Spouse Selection across Generations in Punjab, Pakistan

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This Study aims at scrutinizing the dynamics of spouse selection in Punjab, Pakistan across two generations (parents and their children) in Punjab, Pakistan. These comparisons are made to understand: how behavioral change is taking place in the lifespan of the engaged actors specifically on the issue of spouse selection and family and kinship generally in a transitional country.

Background

Spouse selection refers loosely to the wide range of social behaviors, attitudes and intimate relationship agreements ranging from long to short-term in which individuals engage prior to marriage (Schwartz & Scott 2000). The selection of future spouses may range from autonomous, in which individuals have free choice to select their spouses, to arranged, in which usually parents or kin members select and negotiate for spouses. Moreover the process of choosing potential spouse can be distinguished in accordance with traditional/non-industrialized to modern/industrialized societies.

It is believed that modernization promotes individualization, thus directing individual's personal autonomy towards choosing his/her life partner independently (Halman & Ester 1995), whereas in traditional societies marriage being more than merely union of two individuals is still an alliance between families under traditional ideas of collectivity.

Thus, marriages, organized by elders, ally not only the potential families but additionally congregate their socio-economic and political statuses as well. Though free choice of spouse occurred to some extent throughout human evolutionary history, nonetheless it does not appear to have been the predominant form of marriage. Direct contrary to individual's free choice of a spouse, studies confirm that parents have attempted to influence the mating behavior of their children (Apostolou 2008; Buunk, Park, & Dubbs 2008; Apostolou 2007a; Apostolou 2007b; Haselton & Buss 2000; Talbani & Hasanali 2000).

Spouse selection in Punjab: Socio-cultural context

In order to understand to what extent parents and their children (male and female) agree or differ in spouse selection criteria and how some external factors influence their choices, it is essential to know about Punjabi kinship, family and marriage systems. Marriage institution in Punjab is largely heterosexual and entails religious, legal and cultural rights and duties of marital performance. Choice of spouse is generally guided by the two most common sets of social rules; comprehensive endogamy and incomprehensive exogamy. Traditional extended family structures

55

revolve around a huge variety of social attitudes and practices towards marriage related issues.

In Punjabi society, normally there are three match making means. First is at individual level by his/her self match or personal choice, secondly, at parental level in which parents' involvement and decision is privileged. And lastly potential spouse is introduced by third liaison party i.e. relative, kin group, friend or marriage bureau. Spouse selection by parents is most prevalent matchmaking mean. For spouse selection, Children are provided with marital and relationship choices criteria that is often predefined by parents and kin groups. Groom and bride are not the only ones whose interests are involved in their marriage, nor are they the only ones with absolute control over it. Both sets of parents are engaged as well. Together with parental control, spouse selection is additionally conditioned by more prosaic factors such as kin group, caste, class, lineage, religious sects and exchange of particular shared value system.

Juxtaposing traditional spouse choices and social change in traditional society, Qadeer (2006) confirms that Pakistan is in transition. At this point, traditional and modern values for spouse selection coexist (lesser visible in rural areas as compare to urban areas), and an individual may follow either, depending on his / her exposure to change, or upon family in order to choose a spouse. Parents want obedience, the maintenance of blood purity and perhaps save their older ages by controlling the sexual behavior of their children. On the other hand, children may have some other criteria for their spouses; similarities of education, profession or ideas about how to live after marriage. Thus, the controversial situation leads to the inquiries; are traditional spouse selection procedures being substituted or preserved? How different criteria of spouse selection across generations affect the family life and marital relations in a developing society? It is necessary to take account of social, cultural as well as economic factors to explain changes across time and space in spouse selection process and this research is an attempt to do so.

Objectives

One important task of this research was to identify particular characteristics of potential spouses that are considered to be more desirable, between generations. In doing so, the purpose is not merely to enumerate or enlist ideally desired traits of potential spouses, but to know about the way a social institute (family) treats its members based on their gender hierarchies and ideologies. In this scenario, key objectives of the study are: to understand kinship, family and marriage system being important to contextualize the process of spouse selection; to identify and compare the spouse selection preferences of parents and their children.

Sample and Research Methodology

Through snowball sampling, a sample of twelve families (six in urban and six in rural areas) were selected. An ideal family to be interviewed for this study was considered which could have both parents willing to be interviewed with two unmarried children (son-daughter) of marriageable age. Thus, a total of 21 in-

depth face-to-face interviews were conducted in Lahore, and, a total of 19 interviews were conducted in Habib Abad (rural area). The criteria to select sample from the young generation respondents was their education level and type of education system. Those young respondents of marriageable age were included in the sample if they were acquiring education at graduation level under co-education system in any university in Lahore. On the other hand, in Habib Abad, young respondents of marriageable age were selected with same education level but from non-co-education system. In order to collect data from the sampled population, two semi-structured interview guides were prepared on the issue of spouse selection and marriage; one for each generation. Interviews were tape recorded and then were transcribed into written form for the purpose of comparative data analysis.

Findings and theoretical interpretation

Research findings encircled around the study objectives reveal that traditional culture, social stratification, residential proximity of kinship, intimacy ties with networks of relatedness, and family structure affect individuals' disposition in a given situation to act and shape his/her preferences for spouse selection accordingly. Further, some factors external to individual i.e. co-education, exposure to modernity, perceptions of idealism developed by media, and perceptions about social world shape and reshape the choices of spouse selection.

Individualism versus Collectivism
This study heavily criticizes and denies the westerns over simplified typology of either 'individual' or 'collective' (Berthoud 2000; and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). In Punjab simultaneously being as traditional and transitional society, individuals either parent or children are not standing exclusively on the two opposite edges of the monochrome of individualism and collectivism. Hence, they contextualize their criteria and choices of spouse selection in order to make compatibility with each other's. Further, the study criticizes the construction of the pyramid of Filter Theory for choosing a spouse (Kerckhoff & Davis 1962; Klimek 1979) This may be applicable in the Western or modern society but this study partially agreeing with the filter theory explanations, assume on the basis of research findings in a traditional society, that it is not solely individual who is filtering the expected spouses but his/her family too. In addition, I do not agree with the pyramid which it offers.

Based on previous research findings the study suggests that Biological Filter is not of outmost preference in the traditional process of spouse selection. For commonalty, before he go to Final stage of Decision Filter, the pyramid always starts from Social Filter and the very next is a Complementary Needs filter followed by Biological Filter. A little attention is paid to Psychological Filter while there is almost no space for Trial Filter.

Generations in accordance
Some similarities between generation study finds out, one of them is their very first concern about individual's identity. It was observed that predominantly in both urban and rural areas, parents and children were very concerned about their

57

would-be daughter's/son's-in-law and spouse's identity, his/her personal and family repute, family's social standing in the hierarchal social stratification and lineage group. Nobody from the respondents; either rural/urban, parents/children, boys/girls showed their inclination to develop relationship with individuals belong to hieratically lower social class. Second similarity that study finds is about the issue of respect and taking care of parents; every parent was expecting it and every child was confirming it. Generally fathers are regarded as household head and the final decision makers of the matrimonial issues. Children feel more comfortable with mothers when discussing about their marriage issues as compare to father. Next accordance between opinions (between the parents and their Girls) was the would-be in-law family's small size. However boys were not concerned about it.

Generations in contrast

Contextual choices do not mean that there is no conflict between the parents and their children; indeed there is. Parents want to maintain the social and cultural capital (as elaborated by Bourdieu, 1986) through the traditional matchmaking patterns; arrange marriages, and their children tend to follow the semi-autonomous matchmaking; in other words arranged-love marriages. Not a single parent was in favor of absolute love marriage or absolute independent decisions of their children for choosing their life partners. Almost every parent tends to have some control over the marriage decision with predefined traditional ideologies of how to marry and marry to whom? Whereas almost all children think that no doubt parents' consent should be there, but the most preference must be given to children's opinion/proposed spouse. Rural parents viewed the traditional matchmaking pattern, 'arranged' as more preferred, more idealized, and more successful and were adherent, whereas urban parents though preferred 'arrange' matchmaking but they were in favor of taking children' consent before finalizing the marriage decision.

Urban parents were verily different for considering 'autonomous' choices of their children till they themselves verify the family background and reputation, whereas rural parents showed disliking for 'autonomous' choices and thought it against the 'family unity'. Parents' acceptance for girls' autonomous choices was as equal as boys in urban area, while in rural area it was considered a stigma for family and discouraged strictly. The case for male children was different from female children, as boys are considered the main future source of income thus there must be some relaxations for boys.

Intergenerational differences of opinions related to kinship ties, family formation and marriage choice came to a greater degree as more controversial. Divergences of criteria for spouse selection actually were the ways of perceiving ideals differently, though ideals were same. Contextualizing their choices, rural parents preferences take start from marrying their children within close relatives, and then gradually move down to extended relatives, next to Biraderi. Rural children do not prefer Biraderi marriages but marriages within equal. Rural parents' idealism of 'family unity' means 'joint family system', whereas their children perceive 'family unity' beyond the residence boundaries and distance proximities.

The major differences between the two generations came forward more in rural area than in urban although it is anticipated that there is more harmony and more collective thinking in the traditional set-up. Differences of opinion over the issues of; how to choose a spouse, who is more careful as daughter-in-law, Biraderi marriages, how the parents should decide, living arrangements and composition of family were clearly high between the parents and children in rural area as compare to urban.

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