



History

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Original Research Article

FACTORS AFFECTING THE SELECTION OF PARTNERS FOR MARRIAGE IN AN AGE OF SOCIOECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE URBAN MIDDLE CLASSES IN THE CITY OF DHAKA

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ABSTRACT

Marriage is a vital institution of human civilization. It has taken different shapes at different epochs of history. However, one common factor has always remained intact throughout history, and that is the marginalization of women pertaining to their role and status in society and the structure of patriarchy. With the progress of societal forces, the factors influencing the marriage practices have undergone changes. This research aims to explore the factors impinging upon the selection of partners for marriage under the conditions characterized by globalization and market-led massive social and economic transformations in Bangladesh. Based on empirical research, this study has indicated some intriguing findings. It reveals that traditional decision criteria for marriage have not faded away yet. On the other hand, with the massive social changes, some new selection criteria for marriage have emerged. This is equally true for both men and women. It is found that women are now less subjugated to the whims of the patriarchy. Education, awareness, and economic solvency have enabled women to play a decisive role in choosing their partner for marriage. They have developed a relative capacity to raise their voice concerning their marriage decision. Furthermore, men are also experiencing new forms of dilemmas in selecting their partners. Along with conventional attributes, they also expect some new attributes in women they want to marry. However, the entire saga of decision-making regarding marriage is not a linear process. Still confusions, dilemmas and ambiguities persist relating to the selection of partners for marriage in the city of Dhaka.

Keywords: *Socio-economic transformations; Arranged marriage; Selection of spouse; Women empowerment; Bangladesh.*

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INTRODUCTION

The marriage pattern of a society largely depends on the cultural and socio-economic conditions and the dynamics of the marriage market (Perrin, 2022). This is equally true for all countries. It is also true that socio-economic and cultural conditions are not static. Without a proper consideration of societal factors, an understanding of marriage remains incomplete. Some common features of marriage patterns are found in all South Asian countries. However, regardless of societal conditions, a transition appears to be visible in the pattern of family formation, the mating process, divorce and remarriages in these societies (Das & Bardis, 2023). In the last few decades, Bangladesh has also experienced transition in these aspects. Particularly, the massive socio-economic transformations have impacted the age-long marriage patterns. For example, a dowry system is supplanting the older bride price system, and family background is no longer given its former importance in marriage negotiations. Numerous factors are at place in the marriage negotiations. These factors are not completely new but have received renewed importance during the critical phase of transformations.

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors impinging on the decision-making process regarding marriage in the city of Dhaka. Bangladesh, like other post-colonial societies, has had its tumultuous history. Its colonial past and at least one decade after independence in 1971 were inundated with the backward and agrarian economy, archaic social structure, poverty, natural calamities, patriarchy, subjugation of women, domestic violence, child marriage, and so forth. The glimpses of the transition of Bangladesh society became apparent in the early 1980s. The proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), overseas migration, particularly to the Middle East, the readymade garments-based industrialization, and the rapid increase of real estate construction and the market have a stupendous impact on every aspect of Bangladeshi society. Marriage as a social institution has also been subject to socio-economic transformational forces (Cai *et al.*, 2022).

There is a large body of literature concerning the status of women in society, the marginalization of women, gender relations and sexuality and so forth (Chafetz, 1997). The orientation of the current study is descriptive in nature in that it specifically focuses on the impact of socio-economic transformations on the selection of marriage partners in urban Bangladesh. Therefore, normative theories of feminism haven't been taken into consideration as most of these theories are basically normative in perspectives (Dietz, 2003; Chafetz, 1997).¹ The precepts of the modernization of social change, Hofstede's theory of culture and the social constructivist perspective (Hofstede, 2003; Dietz, 2003; Fourie, 2012) have been used to understand the dynamics of the selection of marriage partners. This research finds these theories useful for their exploratory and descriptive nature. To clarify further, this study does not incline to give value judgments whether the social changes taking place are good or bad.

There is no dearth of literature on the issues pertaining to the role and status in socio-economic and political life and their state of sexuality. Literature is also available on antecedents, processes and outcomes of powerlessness in decision making, dowry, child marriage, and reproductive matters. This has identified a gap in the existing literature in relation to the current state of the selection of the marriage partners in Urban Dhaka. The rationale for the selection of this topic is straightforward. Extant literature reveals that Bangladesh has been undergoing slow but steady socio-economic transformation since the 1990s. Available social development indicators also show that women in Bangladesh have been a distinct part of the transformation. This is not to claim that women's empowerment is achieved. It is a truism that there are socio-economic transformations and some changes in the role and status of women (Rahman & Chowdhury, 2020). Therefore, it will be a good study

to identify and analyze the insights pertaining to the implications of the social changes for the selection of the marriage partners in urban Dhaka.

There are diverse methods of social research. The adoption of a model by a researcher depends on the research questions and objectives. For the current study, the descriptive method has been employed. Here, the descriptive method simply reflects on the events or occurrences or the facts without giving any value judgement. On the other hand, the normative method is very much value-laden and not interested in the fact-value dichotomy. Conventional modernization theory is useful to deliberate on social changes. On other hand, alternative theories of change and feminist theories (of different variants) are mostly normative in nature. These theories tell us **what ought to do**. For detail, please see Dietz (2003); Werhane (2019).

1.2 Background of the study:

Marriage is a complex form of human life. In a typical developing country like Bangladesh, there are many reasons for family life to remain volatile and unstructured. Socio-economic transformations, spread of educational opportunities, industrialization, urbanization, and urban-based employment opportunities are both a bane and a boon (Zhang, 2023). The familiar world of family, social interconnectedness, peasant and community life never remains archaic. The transformations have been on the upward spiral since time immemorial. In the modern era, transformations began in Europe in the 18th century and kept on flourishing. There were several lessons learned from Europe - individual freedom, liberty, and rule of law and the protection of human rights. Although the nature of the changes is not similar, other countries in the world in the Southern hemisphere began to experience the changes following their decolonization (Affun-Adegbulu, et al., 2023). The role and status of women in the socio-economic and political life in society were reconceived and redefined over the last three centuries in the West.

Most developing countries are in transition. The peasant mode of life is in decline, the significant portion of the rural population have migrated to the towns for education, employment and business. Though women's emancipation is still far cry, the situation is not identical to what existed in the past. Now they are keen to get education, keen to work in factories and offices, like to have space in family decision making and so forth. It is inevitable that all societies at this stage experience stress in the value system, the structure and functions of family and social relations.

Bangladesh is at the critical juncture of socio-economic transformations. All social institutions are in flux. The changes are visible (Khan & Ahmed, 2020). There is no dearth of literature concerning the diverse aspects of the role, status and reproductive life of women in society. Many People have migrated internally from rural to urban areas for better opportunities, education, and jobs. The family dynamics have changed over the period. An Unequal family means the financial capacity and living standard also change. A steady rise of the different classes of people - lower, lower middle classes, middle classes, upper middle classes, and the rich has resulted in the way of thinking, new lifestyles, new expectations and so forth (Rafa, 2021). Rural peasants dream of sending their offspring to schools and colleges and see them in respectable jobs. A large number of both skilled and unskilled people have gone overseas and send remittances which also have contributed immensely to the socio-economic transformations.

The issue of women's empowerment has received prominence in this time of transition. Women are beginning to become claimants while arguing for an equal scope of opportunities. The arguments around gender create a cold war between men and women. With regard to settled marriages, we can assume that a particular form of the "marriage market" is emerging in Bangladesh. Some rigidity, some wants, and some expectations are the big challenges for women for selecting partners. The marriage market is showing natural and artificial inflations of demand and supply of qualified brides and grooms.

1.3 Problem statement:

Marriage as an institution is enmeshed with social and economic transformations. With the pace of transformations, marriage practices have also undergone changes in all types of society. The issue is more relevant for the developing world where the patterns of transformations have been uneven over the years. The norms around the selection of partners during the phase of agrarian society lingered over a long period of time. The practice of child marriage and the choice of parents as imposed on the bride constituted the mainstay of marital decision making. But the socio-economic transformations over the last couple of decades have made the choice of partners contestable to individuals to a large extent. This applies to Bangladesh as well. Rapid transformations and subsequent urbanization have contributed to the development of middle classes with different kinds of values. Accordingly, marriage as an institution is much more convoluted than before. Potential brides and grooms hailing from urban middle classes are now in a state of flux characterized by numerous factors. The proposed research aims to investigate the emerging factors that impinge upon the choice of partners among the urban middle-class families in the city of Dhaka.

1.4 Objectives:

The key objectives of the paper are to:

- To analyze the transformation of Bangladesh society and posit the emergence of urban middle classes.
- To explore the factors that influence the decision-making process regarding the selection of partners.
- To examine the transformation of the marriage market in the context of rapid social and economic changes.

1.5 Research Questions:

1.5.1 Broad Question: What are the selection criteria and why is the marriage market in Dhaka city becoming more complicated day by day?

1.5.2 Specific Questions:

- What are critical factors that both men and women highlight in their pursuit of selecting the partner?
- What are the underlying reasons why both men and women are confused about the long-lasting relationship?
- Are all selection criteria equally important for the young single men and women?
- Is the trend of selection factors changing rapidly?

2. Literature Review:

2.1 Socio-Economic Transformation and Marriage Practices: An Overview of Literature

Marriage and family are the insurmountable foundations of society. In general, marriage is the institutional form of two adult men and women getting the legal form of living together and continuing the natural flow of humanity. It's also about building a lasting bond—for the sake of society and the family's foundation. Marriage and family are linked by the creative ability of a man and a woman's union. A child is conceived and born when a man and a woman give themselves to one another.

According to Waite (2005, p. 89), Marriage is a legal contract between two individuals to form a sexual, productive, and reproductive union. Through marriage, this union is recognized by family, society, religious institutions, and the legal system. Marriage defines the relationship of the two individuals to each other, to any children they might have, to their extended families, to shared property and assets, and to society generally. It also defines the relationship of others, including social institutions, toward the married couple.

Marriage as an institution is intricately enmeshed with social dynamics. Though social changes are a dynamic concept, for many centuries in Asian society heavily depended on agriculture and localized livelihood patterns. No substantive changes were noticed in the mode of production in the economic sphere and socio-cultural relations in the social context. Patriarchy as an old institution was well nurtured in this type of traditional societal system. Marriage was never an issue of an individual choice of a girl and a boy. So, the head of the family is the main decision-maker of choosing the bride or bridegroom (Smith, 1980).

Marriage is a formal instrument through which social interactions with respective rights and obligations are created between spouses, between husbands and wives, and between all spouses. a social group from which spouses come, and between all spouses. In all civilizations, marriage distributes these rights and duties in such a way that they are public and susceptible to both informal social control over public opinion and formal legal control (Mitchell, 2003; Ahmed, 2021).

At this point, it is pertinent to single out the critical variables impinging on the choice of partners in the Asian context. Extant literature reveals that the mode of the economy, the pattern of social structure, the intensity of religious practices, local customs, level of social development, and so forth have always been important elements shaping the pattern of marriage in Asian society (Jones & Yeung, 2014; Chowdhury & Trovato, 1994).

The modernization theory provides useful insights about the socio-economic transformations in a society. Once all societies were traditional. More precisely, these traditional societies were economically backward. Agriculture was the main source of the economy. The worldview of human beings developed around the peasant mode of production, the undeveloped forces of production, well-neat community life, religious practices, lack of mobility, particularism and so forth. Renaissance in Europe, the development of science and technology and subsequent industrial revolution brought in stupendous changes in Western societies that culminated in modernization (Xiaodong, 2021).

Universalism, individualism, achievement orientation, and high degree of mobility became visible in society. The trajectories of the journey from tradition to modernity was tumultuous that resulted in completely transformed relations in socio-economic and political arenas (Bernstein, 1971; Fourie, 2012; Jaquette, 1982). While the countries in the West witnessed transformation a long time ago, the rest of the world is basically at the stage of transition containing both tradition and modernity.

Hofstede's theory is also important for the current study. According to Hofstede (Hofstede, 2003; Steele & Lynch, 2013), a society is either collectivist or individualistic. While all societies were once collectivist, Western countries had had socio-economic transformations and attained individualistic status. Technological advancements, industrial revolution, the release of workers from the agrarian sector to feed the industrial sector and so forth completely changed the world view of individuals in Western societies.

Marriage as a social institution has always been riddled with social changes. In the South Asian context, traditionally marriage was a matter of family decision. But with the transformations, marriage became an individual choice devoid of the interference of the family or community. On the contrary, the agrarian mode of production, as well as religious precepts, configured the functioning of the social institutions, community, and family life. Marriage was more like an institution orchestrated by religious practices, patriarchy, or male heads of the family as well as the community. Particularly, girls were more vulnerable (Nadia et al., 2019; Robinson, 1983).

They had no say in the selection of the groom. Under-aged girls were forced to marry. In all respects, girls were seen having peripheral roles in the family and the community. Controversial property rights, lack of educational opportunities (imposed by male heads of the family), high degree of the patriarchal attitude of men, and so forth

almost cemented the marginal position of women in the family and society (Robinson, 1983; Jones & Yeung, 2014).

The colonial intervention failed to transform the agrarian societies which were colonized (Temin, 2023). British raj introduced modern education, developed infrastructure, proclaimed laws, and triggered urban development, the growth of the middle class was very slow and did not uniform across all colonies and sectarian groups. In addition, the vulnerability of women remained conspicuous. It becomes clear that colonial rulers didn't have any intention to destabilize the social dynamics of the colonies. The fact that the British raj stopped *satidaha* could be attributed to the social reformers like Iswar Chandra BidyaSagor than to the noble intention of the raj. Marriage of underaged girls forcibly, dowry, discrimination in all spheres remained unscathed (Bala, 2019).

Colonization did not have a significant impact on the pre-existing social relations, though the colonial state had some legislation to regulate individual groups in society. At the end of the colonial role, there were some glimpses of upward mobility of rural land-owning classes and the subsequent migration of their offspring to the cities for education and jobs. Decolonization provided opportunities for all former colonies to shape and reshape their fortunes. However, the process of socio-economic transformations was slow but steady. Global economic order as well as flawed economic policies of the post-colonial states were not supportive of the rapid transformations. Amidst this inertia, agrarian societies didn't remain static. Modernization of agriculture, a knack for public sector jobs, and urbanization were noticed across Asian countries (Litonjua, 2012).

The 1970s heralded a new era for most developing countries. Oil crisis and price hike following the Arab-Israel war in the mid-1970s contributed to the reconstruction of the global order pertaining to the economy, politics, culture, and gender relations. Through Washington Consensus, the liberal market ideology leveraged the market economy embraced by most countries in the world. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund played catalytic roles in the dissemination of this market ideology. With the risk of oversimplification, it can be said that globalization appeared as both boon and bane for the nation-states and the individuals, economies, politics, individuals, and gender relations. Economies of many Asian countries embraced openness and became partners in the international division of production. The emergence of East and Southeast Asian countries, India and Bangladesh from South Asia and some African countries as important spots of industrialization has impacted the whole set socio-cultural dynamics. Rapid industrialization, urbanization, increase of educational opportunities, rapid rise of urban middle classes, the influx of rural people to the urban areas, overseas migration, increased job opportunities for women and so forth are the remarkable fallouts of globalization and the new international division of labor (Lindio-McGovern & Wallimann, 2016).

The concept of patriarchal social structure, colonization and social mobilization have always been within the dynamics of human marital life. However, the development of the market economy triggered by globalization has had effects on the lifestyles, the desires and expectations about marriage of the urban middle class brides and grooms. The traditional mode of the imposition of the male head of the family over the girls regarding marriage is now being contested in the current turbulent and volatile socio-economic and cultural environments. The same can also be attributed to the decision of the grooms (Jackson, 2012).

Akin to the above, urban people's lifestyles and economic mobility are frequently influenced by the changing values. For urban educated middle classes, along with conventional physical attributes of brides, social status of the family, political connection, economic status of the family, education, potential to be employed in white collar jobs and so forth are also highly emphasized across South Asian countries (Jackson, 2012).

This is not the focus of this research to point out the merits or demerits of globalization. What is a critical factor in this study is to identify the implications for socio-economic relations and marriage practices? However, it is pertinent to discuss in brief some evaluative statements. According to J.P. Singh (cited in 2018, p. 16), Indian

society is witnessing transformation as never before, where the traditional joint family is virtually disappearing from the urban scene. He observes that there is an increased proportion of female-headed households, a decline in the average age of household heads, rise in separation and divorce cases. Moreover, higher disagreement and conflicts between wife and husband, parents and children are on the increase. More freedom of marital choice, greater involvement of females in decision making, lack of ties to kinship, and the mutual dialogue between parents and grown-up children on familial matters are increasingly observed today. From the preceding discussion, it appears that socio-cultural relations in general and marriage have been in the mode of transition. Traditional factors impinging on the choice of partners are losing ground very rapidly on account of the rapid socio-economic transformations in all developing societies. Though these societies are still far away from complete capitalist transformations, the emerging trends point out the presence of individual choice, though not entirely.

Economic transformations have impacted diverse aspects of society – social institutions, marriage, mobility, and values. There is an impact of migration on both destination and origin countries' socioeconomic and demographic dynamics. The loss of young people owing to migration from villages to urban areas. By using social exchange theory to claim that individual choices and decisions for specific behaviors, such as parents' early marriage decisions, are intimately tied to societal benefit against social dishonor judgments. Individuals or their parents make pragmatic judgments in situations where societal approval or disapproval, as well as existing socio-cultural norms, have an impact on their life (Jackson, 2012).

Marriage has long been considered one of the few near universals in human civilization, and it's difficult to find an early ethnography that doesn't include the expectation, and fact, that every adult will marry. This has changed, however, because of the vast shifts crudely glossed with the labels of modernization and modernity (capitalist transformations, industrialization and urbanization, migration, and demographic transitions).

A recent trend is the rising age of marriage, especially among girls, which must account for some of the decline in married adult proportions. 'In practically every emerging country, the average age of women at marriage is rising' (Dyson, 2010, p.174).

This has health and social implications, including lower maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS exposure, more egalitarian marital relations, and less partner violence, as well as enhanced girls' education. Is the rising age at marriage a result of girls' improved education, creating a virtuous spiral that is 'empowering'? In most developing nations, it is commonly considered that the diminishing gender gap in education represents the same kind of parental investment in education for future employment-based well-being that is used to stimulate boys' schooling. This would be a noble act. However, unlike boys, girls' education is heavily impacted by their plans for marriage. Because ideal marriages are often hypergamous, with women marrying 'up,' marriage is perhaps the single most crucial period of possible social mobility in the lives of most poor women (Jackson, 2012).

At this point it is also pertinent to explain the concept of the marriage market. Broadly speaking, marriage decisions are taken through either love affairs or negotiation (arranged). Though both love and arranged marriages are common phenomena in contemporary Asian societies, arranged marriage remains a dominant mode. The concept of the marriage market essentially relates to the mode of arranged marriage. In addition, there are diverse forms of arranged marriages across cultures. Whatever the form is, there are certain critical variables which are taken into consideration for choosing a partner (Anukriti&Dasgupta, 2018).

2.2 Bangladesh: Economy, Society, and Marriage:

Bangladesh is one of the most populous countries in the world with high density. The country has had a turbulent history over a couple of centuries. In the middle of the 18th century, it was annexed by the British raj and remained a part of British India until 1947. In 1947, two independent states – Pakistan and India emerged, and Bangladesh

was part of Pakistan. Bangladesh became an independent state after a bloody war with West Pakistan in 1971 (Lewis, 2011).

Historically, Bangladesh was considered a rural hinterland with low life expectancy, high mortality, low literacy, and agriculture as the mainstay of the economy. It was a predominantly Muslim society. Socio-cultural values were constructed and reconstructed around the peasant mode. Archaic social structure, inequality, poverty, natural calamities, marginalization of women, child marriage, patriarchy, and so forth have characterized Bangladesh society. However, this kind of stereotyping is flawed as there have been massive socio-economic transformations over the last three decades or so (Sawada et al., 2018).

The emergence of rural middle classes was observed with the introduction of permanent settlement by the British raj. The system facilitated the emergence of the rural “Jotedar” class which eventually fueled the process of urbanization in Bangladesh in the 1960s. The first decade following independence was mostly associated with familiar conditions such as instability, poverty, agro-based economy, natural calamities, domestic violence, and deprivation of women in all spheres, dowry, child marriage, and so forth. Marriage as a social institution did not have any significant transformation. As usual, arranged marriages orchestrated by patriarchy and parents’ decisions was the order of the day. Social hierarchy, lineage, education, profession, material status, and so forth remained important indicators in the marriage negotiation among the rising urban middle-class families (Anukriti & Dasgupta, 2018).

The mushroom growth of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and some progressive policies and programs of the successive governments opened the door for women in education, economic and social activities. The mobility of women began to have stirred in both the rural and urban areas. The microcredit programs of the NGOs provided opportunities for rural women to get involved in economic activities (Pandey, 2016). On the other hand, under the neo-liberal global market order and globalization in the 1980s, Bangladesh entered the world market with its readymade garments (RMG) products. The RMG factories generated millions of jobs which were mostly filled up by rural women. They migrated to Dhaka city. In addition, a new wave of urbanization took place in the urban areas with the private sector-led real estate boom resulting in the employment of tens of thousands of men hailing from the rural areas. Furthermore, many men and women found employment opportunities in the oil-rich countries in the Gulf. Their remittances also played a critical role in the socio-economic transformations (Hossain, 2001; Sutradhar, 2020).

Bangladesh is a densely populated country with an estimated population of around 170 million. The male-female ratio is almost the same table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Estimated Population Bangladesh

	(Million)			
	2016	2017	2018	2019
Male	80.5	81.4	82.4	83.33
Female	80.3	81.3	82.2	83.17
Total	160.8	162.7	164.6	166.50

Source: MSVSB 2019, BBS.

Many Bangladeshi women marry young, often before they reach the legal age of 18. A staggering number of people (78.2%) marry before they turn 18 years old, with 5.5 percent marrying at a very young age (before 13 years of age) (table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Age at First Marriage of Women in Bangladesh: Levels, Trends and Determinants

Age	BDHS 1993–1994	BDHS 1996–1997	BDHS 2000	BDHS 2004	BDHS 2007	BDHS 2011	BDHS 2014
10–14	95.2	95.2	92.7	88.6	—	—	—
15–19	50.5	49.8	51.9	52.1	52.8	54.3	54.8
20–24	12.4	17.2	18.5	15.2	14.3	13.4	15.5
25–29	2.2	3.4	4.2	4.2	4.3	3.0	4.1
30–34	0.3	0.5	0.1	1.2	0.6	1.2	1.2
35–39	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.4	0.6	0.8	0.8
40–44	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.6
45–49	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.2	0.2

*Source: (Demographic Analysis) Age at First Marriage of Women in Bangladesh: Levels, Trends and Determinants

Access to mass media appears to play a role in raising the age at which people marry. Exposure to the mass media causes people to marry one or more years later than their non-exposure peers. Women aged 20–29 (15.60 years) have the highest mean age at marriage among non-exposures, followed by women aged 30–39 (15.22 years) and 40–49 (14.85 years), respectively. A similar pattern can be noticed among the different exposure groups.

The age at which a couple marries may be influenced by the wealth index. Women from poor families marry two or more years earlier than women from wealthy families. Women aged 20–29 marry 0.32 years later than women aged 30–39 (15.18 years) and 0.70 years later than women aged 40–49 in disadvantaged communities (14.80 years). This is also true for women from the middle and upper classes.

The influence of a husband's education on marital age is not as substantial as that of a wife's education. With a few exceptions (for example, women aged 20–29 marrying to men with higher secondary education), women aged 20–29 have the greatest mean age at marriage, followed by women aged 30–39 and 40–49 marrying to men with no or limited education. Women who marry men with a higher secondary education marry three or more years later than women who marry men without a secondary degree.

3. Research Methodology:

The research outcome depends on the qualitative and quantitative research techniques to garner maximum responses in the short duration of the research period. Both types of research are useful for the nature of research the current study focuses on. For practical purposes, a large body of secondary literature including academic articles, statistical reports and the relevant newspaper contents have been used as the secondary sources of data and information. Primary data has been collected to address the research objectives and questions.

3.1 Methods of Inquiry:

This study has adopted both quantitative and qualitative types of research. A standard structured questionnaire was developed and administered electronically among the target respondents. Social media platforms were used for this purpose. Qualitative data and information were gathered from the target population focusing on the one-to-one interview, marriage experts' opinions, senior married individuals' life experience, and observations. Interview checklists for each of these techniques were developed.

3.2 Population:

The study is all about transformation of traditional changes of trends, patterns, and preferences of professionals - university-level female students, university teachers, and other professionals. The clients' database of the marriage consulting firm has provided critical information in relation to the interplay of different partners' selection criteria. In addition, the life experiences of some samples reflecting on the antecedents and processes were unearthed through one-to-one intensive interviews and focus group discussion. All the samples selected randomly are based in the city of Dhaka.

3.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size:

To account for the differences in income, gender, norms practice, or location among professional married and unmarried men and female individuals, the random sampling technique was used. Many participants were the clients of the consulting firm. Along with the available profiles containing all kinds of data and information, in-depth discussion further helped to identify some critical factors impinging on the decision regarding marriage. In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 individuals. The criteria for selecting these 11 persons include the duration of married life, expertise in marriage discourse, and expertise in social discourse. life experiences. Furthermore, the evolving trends pertaining to the rapid changes, migration, social stratification, politics, money, and power were included as critical variables while conducting interviews with the respondents.

3.4 Data Collection:

This study has adopted both quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative data were collected by administering questionnaire surveys through the social media platforms. In addition to this, qualitative data and information were gathered through intensive interviews with individuals, married couples, social media influencers, experts' experiences, and observations.

3.5 Data Analysis:

Quantitative data gathered through the google forms were inserted in the Excel sheets. For descriptive statistics, frequency analysis was used showing frequency tables, pie charts, and bar charts.

4. Empirical Investigation and Findings:

4.1 Quantitative Research:

One hundred eighty-four respondents including professionals from NGOs, banks and public sector and self-employed people participated in the survey. Four variables of the partner selection process were included in the survey. These include beauty and talents, status and family property, education and income and values and

behaviors. Quantitative research focused on the first criteria or preferences in the first thought when they start searching for a partner for marriage.

Table 4.1.1 shows the trends as gleaned from the respondents. Here the data shows that men are focused on status, family, and property whereas women are more focused on behaviors, manners, and ethics. The education and income category shows that men have very low concern whereas they emphasize beauty and appearance. Interestingly, many men added in comments that they value beauty, family status and property followed by education, behavior, caring, and kindness. One male respondent observed that though women single out ethics and behavior as important criteria for selecting their partner, for them income, job status also in some cases appearance get prominence (see table 4.1.1).

Table 4.1.1 Partner selection -in priority

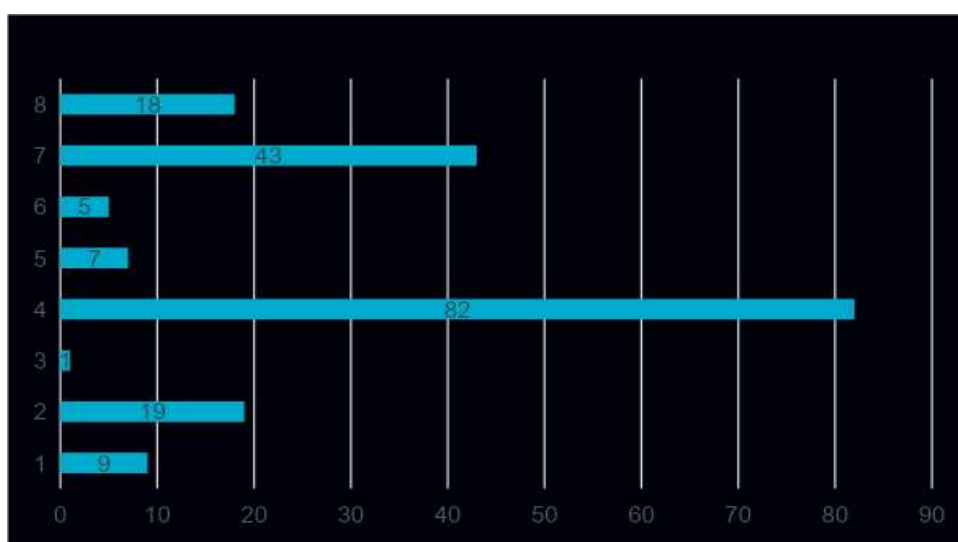


Table 4.1.2 shows that in total, 126 respondents participated in the survey of which 72 (singles and divorcees) were females and 54 males. The highest number of participants were from the age group of 20-49 (see table 4.1.2)

Table 4.1.2 Demographic data of participants

SEX	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	44-49	Total
Female	41	23	5	1		2	72
Male	13	29	7	3	2	-	54
Total	54	52	12	4	2	2	126

Preferred Family

Respondents reflected on the type of family of the potential partner. Table 4.1.3 shows interesting findings. While most women expect their partner from sophisticated families, for men, practicing religious families are the most preferred options.

Table 4.1.3: Preferred Family

Criteria	Female	Male
Any other choice (details)	4%	2%
Cultural -open minded or culturally engaged	3%	2%
Educated	21%	10%
Influential	1%	2%
Religious -rigid and practicing	2%	17%
Sophisticated (decency and family status , education, and professional status)	26%	9%
Grand Total	57%	43%

Age Preference

Table 4.1.4 shows that women don't really care much about the age difference. It is the family that gives priorities to age differences. For men, age difference is not significant while it is important for the family.

Table 4.1.4 Age Preference

Variables	Female	Male
Age difference doesn't matter to me	13%	17%
Age difference isn't an issue at all.	8%	9%
Age difference matters mostly to the family	36%	17%
Grand Total	57%	43%

Educational Qualifications

The findings about the preferences (education and profession) highlight the significance of Very good education with career potentials or already in the job in case of women (31%). Interestingly, for men education as well career potentials or already in jobs constitute an important component. It is also found that many men expect only educationally qualified mates (13%). 10 percent male respondents also don't care about the education of their potential partners (table 4.1.5).

Table 4.1.5 Educational Qualifications and Profession

Variables	Female	Male
Educated & solvent enough to lead a decent life	1%	0%
Educated in specific fields (e.g., doctor, engineer, BCS cadre, army etc.	12%	2%
Educated, religious, already in the job	1%	0%
Educated, job	2%	0%
Education is not a key factor at all.	2%	10%
HSC	0%	1%
HSC or Honors Degree	0%	1%
Only quality education (no job preference by men)	8%	13%
Private sector job, BCS cadres, other professionals	0%	1%
Only educated	1%	0%
Very good education with career potentials or already in the job	31%	16%

District Preference

Though there have been socio-economic transformations in Bangladesh, traditional values like choosing partners from the same district remain prevalent till days though the intensity is not that much severe (table 4.1.6)

Table 4.1.6: District Preference

Variables	Female	Male
District Preference - doesn't matter	33%	24%
District Preference –Strongly	17%	11%
District Preference -Strongly (BNCC -Barisal , Noakhali, Chittagong, Cumilla)	6%	3%
Option 4	2%	5%
Total	57%	43%

Income Status

Table 4.1.7 shows that for most women, income status of the groom is a significant factor while for most men it is not a serious factor.

Table 4.1.7: Income Status

Variables	Female	Male
Income status strongly matters	17%	1%
No	12%	27%
Yes	28%	15%

Personality of the Potential Partner

The findings show that most men and women give priority to personality of their potential partner (see table 4.1.8)

Table 4.8: Personality

Variables	Female	Male
No comment	2%	1%
No	1%	5%
Yes	54%	33%
Your comments -If yes/no	0%	4%

Current Residence

The location of the current residence of the potential partners is an important criterion for decision making pertaining to marriage. From table 4.1.9 it appears that women prefer to have their partners stationed in either Dhaka or other cosmopolitan cities. 23% of men do not have that location-based preference.

Table 4.1.9: Preferred location

Preferred location	Female	Male
Not applicable	16%	23%
Only America or Australia or Canada	1%	0%
Only Dhaka City	20%	10%
Only cosmopolitan cities	21%	10%

Family's Economic Status

The following table shows that both men and women do not give high priority to the income status of the family.

Table 4.1.10 Family's Economic Status

Variable	Female	Male
Not applicable	4%	2%
Not considered	39%	31%
Highly considered	14%	10%

Religious Orientation

Here is an interesting finding. Both men and women would like to see their spouse as practicing muslims.

Table 4.1.11 Religious Background

Row Labels	Female	Male
N/A	2%	1%
No	5%	6%
Yes	51%	37%

Physical Appearance (Height)

Most men and women prioritize medium height. Many women prefer to have tall husband.

Table 4.1.12: Physical Appearance

Row Labels	Female	Male
Doesn't matter	11%	6%
Medium	27%	29%
Tall	19%	8%

Physical appearance (Complexion)

Table 4.1.13 shows that most women do not consider the complexion of men seriously. But for most men (23%), complexion of the bride is a factor to be reckoned with.

Table 4.1.13: Physical Appearance

Row Labels	Female	Male
Doesn't matter	29%	10%
Fair	6%	13%
Medium	21%	20%

Living Preference

The Table shows that women prefers single family and most men has no living preferences (Table: 4.1.14)

Table 4.1.14: Living Preference

Variables	Female	Male
Doesn't matter	37%	57%
Joint Family	11%	30%
Single family	52%	13%
Grand Total	100%	100%

4.2 Qualitative Research:

In-depth interviews were conducted with different professionals. The length of their marriage ranges from 5 to 30 years. Expert opinions (KII) were gathered from 7 professionals – both married divorcees as well. One focus group discussion was held comprising 12 participants.

4.2.1 FGD (Focus Group Discussion):

12 married male and female participants in different age groups joined the session. Here many issues came to highlight the transformation. Here two males were 58 plus and one newly married woman and the rest was between 30 to 45. Different professionals -lawyers, corporate executives, government officials, freelancers, and entrepreneurs took part in the discussion. Old norms and family bondage were the significant factors for them in selecting a partner.

The discussion addressed six major issues:

- ❖ Women settled in Dhaka find it difficult to manage conjugal relationships with men who are not raised in Dhaka. For men, it's a bit difficult to select a partner who has a modern lifestyle and grooming in urban Dhaka city. Still, it is easier for females to marry and migrate to Dhaka. Women raised in the city find it extremely difficult to live with their husband in the village. They suffer from depression. But in recent days, both men and women face similar challenges. The reason behind that, in the old days, parents had had emotional bondage with rural people. Very often, they would force their sons or daughters to marry someone in the village. But this kind of practice is rarely found in the city nowadays.
- ❖ Nowadays, individuals have their own choices, and they have more power and influence to select partners. They are rigid in exchanging minds with those who were not born and brought up in Dhaka. Young girls and boys have a strict preference not to consider those who are not brought up in Dhaka. The gaps in the thought process can also be discerned among the students at the university level. Cultural gaps between those brought up in Dhaka and those hailed from the village are the stark realities. Similar conflicts of culture are also visible in workplaces as well.

- ❖ If young boys and girls are brought up in a congenial family environment, they can adapt very well to changing situations and their behavioral patterns are consistent.
- ❖ Marriage is a dreamy event for many brides or grooms. It's challenging to arrange a costly event if there is an unequal family's financial status. The burdens of the costs of marriage are mainly triggered by their exposure to imported fancy culture.
- ❖ The rising rate of divorce and limitless expectations of potential brides or grooms make marriage-related decisions very complicated. Parents also find it very difficult to negotiate with their children and force them to marry.
- ❖ In Dhaka city, young boys and girls educated in elite schools and colleges and overseas universities face severe difficulties in finding their desired match.

4.2.2 In-Depth Interview (1 to 11):

4.2.2.1 Case 1:

Professor: He is 57 years old and working as a Professor. He grew up in north Bengal and is a talented professional. His father was a farmer, and his mother was a homemaker. In his early life, he lived in a joint family. After his secondary education he moved to Dhaka, finished his higher secondary and tertiary education, and went overseas for higher education. In the meantime, some members of his extended family shifted to Dhaka. He came back to Bangladesh after higher studies. When he had chosen his life partner (1992), he also struggled with many issues. He could afford to choose his partner on his own. He was categorical while choosing his partner in terms of the latter's education, manner, etiquette and values. His wife was a schoolteacher. But as he was a very workaholic at an early age, it had a significant impact on marital relationships. He realized that relationships should be more understandable than mental chemistry, which is more critical to creating harmony in relationships than anything. Now they live in separation due to the priority of his work and family requirements. His children have absolute freedom to select their partner.

4.2.2.2 Case 2:

Widow retired Women: She is 64 years old. She worked for 27 years at BCIC. Before she completed her education, she married a wonderful man with an age difference of 12. She disagreed with the age differences. She took nine months to decide (1983), but her family- a father, convinced her. She felt her father selected the best one as her husband's family was too educated. Her father-in-law graduated from an Indian university, and their whole family lived in Gulshan and Banani. All engaged in the prestigious job. She was from north Bengal, studied at Rajshahi University, and her in-laws were from Noakhali. Her father did a government job but left the job for the responsibility of a big family and not to compromise dishonesty.

Experience: She underscores the importance of family dynamics, norms, education, and open-minded bonding family for a happy life. Her husband inspired her to do her job and continued. Age gap, physical attributes, and district are insignificant factors for happiness. The first child was born 7 years after her marriage. She was so happy with the family in comparison to her six sisters and brothers. Her husband was her friend, and they had a very respectful and straightforward relationship.

4.2.2.3 Case 3:

5 Years Married Professor: He is an assistant professor and 38 years old. He migrated for study purposes to Dhaka in 1996 from Munshigonj. After completing his master's when he returned from the UK, he married (2018) a woman who lived and studied in north Bengal. His family had chosen his partner and prioritized most of the selection points. He also had selection factors such as good education, tall, religious-minded, family-oriented,

and hard working. Still, he emphasizes his wife's career though she is a homemaker. He is open to her choice about homemaking or career. He is happy with his overall journey and partner selection. If women are not caring and family-oriented, it will be tough for a man to maintain a good family life.

4.2.2.4 Case 4

48 Years Old Professor and head of the department (Private University): He is a conservative professor and director of a private University. His main objection to social media is that it has a negative impact on our social life. He is very concerned about cultural transformations. His primary concern is when a student comes from a village and their father is a farmer or fisherman or political or influential person. These boys and girls are dissociated from their families. Family values cannot be imbued in their heart and soul. They are always in competition with others for unnecessary stuff. They often misbehave with their parents. Sometimes they do not study. But they take money from their parents. They take drugs or engage in crime. Sometimes when they do well and get a good job, they feel shy about family and avoid family. Parents do cry. If they engage in a relationship, they hide or embarrass their parents. They have complexities in life and relationships. Sometimes in social situations, they are not welcomed by friends. The behaviors they are exchanging, or learning are alarming sometimes. It is happening for almost every student coming from the rural areas. Also, when they take a room or start living with friends, they are open to making intimate relationships or making many more relationships. They lose respect and accountability for relationships or marriage. And their mindset changes the same way as others. Nowadays, this is the scenario of private universities. After fifty-five minutes of the conversation, he was frustrated about the new generation and relationship. To him, marriage is very complex for this generation.

4.2.2.5 Case 5:

37 years Single Woman: She is a beautiful, introverted, dominant woman and lives in a Women's hostel in the center of Dhaka. Her whole family lives in Rajshahi. She worked for a private company. She maintains close networks with different individuals working in the defense and the corporate sector. She has her own selection criteria including the material prosperity, career, and personality, Dhaka-based and physical attributes. As she is rigid in her own preferences, it is increasingly difficult for her to find the proper match.

4.2.2.6 Case 6:

Male divorcee 50: He is a creative designer and artist. He had a callous life as his first wife had physical sickness. He had a very expensive life as it was costly to maintain the family and bear treatment costs. For his tight work schedule, he could not give her much time, and she felt depressed and was suffering from mental issues. The lady went for extra-marital affairs and eventually married that man after divorcing him. This man, though a divorcee, cannot forget his first wife. Now he wants to marry again. But his selection criteria resemble the attributes of his first wife which he does not find in another woman at this age. He wants to marry a young woman, not above 30. She must be beautiful as well as educated as his first wife was. He doesn't mind marrying a widow with a daughter, but not with a boy. These very stringent selection criteria keep him waiting for marriage.

4.2.2.7 Case 7:

Female divorcee 28: The girl is 28 years old now. When she got divorced, she was a student at a private university and engaged with a professor who was already married and hid this information and married her. Later, the girl was informed, and her parents forced him to take their daughter to her in-law's house. But that man failed to manage their family and divorced her. The girl has no choice and preference now. The family will make the next decision as she could not select a man who cares for her and lives everyday life. Her family is rigid enough to find an established person in business with enormous property. Also, age is not more than 37, well established, or high profile. She is choosy but silent. She is indifferent to selecting as she is traumatized to choose a partner.

4.2.2.8 KII (1):

Owner of Marriage Media: He runs a marriage media platform. He and his wife are taking care of the business. He is 48 years old. He loves his job in finding a proper match for his client. "Matching is too tough nowadays. Every profile requires clarification of many intricate issues such as divorce clearance, educational and professional background. But individual selection factors and desires increase rapidly. Some clients are too rigid in their expectations. Their expectations are too high to find the matches. For example, BCS cadre is the most cherished criterion for urban girls. But the question remains, how many boys are employed in in civil service?"

4.2.2.9 KII (2):

Traditional Ghatak: He has 30 years of working experience as parallel work for extra earning. Every day he earns 10K and for a complete marriage he charges TK 1.5 lacs based on family reputation. He works for only elite and educated individuals or families. The profiles are categorized for girls and boys differently. Male profiles are sorted out based on elite professions or immigration in North America, Europe or Australia and New Zealand. Girl profiles are classified based on physical beauty, father's establishments, education, and residences in posh areas in Dhaka. He said divorces are very frequent nowadays. Even high-profile males, though divorced, want to marry single and very young women.

4.2.2. 10 KII (3):

Urban planner and assistant professor at a private University: She has observed this generation and the transformation of selecting a partner with examples" Somehow, I have attended a marriage ceremony where the young groom was the organization's CEO, which is very renewed. His father died very recently, days before his marriage, and they have organized nine programs, all of which were very luxurious. And the video was viral among the young generation. The young girls are watching; even one of my relative's daughters also dreams of having such a partner with a high profile and luxurious event in her dream. So when she started choosing her life partner very unintentionally, it automatically influenced others' minds. A couple and single (never married or divorced, too) have very unrealistic dreams about selecting a life partner, which makes them unhappy and their parents. Examples and reality have differences. In our early marriage days, we tried to consider feelings, respect, and family structure, which is very negligible in the young generation. They are waiting for a dreamy marriage. In reality, they feel challenged to continue the relationship." Our social media has played a big part in selecting a partner. And it is not easy to get out of these influences and trends.

4.2.2. 11 KII (4):

Executive Director of G-Social and an activist: "In urban areas, the highly educated families mostly choose the love marriage while giving freedom to the children for selecting their partners. In the same society, if the family is practicing religion, they are rarely ready to go with their children's choice. Instead, they prefer arranged marriage. While similarly valid for the country's urban, peri-urban, and rural settings. So, marriage is a hugely complex and multi-dimensional institution in Bangladesh that eventually considers economic concerns, social traditions, and social activism. In addition to that, I also see considerable differences in the marriage culture according to the religions. The culture of acceptance of cross-religious marriage is significantly poor in Bangladesh. Other factors include financial solvency, social status, secured job, connection with influential persons. So we can summarize in a way that marriage is not a simple discourse in the context of Bangladesh."

5. Analysis and Discussion

The findings of the current research reveal many intriguing issues pertaining to the selection of partners for marriage. There is no doubt about the stupendous changes taking place in the "marriage market". While there

are visible changes in recent years about marriage decision making, it is also true that the traditional practices such as the role of the family, lineages, status and so forth have not faded away completely. Therefore, the selection criteria are neither completely rational, nor incremental. The overall decision-making process is quite complex. Very often, contradictory responses are also found in the responses which not only state the mindset of the respondents but also the complex features of societies undergoing transformations.

Family remains a dominant force though not the absolute actor in the selection of the partners. Since the old family structure is receding too fast with the influx of the “modern values”, individual choice is getting prominence gradually. While the process is easier for men, not so easy for women. There is no doubt that the vulnerability of women persists in diverse aspects of society. Nevertheless, there are glimpses of changes in Dhaka city. The outright imposition of the decision of the family over the girls is under trial. The findings reveal that girls still honor the family, but they have their own criteria for choosing their partners.

The growth of the economy along the capitalist line, urban secluded life, economic independence and so forth have given impetus to relative empowerment of women to make their own decision regarding marriage. In the Bangladesh context, globalization heralded a new era of economic growth. Bangladesh became able to grab the opportunities offered by the deregulated international markets. The readymade garments industry is a case in point. With the reinvigorated economic environment in the cities, massive construction activities were carried out for the fast-growing lower middle class and middle classes. In addition, these classes are in the process of transforming their lifestyles, consumption patterns and religious and ideological spaces. English medium or quality education demands qualified partners. Where in Bangladesh 3% of the total population are highly educated in terms of title or family status means heritage. They are sensitive to selecting partners and consider any limitations. These classes have easy access to the internet, satellite television and other modern amenities. Social media plays a big role in selecting partners. This new generation of young men and women is used to seeing or feeling or dreaming of a variety of lifestyles that influence their behavioral patterns in demanding more attributes.

Amidst the transition, one significant challenge is aging. When women are more engaged in the economy, they become more in control of taking their own decisions than their families. They have their own voice and when gender plays a patriarchal role in relationships illogically or logically, it has an impact. And the average age of marriage increases in the country. In Japan, it is 39 and Sri Lanka 28. Dhaka is likely to ride on the same bandwagon.

6. Conclusion:

This study examines partner selection in arranged marriages in Dhaka within a broader socio-economic context. Findings show that modernization, urbanization, education, and employment have reshaped marriage preferences, with increasing emphasis on education, career, status, and personal attributes. Notably, women—especially from the educated middle class—are gaining greater participation in decision-making. However, traditional and modern values coexist, creating a complex and sometimes conflicting set of selection criteria. While signs of social change and partial empowerment are evident, a clear, stable pattern has not yet emerged, indicating the need for further rigorous research.

Author contributions

The author in this paper have made a significant contribution with full concern of direct participation and intellectual contribution to this work and let it to reaches for publication as original work.

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Data Synthesis and Analysis

Data were synthesized using meta-analysis (fixed/random effects) with heterogeneity assessed by I^2 and Cochran's Q. Where pooling was not feasible, narrative and thematic syntheses were applied. Network meta-analysis and meta-regression were conducted where appropriate, in accordance with PRISMA and Cochrane guidelines.

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