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Analysis of forced and arranged marriages in South Asian diaspora families in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

This article delves into marriage practices of South Asian community in the UK to analyse challenges being faced by the youth. Thereby, it answers the question: How do arranged marriage preferences, gender roles, and changing attitudes toward love and sexuality shape relationships in the South Asian diaspora community in the UK? The methodology of this paper is inspired by qualitative research. Unstructured open-ended online interviews were used as data collection technique from the respondents of South Asian origin in the UK. The findings suggest that South Asians are still rooted in their patriarchal structure followed back home in India and Pakistan. They are evolving, yet, the process of assimilation is slow. The challenge to parents from children is defiance of their value system, as most of the youths prefer love or semi-arranged marriages. Other challenges include sexuality, especially queerness. This research concludes that South Asians assimilation in British culture is slow even if they are evolving and facing realities of free love and sexuality.

Keywords: British South Asians, Arranged Marriage, Forced Marriage, Domestic Violence, Sexuality, Intersectional Feminism

1. Introduction

As per the British census of 2021, the Pakistani diaspora population is estimated to be around 1.5 million, which has seen an exponential rise since the early 2000s, when this population was less than one million. Similarly, the Indian population is around 1.8 million—that grew at a rapid pace. Collectively, both Indian and Pakistani communities stick to their cultural roots followed back in South Asia—and thus have refrained from total assimilation into the host community. Given this connection, South Asians are influenced by patriarchal values followed in India and Pakistan and thus indulge in practice of arranged marriages. These marriages are sometimes labelled as forced marriages, owing to the absence of consent, or taken one through emotional blackmail. Consequently, in absence of free will, domestic violence is also reported in such marriages (Shaw, 2006; Bhopal, 2011, Pande, 2016; Khan and Lowe, 2018; Phillips et al., 2020; Tahir, 2021).

Over the last two decades, the attitudes of South Asian youth toward marriages and relationships have changed. While they take their parents on board because of financial reasons in deciding about their marriage, nonetheless, the role of intermediaries as traditionally happened in South Asian marriages has been finished. Thus, phenomenon of semi-arranged marriages or love-cum arranged marriage has seen rise. More importantly, the diasporic youth is also seen defying the norms of South Asian patriarchy and choosing love and romance at their free will, which has also become a challenge for their parents. It is also significant to point out that they have also become vocal about their sexuality and do not feel ashamed of it in public.

This research is significant for the fact that it evaluates the above-mentioned issues not from merely observations and literature but rather through in-depth interaction with South Asian young individuals, both women and men. Their discourses have been analysed in depth through the major research questions like, what are the differences between forced and arranged marriages, and why

incidents of GBV occur in South Asian diasporic community in the UK? How South Asian youths have defied patriarchal values in their love life? What are the sexual preferences of South Asian youth in the UK and how successfully they have assimilated into the host community? The paper is divided into four major sections of literature review, methodology, findings, and discussions and lastly conclusion. The literature review section explores relevant scholarly discussion and points out significant gaps. The methodology section elaborates in detail the techniques utilised in this paper for research approach, data collection, and analysis. The findings and discussion section presents new information and its interpretation. Meanwhile, the last section sums up the paper.

2. Literature review

Before moving on to take an overview of the forced and arranged marriages, and domestic violence in South Asian cultural context, it is necessary to explain the terms conceptually. In a forced marriage, there is absence of consent, which makes the practice against human rights and part of violence against women and children—resulting in psychological trauma. At the global level, forced marriages are still reported from the regions like the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. The factors responsible for such a marriage are imposition of patriarchal will, economic advantages, and in some instances religious influences (Enright, 2009; Gill & Anitha, 2009; Chantler & McCarry, 2019; Simmonds, 2019; Gill & Gould, 2020; Noack-Lundberg et al., 2021).

Similarly, an arranged marriage is decided by the families acting as intermediaries for their children. It is generally reported from cultural zones, where consanguinity is a norm. Other reasons which influence arranged marriage are economic interests of two groups (mainly to expand business or share land) and political rapprochement (mostly reported from tribal societies or caste-based groups) (Bhopal, 2011, p. 434; Allendorf & Pandian, 2016, p. 435). The boundaries between an arranged marriage and a forced marriage sometimes get blurred too—nevertheless, there is a misconception that all arranged marriages happen because of family pressure or emotional blackmail—specifically in the South Asian context (Tahir, 2021).

In analysing marriage practices of South Asians in the UK, it is significant to evaluate them in the cultural complex of South Asia first. For instance, in India arranged marriage is still preferred by the majority of population. Allendorf and Pandian (2016) have tried to understand arranged marriage in India in historical perspective. Their study found that the proposition of some scholars that industrialization and modernization would lead the society to adapt to the Western nuclear family model did not materialize, and people still decide marital relationships, motivated by “caste, patrilineality and patrilocality” especially in the north of India (p. 437). Meanwhile, in South India, the modernization could only change the perception of five percent families. Overall, in India, the trend since 2000 has shifted to semi-arranged marriages (Allendorf and Pandian, 2016).

Traditionally, Indian arranged marriage included the practices of dowry—which originated from the notion that a bride is a gift and therefore, she must bring tranquillity to in-laws. Consequently, those brides, who could not bring a significant proportion of dowry were faced with domestic violence, which often resulted in suicides too (Bhopal, 2011, p. 433). The research of Inman and Rao (2017) reveals that the percentage of domestic violence in India is high with 40 percent women facing it sometimes in their lives—even though, there is “Dowry Prohibition Act of 1987” as well as “Domestic Violence Act of 2005” in place. Whereas in yet another study of Imkaan (2018), it is explained that domestic violence has seen an increase of 53 percent if compared with the figures of 2001 (which were 18 percent) to the figures of 2018 (at 28 percent).

The shift to semi-arranged marriages in India is also visible in the Indian diaspora community in the UK. Bhopal (2011) argued that Indian diasporic youth are now letting their parents know about their choices. For Bhopal, the traditional decision maker role of parents in marriage has now shifted to facilitators or intermediary only. Pande (2016) findings show similar results from Indian diasporic

community in the UK. She argues that Indian arranged marriage is politicized in the UK. According to her, only the first generation of Indians in the UK had actually married in traditional arranged marriages—whereas the second generation mostly decided for themselves by keeping their parents informed. Pande states that British Indians have four types of arranged marriages. One, where traditionalism prevails, two, where parents only act as intermediaries, third, where couples in love get the support of parents, and four, where the parents' role is only of wedding regulators (Pande, 2016, p. 388).

As far as Pakistani diaspora community in the UK is concerned, a few significant studies explore their marriage practices. For instance, Khan and Lowe (2018) bring to light honour-based violence (HBV) among Pakistani community. HBV consequently result in forced marriage as well, especially for those girls, who could not continue higher studies. Not only this, but HBV also cause anxiety, isolation, and mistreatment of young diasporic Pakistani girls. The precursor to this mistreatment is notions of *ghairat* (honour), *izaat* (prestige), and *haya* (chastity). Shaw (2006) also argued on similar lines that for staying true to their roots, Pakistani community started marrying within their own families, thus giving rise to consanguinity. Majority of consanguineous marriages by Pakistani diaspora are conducted in northern and central Punjab of Pakistan, and Azaad Jammu and Kashmir.

Dale (2008) on the other hand stated that consanguinity is rooted in Pakistani society, which subsequently is exported to the UK. Therefore, according to Dale, this is more of a cultural issue rather than an immigration risk as often portrayed by academia or state authorities in the UK. In a yet another interesting study of Phillips et al. (2020) it has been argued that while younger generations of the Pakistani diaspora are assimilating in the British culture, nonetheless, when the time of marriage comes, they too prefer a marriage—where their parents are on board. A recent study by Chantler and McCarry (2019) argued that state in the UK could not effectively analyse the marriage patterns in Pakistani community. As it focuses on the events' where forced marriages are reported and ignore the causes, which have led to such a marriage in the first place.

It is also significant to highlight here that in the UK it is termed that forced marriages in the Pakistani community occur because of religious pressures. However, the evidence points contrary to such a claim. For instance, the study of Gill and Hamed (2016) delved into details of how Islam empowers women to marry by their own choice through Quranic verses and prophetic sayings. The study emphatically elaborates on the concept of Islamic Nikah (marriage), which has three conditions of *Ijab* (offer), *qabul* (acceptance) and *sigha* (formal exchange).

Coming to the major research gap in the literature reviewed above, it has been seen that various scholars have covered aspects of forced marriages, arranged marriages and domestic violence within South Asian community in the UK. Nonetheless, most of the information comes from merely observation rather than detailed qualitative experiential analysis. For instance, Bhopal (2011), Pande (2016), Allendorf and Pandian (2016) Inman and Rao (2017), and Imkaan (2018), analyse the shifts in culture of South Asian community in the UK after 1990s—nonetheless, the variables they mostly touch are perceptions on arranged marriages in the youths and their acceptability by their parents. The other variable they focus is the intermediary role of parents in traditional way. Thereby, overlooking the modern shifts such as online interactions for marriage and love. Moreover, these studies also fall short on analysis of the sexuality of South Asian youths as well as their dating habits.

Similarly, Shaw (2006), Khan and Lowe (2018), and Philips et al. (2020) have elaborated on the causes of consanguinity among Pakistani diaspora—nevertheless, they did not reveal the consequences of such marriages—especially when they end up in domestic violence or divorce and subsequently creating legal issues for the authorities in the UK. This research paper on the other hand tries to cover the gaps in the literature through conducting in-depth interviews—thus, examining the forced and arranged marriages through shared and individual lived experiences. At the individual

level, every experience comes from a specific standpoint and has a distinctive story. Whereas at the collective level, the situation of the entire South Asian community is analysed by looking at the stories in sync.

3. Methodology

This research paper is inspired methodologically by interpretivism, where subjective experiences of women have been evaluated related to forced and arranged marriages to arrive at a conclusion. Contrary to positivism, the ontological position of interpretivism focuses more on the lived and shared experiences, which are also dynamic depending on the cultural framework within which these experiences are gained. In case of Indian and Pakistani diaspora in the UK and their marriage practices—the shared and lived experiences are inspired by religious and cultural values—thereby, making an objective inquiry an unachievable task—given the fact, that South Asia is further subdivided into hundreds of cultural zones (Neuman, 2011, p. 87-105; Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 19; Hathcoat et al., 2019, p. 102; Kurowskaa & de Guverra, 2020, p. 1225).

Epistemologically, this research paper relies on the framework propounded by the intersectional feminism. Such a framework becomes crucial in a multi-cultural environment of the UK, as intersectional feminism argues for observing a concern related to women from the prism other than that of white feminists, who have not lived it as an experience personally. Crenshaw (1989) eloquently equated intersectionality with a traffic intersection, where cars arriving from multi-directions to the intersection were regarded as inequalities, ranging from patriarchal cultural injustices to systemic discrimination at the state level. Similarly, Potter (2013) argued that in a Western world, intersectionality can effectively address gender related biases in political and legal systems. However, for Crenshaw (1991), for making intersectionality a success, the Western political systems must be reevaluated to incorporate women viewpoint. In a more recent take, Crenshaw (2012) also lamented Western governments' treatment of individuals from ethnic minorities—as she observed, their individual lived experiences are associated with their culture in deciding their legal cases, thereby denying them social justice.

Given the above explained ontological and epistemological positions, this paper has employed qualitative research technique for findings, owing to its people-oriented approach as well as collection of evidence around a phenomenon of concern to arrive at a holistic answer. In qualitative technique, values followed by certain groups are deeply evaluated to bring about a constructive change in the lives of the people.

4. Data Collection

The data collection was done following qualitative techniques, i.e., in-depth unstructured interviews as well as insider information. From among the South Asian communities, only Indian and Pakistani communities were selected as a point of reference. As far as in-depth interviews were concerned, I selected a total of eight individuals, five women (three of Pakistani origin and two of Indian origin) and three men (all of Pakistani origin), two of them heterosexuals and one gay man. All of the interviews were conducted on-line, through the medium of WhatsApp. From the Pakistani diaspora, the selection was done from the regions of Punjab and Azaad Kashmir. Meanwhile, the Indian respondents were primarily hailing from Indian Punjab, with whom rapport was built through a mutual contact in the UK. The eight individuals were further categorized into two different age groups, i.e., 18-25 and 25-40.

The informed consent was verbally taken from the respondents, who were told about the nature of the research. The individual interviews lasted from one to two hours. Every single interview was initiated from introducing the research and major question of arranged and forced marriage, which was then further progressed to follow up questions, as erupting in the discussion. Given the sensitivity of the topic and privacy concerns of the individuals interviewed, no recording was done, and rather

only notes were taken. Moreover, the identities of the individuals interviewed for this research are protected and rather pseudonyms are given in the findings section of this paper.

Furthermore, my insider information about the phenomenon of forced and arranged marriages in the UK also aided in this research paper. To explain my reflexivity, I hail from Mirpur, Azaad Kashmir, administered by Pakistan. As a significant proportion of Kashmiris have migrated to the UK and share cultural bonding back home, therefore, based on kinship ties—I am aware of the causes of transnational marriages (as they term it in the UK). In fact, I have experienced incidences of such marriages within my own immediate and extended family. More importantly, the initial ideas about various variables associated with arranged and forced marriages were gathered from within the family—based on which, I established contacts in the UK for in-depth interviews.

5. Analysis

As far as the analysis is concerned, this research paper employed the techniques of discourse analysis to evaluate the spoken data collected from in-depth interviews. The different perspectives of forced marriages, arranged marriages, and domestic violence were treated as discourses. After the completion of interviews, various discourses were identified from the spoken data. These discourses were related to South Asian patriarchy, consanguinity and financial interests, migration and settlement, free love, and sexuality, as well as domestic violence. These themes were interpreted keeping in view the guidelines of intersectionality as an epistemological position.

The objectives of discourse analysis in this paper were related more to what was being said, rather than who was saying it—as has been advocated by Taylor (2013, p. 53-56). More importantly, a discourse analysis technique is explanatory as well, as argued by Gee (2016, p. 2). Such an analysis builds upon the already established methodology and theoretical framework—interpretivism and intersectional feminism in case of this research.

6. Coding

After the completion of all in-depth interviews, the coding was initiated with reduction of the data. During this stage, repeated themes like “assimilation and acculturation,” “love and defiance of patriarchy,” “sexuality and South Asian diaspora,” were taken as different thematic subsections elaborated in the finding and discussion section of this paper. Consequently, metaphors were extracted from the discourses of interviewees to make an understanding about the phenomenon of forced and arranged marriages, love, and romance, as well as sexuality.

7. Limitations

As this research paper has been written in Pakistan, therefore, it has limitations of directly observing the diasporic society within the UK. This limitation was overcome by selection of respondents from different age groups as mentioned in the section above. This selection helped analyse the perspectives of all groups and making educated interpretation.

8. Ethics

Great care has been taken in this research paper to maintain scholarly ethics. Thus, all of respondents were told in advance about the nature and scope of this research. More importantly, there informed consent was taken. As mentioned above, I share kinship ties with Kashmiri immigrants in the UK—thereby, I did not conceal any evidence—which could have been contrary to my own value system.

9. Findings and Discussion

This section is subdivided into three subsections, i.e., assimilation and acculturation, love and defiance of patriarchy, and sexuality and South Asian diaspora. In the first subsection, the phenomena of forced marriage, arranged marriage, and domestic violence are analysed through the lived experiences of four South Asian women. Similarly, in the second subsection, love and defiance of

South Asian patriarchy is evaluated. This subsection contains the in-depth interviews of two British Pakistani men and one Indian woman who gave their perspectives about love and romance in South Asian youth. Meanwhile, the third and last subsection reveals the findings about sexuality and South Asian diaspora from the viewpoint of a British Pakistani gay man.

10. Forced And Arranged Marriages: Assimilation and Acculturation Into British Culture

In this section, I answer my research question, what are the differences between a forced and arranged marriage, and why incidents of GBV occur in South Asian diasporic community in the UK? In the literature review section above, it has been shown from the studies of scholars that South Asians prefer arranged marriages, which sometimes lead to forced marriages, consequently ending in domestic violence. In this section on the other hand, it will be shown, what British South Asian women think about these issues from their own experiences? I have discussed these issues in detail with three Pakistani women, Shandana, Asma, and Samina (names changed for privacy). Meanwhile, from the British Indian community, I have interviewed Rajdeep Kaur.

Samina, a resident of Mirpur Azaad Kashmir, was married to her maternal cousin, born and brought up in Bradford, England. This marriage was arranged, where the cost was shared by both families. Even marrying at the early age of eighteen, Samina was happy as her consent was taken, and she liked the groom, Ahsan. In the paragraphs below, I reveal her lived experience of a transnational marriage, views about arranged marriage, and the issue of domestic violence.

a) Please, tell me how did your marriage proposal arrive and what were your reasons for accepting it?

My mother told me that my maternal uncle was interested in my proposal for his son, Ahsan. I had not seen Ahsan in a long time, as my uncle's family visited Mirpur rarely. However, I knew Ahsan from the family photos and childhood interactions. As per Kashmiri customs, the parents decide the marriage of their children, and I too was asked by them for my opinion. I agreed with their decision, and this is how things went on (Samina, "personal communication, May 12, 2023).

b) Did you and Ahsan contact each other after the proposal was finalised?

Of course, this was natural. We discussed about it and were both happy. The period from engagement to marriage was short in my case, so our discussions mostly revolved around arrangements of wedding functions and general interests. Our marriage took place in Mirpur, and after spending a week in Pakistan—we moved to Bradford.

c) How was it to settle in a totally new environment and new country?

Well, there was not much difference for me. I moved to the house of my uncle. The community of Kashmiris in Bradford was already strong and looked like Mirpur to me. There were many Kashmiri families at my reception in Bradford. Moreover, settlement was easy as my husband was cooperative and got me admitted in a college to get a degree.

d) What are your views about domestic violence?

I would say, it is a grave concern for Kashmiri women as their culture is still patriarchal. Nonetheless, the new generation is changing. I have not experienced such a thing in my marriage and we both respect each other's decisions. Every couple go through heated arguments, and it happens in our case too—nevertheless, we have never taken it to the point, where a serious conflict arises. If we both gave consent to our marriage, so making it successful is our responsibility too.

However, not all individual experiences are similar to that of Samina. There are instances, where women go through psychological trauma because of imposed decision. Such a situation can be clearly seen from the story of Asma, a resident of Rawalakot, Azaad Kashmir. She married a British Pakistani on the wish of her parents. Asma had a painful story to tell, which is highlighted below.

e) How did you agree to the marriage proposal?

It was in 2014 that a British Kashmiri family visited our home for my Rishta (proposal). I had just arrived from the college, when my mother informed me and asked to dress up and prepare tea for them. The proposal was decided by both families, and I was asked typical questions about my education and the domestic work that I know. They also took their son Ali (name changed) on a Skype video call—so that, we can see each other. I gave consent to the marriage because there was no issue then and everybody seemed happy about that (Asma, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

f) What specific issues then led to your divorce with Ali?

It was because Ali had hidden his sexuality from me as he was a gay. I was kept in the dark from the beginning and my in-laws were also aware of this. Earlier on, Ali would avoid me and spend less time with me. He would lie to me about business related work and spend time out of home. Nonetheless, when we started heated arguments, he revealed his sexuality in front of me.

g) Did you also face incidents of domestic violence?

Yes, when I was not aware about his sexuality and asked him questions that where he spent most of his time, he would quarrel with me. He would taunt me that being a Pakistani girl I had no idea how English culture worked. I would complain about this to my in-laws, and they would only console me that everything would turn normal if I were patient.

h) Why did you not tell the authorities about domestic violence?

You know, the stigma associated with taking your husband and in-laws to court is huge in Pakistani culture. Therefore, I remained silent for the honour of my in-laws and my parents back home in Pakistan. More significantly, having been in England for just about three years, I was also afraid that no one would trust me. I would be rather framed by my husband and in-laws that I was using them for getting citizenship. I also want to make it clear here that, I was not against his sexuality, but that, he and his parents lied to me. I had dreams of a family, children, and happy married life—which were devastated.

The two lived experiences revealed above are distinctive of each other. In the first case, Samina led a happy life in an arranged marriage, whereas in the latter case, Asma was cheated upon and lied to, which consequently led to domestic violence too. Asma's story is a classic case of marriage deception, which regularly occurs in South Asian diaspora in the UK. Such marriages are conducted by the South Asian parents, who think their children have gone out of their hands, and thus needed taming. Consequently, the solution in front of them is marriage, based on the perception that responsibility would change their children.

Nonetheless, such marriages often fail, and the brides taken from South Asia subsequently blame their parents for a bad decision. If seen at the face value, these marriages seem perfectly arranged with the consent of bride, yet they are persuaded if their story is heard in detail, for instance Asma. This is akin to influencing the will of a bride. However, at the same time, it must be recalled that in the lived experience of Samina, the consent was definite, resulting in mutual love and happy marriage.

South Asian diasporic youth in recent years have also turned to semi-arranged marriages, which is significantly revealed in my interview with Shandana, a British Pakistani Punjabi. In this interview, I came to know about the inter-racial marriage. Shandana had married her boyfriend Muhammad, a Lebanese man in a semi-arranged love marriage, whom she met at work. I got to know Shandana through my family in England. Shandana is a loving lady, who agreed to share her story with me.

i) How did you get to know about Muhammad?

We worked at a restaurant in Birmingham and fell in love. Me and Muhammad had decided this that we would marry by letting our parents know. Thereby, I was the first to inform my mother, who was

initially reluctant because of potential family pressure back home in Pakistan. However, I was able to persuade her. The similar situation had risen in front of my father too, who wanted a Punjabi groom for me—nevertheless, he too agreed at the end. Consequently, Muhammad took her mother to our home, and marriage was finalised (Shandana, personal communication, May 13, 2023).

j) Did you face any cultural shocks after the marriage?

Well, I would say, everything was absolutely normal, as both me and Muhammad were from the similar religion and were both born in England, so, we were already sharing similar cultures at so many levels.

k) Do you think domestic violence happen in love marriages too?

Domestic violence can happen at emotional level too, especially when likes and dislikes of the couple are different. The disagreements can rise when both partners move together. I would say that benefit of the love marriage is that a lot of things are sorted already between the couple. In our case, we had planned everything before our marriage, and had known each other for a long time. Thus, we do not fight on major decisions in our life. Of course, we have disagreements, however, these are of minute nature—which get resolved with mere discussion.

From the experiences of Shandana, it is learnt that love and interracial marriages are becoming normal in case of Pakistani community in England. More interestingly, parents are also getting involved making these love marriages semi-arranged too—which was quite uncommon until 1990s. Having seen from the experiences of Asma and Samina, acculturation seemed preference of some of the parents, nonetheless, lived experiences of Shandana show that assimilation into the British culture is also happening—however, at a slower pace.

My interviews with the Pakistani diasporic women as well as my own insider information of the phenomenon reveal that overall, British Pakistanis are still rooted in their own patriarchal culture and thus could not totally assimilated in the British society. As far as parents in Pakistan are concerned, their preference for British Pakistani as spouse of their children is often inspired by economic benefits, i.e., that of citizenship. Thereby, upon receiving a marriage proposal from a British Pakistani, quick agreements are seen, which often result in distress at the end. The reasons for distress are no evaluation of transnational marriages and cultural changes the individuals may face after marriage. Therefore, when spouses from Pakistan reach England, they face shocks—for instance, Asma experiencing different sexuality of her husband.

In the paragraphs above, I only presented the experiences of Pakistani women about marriage. Meanwhile, in the subsequent paragraphs, I will elaborate the experiences of an Indian diasporic woman about marriage. Her individual and shared experiences are similar to that of Pakistani women in some instances, nonetheless, the difference arises in shape of Indian separate culture and its own patriarchal values—which shape their viewpoints on marriage and love. For instance, it is significant to point out here that caste-based decisions with regard to marriage are still followed by the Indian diaspora in the UK. Generally, the Indian experiences are similar to that of Pakistanis, as arranged marriage is the norm in their culture too. However, the striking difference is absence of consanguineous marriages in British Indian community, which stems from the Hindu and Sikh religious obligations of not marrying in one's immediate family. However, marriage in the similar caste is preferred.

Indian Punjabi Sikhs make the majority of Indian diaspora in the UK. Hence, it was significant to get in touch with a respondent from the community, who could share her experiences. Thus, I came to know about Rajdeep Kaur (name changed), a resident of Glasgow through a mutual contact. Rajdeep Kaur had faced domestic violence at the hands of her husband. According to Kaur, her husband had

control issues and wanted her to obey her in every matter, as a Punjabi Sikh wife would do. I asked her the following question,

l) Why did your husband want to control you and what were his reasons?

I was not independent financially, neither did I have command over the English language to understand the British society. Moreover, I was not allowed to intermingle with the community outside our home. For three years, I suffered harassment and mental behind the closed doors. I complained about the abuses to my mother back home in India, however, she would advise me to stay in the relationship as everything would get fine once we had children. Nonetheless, GBV continued, even after the birth of our daughter (R. Kaur, “personal communication,” May 14, 2023). The reasons behind GBV in my case was dowry. My husband wanted cash as a dowry, which my father could not arrange, therefore, initially the verbal abuses started—which eventually led to physical violence. He would often taunt me that he brought a village girl to a place like Glasgow, where even the elites of India could not get easily.

m) So, how did you file for divorce?

I first went to our local Gurdwara in Glasgow, and informed about the violence I was facing to the Sikh ladies, who were present at the Gurdwara. I was helped by these ladies, who cautioned by former husband that they would inform the authorities about the GBV. With the counselling and interference of community Sikh women, there was a period of break in domestic violence as my ex-husband would be in check. Nonetheless, whenever, the dust settled, he would restart the same things and start beating me. I, in fact, went into depression because of him. My life was not normal, it was in pain. I was tortured both psychologically as well as physically. In all this, I would get worried for my daughter and her future. I kept suffering torture for the sake of my daughter, honour of my parents, and avoiding the stigma of divorce. Nonetheless, one night when he beat my daughter too along with me, I decided to formally lodge a complaint. The authorities arrived, he was arrested, and we were sent to a shelter home, from where I filed for the divorce. Subsequently, I lived alone and took various part time jobs to cover for mine and daughter’s expenses. Consequently, I met an Indian Sikh student, who had come to Glasgow for studies. He asked for marriage and was also willing to raise my daughter together with me. We married in Glasgow by having a simple reception. We have two sons together and lead a happy life.

11. Love and Defiance of Patriarchy

Defiance of the patriarchy and exploring love and sexuality by young South Asians in their own way in the UK is something which is not covered by scholarship. Therefore, in this subsection, I answer the following question, how South Asian youths have defied patriarchal values in their love life? In this connection, Furqan’s (name changed) love story is significant, who did not obey his parents’ decision of marrying in Pakistan. On the contrary, he wanted to have a stable career first. However, at the same time he was also in a relationship and wanted to move in with his girlfriend, in order to better understand each other before the marriage.

My friend in London arranged my WhatsApp discussion with Furqan. I asked Furqan the following question,

a) Being a British Pakistani, it would have been a difficult choice for you to move in with your girlfriend. Can you explain your experience?

Well, my parents immigrated to England back in 1990s, and they are old school Pakistanis, for whom Muslim Punjabi culture and values are above all. Therefore, they wanted to influence my life as well, whether it was career related or my married life. At the career front, my father already had decided to send me in a medical school—despite the fact that I did not want that. Similarly, he also insisted me on marrying a cousin back in the village in Punjab. Their rationale was based on Punjabi Muslim values and thus continuing with the culture already practiced in our family. More importantly, they

were concerned with lack of suitable match in a community around me in London, which according to them was too liberal and irreligious (Furqan, “personal communication,” May 21, 2023).

b) Did your parents have a specific issue with your love choice?

Indeed, they had a problem with my white girlfriend. That was the entire reason for their preference of Punjabi Muslim values. However, me and my girlfriend are clear in our life choices and want to focus on our career. In the meantime, we are also experimenting with a life together—which would help us decide about marriage. Our relationship does not revolve around the dramatic stuff as happen in Pakistan. Now, we both were happy with such an arrangement, nevertheless, my parents had a concern initially that this was haram relationship, and I was committing sin. While my parents have come to terms with my relationship—but still, they want us to marry because for them living like this is irreligious.

The love story of Furqan sheds light on the fact that South Asian parents in the UK are losing control over the lives of their children and they are deciding for themselves. For the Pakistan origin parents, this is something unacceptable, which is why they also prefer consanguineous marriages to have greater control over their children. Nonetheless, the youth have become a challenge for their parents, and they are adapting to the values of British society as well as not feeling ashamed of experimenting in their love life. This change of attitudes in the South Asian diasporic youth have also enhanced their assimilation process in the British society.

Although diasporic parents are challenged by the youth over notions of love, sexuality, and marriage, nonetheless, financial dependence or other economic interests like inheritance still becomes a hurdle in decision making of many South Asian diasporic youths. Thus, giving rise to the phenomenon of double lives—meaning that, they have become secretive of their romantic lives at homes as well as at work. This trend is especially visible among the females of South Asian origin, who are constantly reminded of the family honour and being not able to protect is akin to bringing disrepute to the family.

I raised this issue of double lives with a young Sikh girl, Puramjeet Kaur, who was born into a traditional Punjabi Jat Sikh family. I came into contact with Puramjeet Kaur through a family friend, who connected us on WhatsApp. We discussed candidly on aspects of love and assimilation in the British society by young girls. The questions I asked her, and the responses she gave are documented below.

c) What is challenge for girls like you in assimilating in host British community?

A British Sikh girl must live two parallel lives in the UK. Outside of home, it is quite normal like every other British youth, nevertheless, at homes, we seem like living in Punjab. We are treated the same way as girls are treated in Punjabi villages back in India. Our brothers get special treatment, and we must help our mothers in kitchens and other household activities, which is unexpected from our brothers. In my opinion, this singlehandedly is biggest reason for lack of assimilation. There are many other ethnicities in the UK as well, however, they seldom face these issues, however, in Punjabis case, this idea of sticking to Punjabi values has created roadblocks in developing habits like the host community (P. Kaur, “personal communication, May 20, 2023).

d) Are you free to choose your partner? Have your family set guidelines in this regard too?

Well, my parents have given me the freedom to choose for my marriage. However, he must be a Jat Sikh. This is like giving freedom from one hand and taking it back from the other. This makes a serious relationship quite a hectic job from the beginning. You meet nice people daily, but since most of them are not from your religion and caste, therefore, you do not build bonding with them—as you already know the situation at home, once you tell them. Thus, most relations are secret, where long term strings are not attached. Young boys and girls experience love, date, and make romance—often interracially too.

To evaluate the dating culture in depth among British Indians and British Pakistanis, I interviewed Hamza (name changed)—who was willing to share individual and collective experiences of the South Asian community. Hamza's take on love and intimacy is distinct than Furqan's, whose girlfriend is a white girl. Hamza had different views about the interracial love in the UK. I asked Hamza the following question,

e) What is your experience of dating in the UK? Does South Asians generally look partners in different communities than their own?

Actually, the dating scene here in the UK is linear for South Asians as they mostly date among each other. There may be examples of inter-racial love, however, those are quite less compared to the general trend in the community. One of the major reasons for this attitude is lack of assimilation by the South Asians, as they are taught from the childhood of being distinctive than the host community. Consequently, the South Asians have different cultural habits. Whereas in dating culture in the UK, white women prefer men, with whom they can relate culturally. They are dating Black, Filipinos, and other Asian men because they have assimilated, whereas the South Asians are still lagging (Hamza, "personal communication," May 24, 2023).

f) Is the dating scene open or secretive?

Well, that is of course secretive. Parents are kept in the dark. As majority of South Asians follow traditionalism, thereby, their family structure does not allow them to be open about love and romance. However, the youths are actively engaged in clubbing and party culture. They get to know each other in schools, colleges and at the community level. Civilizational links play a crucial role in attracting romantic partners and thereby most South Asians make couples with each other.

12. Sexuality and South Asian Diaspora

In the UK, love and sexuality is quite different than that of South Asia. The freedom to choose and make romantic unions even before marriage is normal and legal. Other than that, queerness is accepted, normalized, and legalized—thus giving a sense of freedom to lesbian, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders (LGBT). While South Asian parents have accepted the aspect of love between heterosexual partners, provided they marry as well, nonetheless, the LGBT relationships are yet not normalized in the community. Therefore, making it a challenge for South Asian youths with different sexualities. This subsection therefore answers the research question that, what are the sexual preferences of South Asian youth in the UK and how successfully they have assimilated into the host community?

To understand LGBT relations within South Asian community, I interviewed Asjad (name changed). I came to know about him through a Facebook closed group (which is not revealed for privacy purposes as LGBT relations are outlawed in Pakistan) meant only for South Asian LGBTs—that I had joined to find agreeing individuals to talk for the sake of this research.

Asjad is administrator of the Facebook group and manages it from the UK. I sent Asjad a personal message asking him for his interview. I informed him about the nature of this research and perspectives of the LGBT community on their sexuality and its acceptance among the South Asian community. Asjad agreed for the interview and thus we shared our contact details and interacted through WhatsApp for about two hours. I share the details of this interview in the paragraphs below. I asked Asjad firstly about his own sexuality,

a) When did you know first that you were a gay?

I was probably seventeen when I first came to know that I was not a heterosexual and rather more attracted to the individuals from same sex. Earlier, I kept silent about my sexuality for the fear of rejection and isolation from the broader British Pakistani community as this was unacceptable both culturally as well as religiously. Thus, I kept this secret to me till I was twenty-two, the time when I

first realized that it was only a problem for British South Asians, whereas in the white community bisexuality or queerness was absolutely normal. At this moment, I wanted to be in the space of LGBTs to feel protected and loved, nevertheless, I was deterred by the thoughts of revelation of the reality in front of parents and Pakistani friends. Thus, even the awareness about my sexuality and its acceptability in the UK stopped me from going public because of South Asian patriarchal culture (Asjad, “personal communication,” May 25, 2023).

b) What encouraged you subsequently to reveal your sexuality in public?

Well, it was my British partner, Alex (name changed), who influenced me to feel normal about my sexuality. It was with him, where I felt safe and part of the LGBT community—who would aid me in difficult times—and provide me a space to enjoy my life in my own way rather than an imposed value system, where I was not what I was. The queer space, in fact, given me a sense of belonging—which I always aspired for. I met Alex online on a dating platform and we subsequently dated and developed good understanding of each other. Initially, the relationship was limited to meet ups, where I would often stay at his place. Nonetheless, at Alex’s insistence I moved with him permanently and now we both live together.

c) Have you informed about your sexuality to your parents, and what was their reaction?

Honestly, I did not tell them about my sexuality personally. However, they have come to know about it from my queer circle. The reason for not revealing it to my family was avoidance of conflict, as I knew they would never accept it and force me to marry someone in Pakistan. Same advice came from my partner Alex as well, who was of the opinion to go with the flow. Since I moved with my partner, I have avoided visits to my family to avoid domestic violence. As my family still has not accepted that I am a gay. They in fact have tried to blackmail me too by showing superficially that they accept it—however, I know that they deep inside reject my sexuality.

13. Conclusion

To sum up, this research paper found that South Asian diaspora still prefers arranged or semi-arranged marriages whether they are Pakistan or Indian origin. They are rooted in the patriarchal culture of South Asia and only gradually assimilating in the British culture. The forced marriages occur because of emotional blackmail to get consent of individuals. Such marriages are often portrayed as arranged marriages. Over the last decade, the South Asian youth have defied patriarchal norms of their parents and are experimenting with love and romance. Moreover, they are also accepting their different sexuality and thus posing a challenge to their older generations.

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