that couples facing economic hardships often experience increased conflict and lower relationship satisfaction. The burden of financial responsibility can disproportionately fall on one partner, leading to feelings of resentment and imbalance, as noted by the respondents in interviews.

Additionally, the work of Conger et al. (2008) emphasizes the "family stress model," which posits that economic hardship can lead to negative emotional and behavioral outcomes in families, affecting not just the couple but also their children. This model supports the notion that financial strain can create a cycle of stress that exacerbates relational issues.

One of the respondents stated that:

"Marrying into Syed-family brought me into high socio-economic bracket, providing access to all resources which I was not habitual to. This shift required me to adapt quickly new social responsibilities and expectations associated to my husband status."

The sudden change in socio economic status bring both advantages and challenges. On the positive side, this shift led her to increased financial stability, allowed her for a more comfortable lifestyle and access to better resources.

"My socioeconomic status impacted after marriage because marriage I burn my own expenses but after marriage all the financial responsibilities are on my husband."

"Growing up in wealthy families, both my spouse and I have enjoyed access to quality education, comfortable living conditions, and various opportunities for personal and professional development. Our shared socio-economic status has played a significant role in ensuring a smooth transition and mutual understanding in our marriage. Since our marriage, our socio-economic status has remained relatively stable, given that both my family of origin and my spouse's family are wealthy. We continue to enjoy a similar level of financial comfort and stability as we did before marriage."

One significant advantage of marrying into a higher socio-economic status is the access to improved resources, as noted by the respondent who described increased financial stability and opportunities for personal development. This aligns with the findings of Kalmijn (2011), who argues that marriages between individuals of differing socio-economic statuses can lead to enhanced social capital and better access to educational and professional opportunities. As this elevation in social standing also led to greater respect and recognition within her husband's community, along with improved opportunities for education, healthcare, and career advancement for herself and their children. However, such a transition also presented difficulties. There existed a pressure to conform to new social norms, which were stressful, and she had to struggle with their identity due to the feeling of overshadowed by her partner's status. Psychologically, she experiences adjustment issues, anxiety. Ultimately, marrying into a high-status family offered her numerous benefits, but required careful navigation of new dynamics and personal adjustments to maintain a sense of self and effectively manage expectations.

"Our primary source of income is my husband's mechanic shop, which provide a very basic standard of living. This financial situation is a totally different shift from my upbringing in a wealthy Syed family. Where I was accustomed to a higher status. This disparity has been difficult for me, as I had

to adjust to managing with limited resources and a more frugal lifestyle, which has strained me emotionally and financially."

The transition can also pose considerable challenges, particularly in terms of identity and social expectations. As noted by the respondents, the pressure to conform to new social norms can be overwhelming. This is supported by research from Merton (2018), who discusses the concept of "status inconsistency," where individuals experience stress and anxiety when their social status does not align with their self-perception or past experiences. The feelings of being overshadowed or struggling with identity, as described by the respondent, illustrate this phenomenon.

Women from higher socioeconomic backgrounds who marry men of lower status face several challenges. Social stigma, including disapproval from family and friends, is a significant concern. Power imbalances within the relationship can lead to tension and resentment. Financial disparities can create anxiety and guilt for the women. Cultural differences and concerns about future financial stability further complicate these relationships.

Parent's Marriage Legacy & Its Effects

After conducting a series of interviews, the findings indicate a diverse nature of challenges and its impact or influence on the both husband and wife's life. Parents' marriage history plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes toward exogamous marriages. Their experiences, values, and approaches to diversity can significantly influence their children's openness to relationships outside their cultural or social group. This aligns with research by Smith (2009), which indicates that exposure to diverse relationships can foster greater acceptance and adaptability in individuals, ultimately leading to more inclusive attitudes toward exogamous marriages.

One of the respondent from parents' marriage legacy and its effect

"My parents' marriage was an endogamous union, because it's a traditional with in a Syed community. My parents had a strong cultural and religious values which had a great influence on my marriage. My parents' endogamous marriage shaped my belief that I should marry into my own Syed community to maintain the stability and compatibility. However, observing my parents' relationship I realized that the core values of understanding and respect were more complicated than the community of origin."

Through observing their parents, they recognize that core values like understanding and respect are more complex than simply adhering to community traditions. This realization challenges their initial beliefs about the importance of cultural boundaries in marriage.

"I have to select a right partner at a right time it can be from the same family or out of family. My in laws are educated and both families had no issue to marry their children outside the community.so basically there was no tradition or obligation in my Syed family to marry into the same community."

The respondents highlighted that their in-laws are educated and that both families are open to inter-community marriages, indicating a lack of traditional obligation to marry within the Syed community. According to Rumbaut (2004), cultural values and family expectations play a significant role in shaping individuals' decisions regarding marriage. In communities with strong endogamous traditions, such as the Syed community, the pressure to conform to these norms can create significant barriers to considering partners from outside the cultural group. This perspective is supported by research from Qureshi (2011), which highlights that despite changing attitudes among younger generations, the weight of familial expectations and cultural heritage can still impede acceptance of exogamous marriages, leading to internal conflict and resistance against diverging from established norms.

One of the respondent said that:

"My parents have allowed me to marry outside my community because they emphasized marriage on the base of love, respect and mutual support"

This progressive stance reflects a more flexible and modern approach to relationships, allowing for personal choice over strict cultural norms.

"My parents' marriage was a well- balanced and harmonious endogamous union with in Syed community. It was marked by mutual respect, financial stability and adherence to cultural traditions. This background gave me a firm belief that I should marry into same community to ensure the compatibility and respect to maintain the superiority over other castes or communities. My parents' strong relationship set high expectations for my own martial life."

The respondents' observation of their parents' experience with familial interference significantly shaped their perspective on marrying within the same community. While initially influenced by the harmonious nature of their parents' endogamous marriage, the respondents became aware of the complications that arose from familial involvement in personal matters. Findings of Cherlin (2009), who argues that contemporary relationships increasingly prioritize individual choice and emotional fulfillment over traditional obligations. The willingness of their parents to support inter-community marriages reflects a progressive stance that values personal autonomy, suggesting that modern relationships can thrive outside conventional boundaries

One of the respondent stated that:

"Seeing my parents who got married in a family who interferes in their personal life, so after seeing this I always thought to get married out of family. My parents got married into their own paternal family so they had to face many problems because they were used to be in same family since their childhood. So, when there is any personal matter, everybody got involved. My parents were willing to let me marry in other caste but my paternal family created a lot of hurdles for me."

Witnessing this interference created challenges and stress in their parents' relationship led the speaker to question the benefits of marrying within the same community. As a result, they began to see the potential advantages of seeking a partner outside the family, valuing personal autonomy and the desire for a more independent marital life over traditional expectation. This shift reflects a growing recognition that compatibility and respect can exist beyond cultural boundaries. Research by Kalmijn (2013) suggests that while endogamous marriages may offer stability and shared cultural values, they can also lead to increased familial pressure and interference, which may undermine personal autonomy. The respondent's decision to seek a partner outside their family illustrates a growing recognition of the need for independence in marital relationships, emphasizing that the desire for personal space and freedom often outweighs the perceived benefits of adhering to traditional expectations.

Concept of Ideal Partner

The concept of an ideal partner in exogamous marriage often encompasses a blend of personal preferences, cultural values, and social dynamics. In exogamous unions, where individuals marry outside their social, ethnic, or cultural groups, the ideal partner is frequently perceived as someone who not only complements one's personality and interests but also enriches one's worldview through diverse backgrounds. This diversity can foster greater understanding and adaptability, as partners navigate the complexities of merging different traditions and beliefs. Ultimately, the ideal partner in this context embodies qualities such as open-mindedness, love for cultural dissimilarity, and in addition to dedication to building a harmonious relationship that celebrates both individuality and unity.

The respondent from concept of ideal partner stated that:

"The reality of choosing spouse from a different community brought unfrozen challenges and adjustments. The factor that heavily I considered was my husband respectful demeanor, his genuine affection and commitment to family values. Which aligned with me despite with the cultural difference."

In exogamous marriages, the fantasy often centers on a partner who embodies diverse cultural experiences and values. This idealized vision emphasizes shared values and mutual respect, crucial for cultivating a harmonious relationship that celebrates diversity, as highlighted by Collins (2009). The ability to embrace different perspectives is essential for a successful inter-cultural partnership.

The other respondent stated from concept of ideal spouse that

"I was scared about the concept of marriage but it turned out totally opposite what I imagined it as, I am living happy life now. We both are having same mind-sets. My fantasies and actual life both are totally opposite. And my spouse supports me in every matter."

The fantasy involves a harmonious blend of backgrounds, leading to vibrant celebrations of various cultural practices, fostering a home filled with understanding and acceptance. Additionally, there is an expectation of mutual growth, where both partners inspire each other to explore new ideas and challenge preconceived notions. This positive fantasy often envisions a relationship characterized by open communication, respect for differences, and a commitment to building a strong, unified family that honours both cultures, creating a nurturing environment for future generations. Ultimately, it's a dream of love that transcends boundaries, highlighting the beauty of connection and collaboration in a diverse world. This highlights the potential disconnect between fantasy and reality in exogamous unions. Research by Kalmijn (2018) indicates that while the ideal of a culturally rich partnership is appealing, the practicalities of merging different backgrounds can lead to misunderstandings and adjustments that may not align with initial expectations. The challenges of navigating cultural differences, familial expectations, and societal pressures can create stress, suggesting that the idealized vision of an exogamous marriage may not always reflect the complexities involved in making such relationships work.

"Before marriage I dreamt of an ideal spouse who provide me security, share my cultural values and support my ambitions. My fantasies included a life where I could maintain my family cultural traditions and enjoy financial stability. My spouse's kind nature and promises of a loving partnership convinced me to take the bold step of marrying outside my community. However, the reality of cultural and economic disparities soon overshadowed the initial promise, and my expectations of a harmonious life were not met."

The initial vision of an ideal spouse in an exogamous context often encompasses the desire for security, shared cultural values, and mutual support. As one respondent articulated, the promise of a loving partnership and the hope of maintaining cultural traditions can motivate individuals to marry outside their community. However, this ideal can be challenged by the realities of cultural and economic disparities. The respondent's experience reflects the notion that while the idea of a harmonious life is appealing, the complexities of merging different backgrounds can lead to unmet expectations. Research by Rosenblatt et al. (2019) supports this, indicating that couples in exogamous relationships often face unique challenges related to cultural differences, which can strain their partnership despite initial hopes for unity.

In an exogamous marriage, the fantasy of a spouse may involve anxieties about cultural differences leading to misunderstandings and conflict. This vision often includes fears of losing one's identity as partners struggle to navigate contrasting traditions and values, potentially resulting in feelings of alienation or resentment. There may be concerns about family acceptance, with worries that relatives might disapprove or create tension, further complicating the relationship. Additionally, the fantasy might depict a lack of compatibility, where differing expectations about roles, child-rearing, and lifestyle choices create friction. This negative outlook can lead to feelings of isolation, as one partner may feel pressured to conform to the other's cultural norms, ultimately undermining the foundation of the relationship. In this scenario, the dream of a harmonious and enriching partnership is overshadowed by the fear of division and misunderstanding, highlighting the challenges that can arise when blending distinct cultural backgrounds.

Compatibility Factors in Exogamous Marriage

Compatibility factors in exogamous marriage are essential for nurturing a successful relationship

despite cultural differences. Shared values, such as beliefs about family and life goals, provide a strong foundation, while effective communication helps partners address misunderstandings and resolve conflicts. Mutual respect for each other's cultural heritage fosters appreciation and strengthens their bond. Adaptability is crucial, as couples often face unique challenges requiring flexibility and compromise. A supportive network of family and friends can reinforce their commitment, while conflict resolution skills enable them to navigate disagreements effectively. Engaging in shared interests and hobbies enhances emotional connection, and a willingness to participate in each other's cultural practices enriches their shared experience. Understanding family dynamics and aligning on long-term goals, such as career aspirations and family planning, further ensures that both partners work toward a common vision. By focusing on these factors, exogamous couples can build a resilient partnership that celebrates their differences while fostering unity.

The respondent from interview stated that:

> "My marriage is a full of occasional conflicts and compatibility, our lifestyle, social status and values have a considerable overlap, certain cultural practices sometime lead to a disagreement. Major challenges are childrearing practices and expectations in family rituals. However, willingness and open communication to compromise have been involved in resolving these issues."

The commitment to open communication and compromise is crucial in resolving issues related to child-rearing practices and family rituals. Research by Rosenblatt et al. (2017) supports this notion, indicating that couples who prioritize shared values and effective communication are better equipped to navigate the complexities of cultural integration. Additionally, a supportive network of family and friends can reinforce commitment, allowing couples to celebrate their differences while fostering unity.

In their marriage, the couple experiences occasional conflicts arising from cultural differences, despite having closely aligned lifestyles, social status, and values. Disagreements often occur regarding child-rearing practices and family rituals. However, their commitment to open communication and willingness to compromise has been crucial in resolving these issues effectively.

One of the respondent stated that:

> "My husband fundamental values about family and respect, cultural difference sometimes create a lot of tension. Issues have risen from differing social custom, status. Expectations from my husband extended family and my adjustment to a more affluent lifestyle. Major challenges include feeling of inadequacy due to my poor educational background and pressure to conform to high social standards. My husband's support and open communication have been crucial in addressing these issues."

Fundamental values around family and respect are central to the relationship, yet cultural differences often create significant tension. Conflicts arise from differing social customs and statuses, particularly as expectations from the husband's extended family clash with the wife's adjustment to a more affluent lifestyle. Major challenges include feelings of inadequacy stemming from her limited educational background and the pressure to conform to high social standards set by her husband's family. However, her husband's support and their commitment to open communication have been vital in addressing these issues and navigating the complexities of their diverse backgrounds.

> "My marriage is fraught with compatibility issues and conflicts. The cultural difference between me and my in laws have been a constant source of tension. I struggle with the lack of understanding and support for my Syed traditions from my husband family. Major challenges include disagreements over social expectations, religious difference and lifestyle choice. The financial constraints and differing views on family responsibilities have exacerbated these issues. Despite efforts to communicate and find a common solution, I feel increasingly isolated and unsupported in her marriage."

Compatibility issues and conflicts are prevalent, primarily stemming from cultural differences between the wife and her in-laws. The lack of understanding and support for her Syed traditions from her husband's family creates ongoing tension. Major challenges include disagreements over social expectations, religious differences, and lifestyle choices. Financial constraints and differing perspectives on family

responsibilities further exacerbate these issues. Despite her efforts to communicate and seek common ground, she increasingly feels isolated and unsupported within the marriage, highlighting the complexities of navigating diverse cultural backgrounds. These experiences align with Kalmijn's (2005) research, which emphasizes that the blending of distinct cultural backgrounds can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts that challenge the foundation of the relationship. Despite efforts to communicate, the strain from financial constraints and differing views on family responsibilities can leave partners feeling unsupported and isolated.

"There is a huge difference between our values and lifestyle but beliefs are similar because we both are Muslims. I belong to a Pathan family and my husband belongs to a Punjabi family so there is a huge difference between our lifestyle traditions dressing and languages."

"One of the major challenges we encountered was navigating the initial resistance from our families due to our different cultural backgrounds. This created tension and required open communication and patience to address."

There is a significant disparity between the couple's values and lifestyles, despite their shared Muslim faith. The wife hails from a Pathan family, while the husband comes from a Punjabi background, leading to notable differences in traditions, dress, and language. One of the major challenges they faced was the initial resistance from their families due to these cultural differences, which created tension in their relationship. Navigating this resistance required open communication and patience to address the concerns of both families and foster understanding between their distinct backgrounds.

"We are having almost 80% same beliefs and lifestyle. We both have to sacrifice little bit to make this relationship successful. No major conflict exists."

One of the respondents stated:

"We are 100% compatible with each other. Keep habit of listening your spouse first and don't be judgmental especially when any conflicts occur. No such major conflicts raised. If the small matters or problems are not addressed properly, it will lead to the destruction of relationship."

The couple enjoys a high level of compatibility, sharing approximately 80% of the same beliefs and lifestyle, which contributes to a strong and harmonious relationship.

The other respondent stated that:

"The level of compatibility between me and my spouse in terms of values, beliefs, and lifestyle is high. We share similar values, have compatible beliefs, and our lifestyles complement each other well, making our relationship strong and harmonious. In our marriage, open communication, mutual respect, and compromise have been key. Understanding and respecting each other's cultural backgrounds have also strengthened our compatibility."

They recognize the importance of making sacrifices to ensure the relationship's success and emphasize the need for open communication and mutual respect.

One of the respondents stated that:

"We share core values such as honesty, respect, kindness, and integrity, which form the foundation of our relationship. Our beliefs align closely, particularly regarding family, community involvement, and personal growth. In terms of lifestyle, we have found a comfortable balance that suits both of us. While we may have individual interests and preferences, we respect each other's choices and actively support each other's pursuits. Our mutual respect extends to decisions about career, finances, and leisure activities, where we aim to find common ground and compromise when needed. Overall, our compatibility in values, beliefs, and lifestyle has been a significant strength in our relationship."

They have not encountered major conflicts; they understand that failing to address smaller issues can lead to larger problems. Their core values, such as honesty, respect, kindness, and integrity, form the foundation of their partnership, with aligned beliefs regarding family and community involvement. They have found a comfortable balance in their lifestyles, actively supporting each other's individual interests while

respecting their choices. This commitment to understanding each other's cultural backgrounds has further strengthened their compatibility, making their relationship resilient and fulfilling.

Perspectives on Exogamy vs. Endogamy for Future Generations

Perspectives on exogamy and endogamy for future generations highlight the complexities and potential benefits of both practices. In a series of interviews, respondents shared their views regarding this practice for their children.

The respondent from the Perspectives on Exogamy vs. Endogamy for Future Generations stated that:

"She holds a balanced view on exogamous and endogamous marriage for her children. "According to my point of view respect and personal valued should be more considered over the community considerations."

Respecting each other's individuality and beliefs fosters open communication and encourages couples to navigate challenges collaboratively. While community considerations are important, they should not overshadow the couple's personal connection and shared values.

"I will allow my children to select their own partner but considering their parents as well in a loop of advice."

One of the respondents stated that:

"My spouse and I will always support our children to make their choice wisely and choose a person having desired qualities to spend a good life instead of exogamous or endogamous community."

Emphasizing the importance of choosing a partner based on desired qualities rather than strictly adhering to exogamous or endogamous community norms promotes a more open-minded perspective. This approach encourages children to look beyond cultural boundaries and focus on attributes such as respect, kindness, and compatibility, which are essential for a fulfilling relationship. By supporting their children in making wise choices, parents instill confidence and critical thinking skills, enabling them to build healthy, lasting partnerships. Ultimately, this mindset fosters a family environment that values love and understanding over societal expectations, paving the way for future generations to embrace diverse relationships.

"On my personal experience I will suggest the incoming generation that no matter what notary says do what you want to do because it's your life choose a partner whose mentality matches yours and whose respectful loving and caring. Think out of the way castes and origins do not matter what matter is your peace of mind and a healthy happy life."

Embracing cultural diversity can enrich partnerships, allowing individuals to learn from each other's backgrounds and perspectives.

One of the respondents stated that:

"I would advise the next generation to prioritize mutual respect, open communication, and shared values in their relationships. Embrace cultural diversity, learn from each other's backgrounds, and work together as partners to navigate challenges and grow stronger together."

By working together to navigate challenges, couples can grow stronger and build a fulfilling life that reflects their unique bond. Ultimately, prioritizing personal happiness and understanding will lead to more meaningful and resilient relationships.

"I hold traditional views about marriage for my children, and I prefer endogamous union within the Syed community. My experience has aware me of the challenges posed by cultural difference, and I do not want my children to face those challenges. I believe that shared cultural background, community can provide a smooth path."

Conflicting family expectations regarding marriage, parenting, and lifestyle choices can create tension within the relationship. Navigating varying cultural traditions, especially during significant life events like weddings or holidays, may also lead to disagreements and feelings of exclusion

One of the respondents stated that:

"I faced the difficulties of navigating cultural difference and the importance of shared community values. I believe that my struggles could have been mitigated by marrying within the Syed community, where mutual understanding and social acceptance are more likely. For my son, I hope to ensure a marriage that aligns with our cultural and religious heritage, providing stability and shared values."

Couples from different backgrounds faced social judgment or a lack of acceptance from their families and communities, straining their bond. Identity conflicts can arise as partners struggle with their cultural identities, particularly for children raised in a mixed-culture environment. Differences in core values, such as views on gender roles and religious practices, can lead to fundamental disagreements. Parental influence created pressure regarding whom their children should marry, while one partner may feel compelled to adapt to the other's cultural norms, resulting in resentment or a loss of self-identity.

Attitudes towards Marriage Acceptance

Acceptance of marriage in exogamous unions can vary widely across different cultures and communities. In many cases, exogamous marriages where individuals marry outside their cultural, ethnic, or religious group can face challenges related to societal norms and familial expectations. However, acceptance is gradually increasing in many societies due to globalization and changing attitudes toward diversity. Families that embrace open-mindedness and value personal happiness may support their children in choosing partners from different backgrounds, recognizing that love and compatibility often transcend cultural boundaries. In more traditional or conservative communities, exogamous marriages may encounter resistance. Concerns about preserving cultural heritage, familial honor, and social cohesion can lead to disapproval or even ostracism of those who choose to marry outside their community.

"My husband's family welcomed me warmly, valuing my professional stability and educational background. However, some extended relatives hold reservations on both sides. These complexities made me stronger, and a beautiful relation with my husband, proving that love and understanding can bring cultural divides."

Parental support provided emotional stability for the couple. Knowing that both families are on board can alleviate stress and anxiety related to societal pressures and familial expectations. This backing encourages open communication between the partners, allowing them to navigate cultural differences together more effectively.

"We just minimized the community pressure by educating others, by understanding the cultural context and by open communications."

One of the respondents stated

"Our families supported our relationship, emphasizing the importance of love and understanding over social norms. Open communication, mutual support, and the backing of supportive friends and family have helped us manage social and community pressures related to our exogamous marriage."

Strong parental support from both sides can transform potential challenges into opportunities for growth, leading to a more resilient and fulfilling partnership. By prioritizing love, respect, and understanding over cultural barriers, families can contribute to a positive foundation for exogamous marriages.

"Our marriage faced significant resistance, especially from my spouse Syed community, who were concerned about maintaining cultural purity and social status. My non-Syed background was initially a source of investigation and skepticism."

Non-acceptance of exogamous couples can manifest in various ways, often leading to significant challenges for the individuals involved. One of the primary sources of non-acceptance is rooted in cultural, religious, or ethnic traditions that emphasize endogamy, or marrying within a specific group.

"I faced the challenge of cultural integration, financial strain, and the emotional toll of unmet expectations."

Families may fear that exogamous unions could dilute cultural heritage, disrupt familial bonds, or challenge established social norms.

One of the respondents stated that:

"We simply didn't care about anyone's thought and living our own life and minding our business there is sometimes a lot of stress from community but still we manage all the things. There were a lot of challenges in acceptance of our marriage regarding community."

Societal stigma can play a significant role in non-acceptance. Couples may encounter judgment or discrimination from their broader community, which can affect their social interactions and mental well-being. This stigma can also extend to their future children, who might face identity struggles or exclusion based on their mixed heritage.

Discussion

The findings of this case study contribute to the broader discourse on the intersections of gender, caste, religion, and class in the context of inter-caste marriages in South Asia, particularly in the Pakistani province of Punjab. The study's focus on the lived experiences of a Syed woman provides valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women navigating these complex social landscapes. The respondent's narrative underscores the significant influence of the Syed community's religious and social status on the dynamics of inter-caste marriages. The heightened expectations and pressures placed on Syed women to uphold caste purity and family honour add an additional layer of complexity to their experiences, which is not as prominent in studies focusing on inter-caste marriages in a more general sense. The case study also highlights the role of economic independence and educational attainment in shaping women's agency and ability to negotiate their identities within the constraints of cultural and familial expectations. This finding aligns with existing literature on the transformative potential of women's empowerment in challenging traditional gender norms and power structures.

Furthermore, the study's emphasis on the importance of intergenerational dialogue and community engagement in fostering acceptance and inclusion for inter-caste marriages contributes to the growing body of research on the gradual evolution of social attitudes and the potential for cultural change. By applying an intersectional lens to the analysis of this case study, the research provides a deeper understanding of the multifaceted experiences of women in Syed and non-Syed inter-caste marriages. This approach illuminates the nuanced ways in which various social identities and power dynamics intersect to shape the opportunities and challenges faced by these women, offering valuable insights for policymakers, community leaders, and social service providers.

The findings of this case study also serve as a springboard for further research on the experiences of women in other religious or caste-based communities engaged in inter-caste marriages, potentially revealing additional layers of complexity and diversity in these lived experiences. Comparative studies across different regions or communities could also yield valuable insights into the contextual factors that influence the dynamics of inter-caste marriages and their impact on women's lives. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on the intersectional experiences of women in inter-caste marriages, with a specific focus on the Syed community in Punjab, Pakistan. The insights gained from this research can inform the development of more inclusive and responsive policies, programs, and interventions aimed at supporting and empowering women navigating the challenges and opportunities presented by these complex social realities

Conclusion

This case study provides a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of a Syed woman in an inter-caste marriage within the context of Punjab, Pakistan. The findings illustrate the complex intersections of gender, caste, religion, and class that shape the challenges and opportunities faced by women in these marriages.

The respondent's Syed identity, which confers significant religious and social status, creates unique expectations and pressures regarding her marriage and family life. As a woman, she navigates additional gendered expectations and limitations imposed by her family and community. The cultural emphasis on maintaining caste purity and family honour poses significant barriers to her marital choices and personal autonomy.

Because of her Syed identity, the respondent has a high religious and social standing, which comes with unique expectations and demands for her marriage and family life. The Syed caste is held in great regard and, in order to preserve social and religious purity, members are obliged to marry within the caste. They are thought to be descended from the Prophet Muhammad. Syed women are under tremendous pressure from society to follow conventional marriage customs.

The respondent financial independence as a school teacher, the respondent enjoys greater liberty and the rare capacity to support her family in her community. Her financial support subverts the conventional wisdom that men should be the family's main breadwinners, changing gender roles in the home. She has been able to increase her status and influence in her family as a result of her economic empowerment.

In addition, the respondent experiences limits and expectations specific to her gender from her family and community since she is a woman. Women's liberty is frequently restricted by traditional gender roles in Pakistani society, especially when it comes to marriage.

It is expected of women to respect the honour of the family and follow the decisions made by the males. The respondent's decision to wed a non-Syed man subverts these deeply ingrained conventions and draws attention to the ways that gender and caste intersect to shape her actual experience.

Recommendations

Promote Intersectional Awareness and Sensitivity

The study highlights the need for greater awareness and sensitivity towards the intersectional challenges faced by women in inter-caste marriages, particularly those involving the Syed community. Policymakers, community leaders, and social service providers should implement educational programs and outreach initiatives to foster understanding of the unique experiences of these women. This can help reduce stigma, promote acceptance, and provide appropriate support systems.

Strengthen Legal and Institutional Protections

The study reveals the significant social and familial pressures that women in inter-caste marriages face. Strengthening legal and institutional protections for these women is crucial. This may include enacting anti-discrimination laws, improving access to legal aid, and establishing support services such as counselling and shelters to assist women who face ostracization or violence due to their marital choices.

Empower Women through Education and Economic Opportunities

The case study suggests that the respondent's economic independence as a school teacher has provided her with greater autonomy and the ability to support her family. Investing in women's education and economic empowerment can be a powerful tool to help women in inter-caste marriages navigate their challenges more effectively. Initiatives that promote financial literacy, skill development, and access to employment opportunities should be prioritized.

Engage with Religious and Community Leaders

Religious and community leaders hold significant influence in shaping societal attitudes and norms. Engaging these stakeholders in dialogues about the importance of inclusivity, respect, and acceptance for inter-caste marriages can help foster more supportive environments for women. These leaders can use their platforms to challenge the stigma and promote the value of diverse familial structures.

Foster Intergenerational Dialogue and Change

The case study highlights the generational divide in attitudes towards inter-caste marriages. Facilitating open dialogues between younger and older generations within families and communities can help bridge

this gap. Encouraging the sharing of personal narratives and fostering mutual understanding can contribute to gradual shifts in cultural perceptions and acceptance of inter-caste unions.

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