Mate Selection, Caste Norms, and Female Decision-Making in Indian Marital Systems: A Systematic Review

**Abstract**

**Introduction**: In India, marriage is a complicated social institution that is firmly rooted in caste-based, religious, and cultural customs. It is not just a union between two people. Despite changes throughout time, the mate-selection process still reflects and perpetuates structural inequality, especially with regard to gender and caste. Caste endogamy is still a major organizing force in the traditional practice of arranged marriage, which is frequently controlled by family elders and social conventions. In many situations, women's autonomy in selecting spouses is still disputed and constrained, even in the face of increased female education, work, and urbanization.

**Objective:** The present studyexamines the intersection of mate selection and the role of women within the institution of marriage in India.

**Methodology:** Drawing on a wide body of literature from various databases including PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar with the help of particular keywords and phrases such as marriage formation, marriage & caste, obstacles & opportunity in the process of marriage, cultural factors in shaping marriage patterns, age at marriage and marital satisfaction have been used. Conceptual flowchart for the systematic review has been prepared to trace the historical roots of arranged marriages and examines how patriarchal structures and caste-based restrictions have long governed marital choices, often at the expense of women’s autonomy.

**Results:** The review highlights the gradual but meaningful rise in women’s participation in premarital decisions, especially in urban and educated contexts, along with emerging trends such as love marriages, hybrid marriage forms, and the use of digital matchmaking platforms. It also analyses the extent of women’s role in post-marital domains such as household decision-making, reproductive choices, and financial autonomy.

**Conclusion:** Despite progress, the review emphasizes that structural inequalities especially those linked to caste, class, and geography continue to limit full autonomy for many women. The findings underscore the need for policy interventions and social reforms aimed at dismantling patriarchal barriers and enabling equitable participation in marital decisions. This study contributes to the broader discourse on gender equality by contextualizing the evolving role of women in Indian marital systems through a multidimensional and intersectional lens.

**Keywords:** Marriage,inequality, policy, traditional, women’s, autonomy

**Introduction:**

Marriages in India, since the early period, are mostly characterized by arranged- marriages, where parents and family members plays detrimental role in overall mate selection process (Prakash and Singh, 2013). It is a social institution that is of such fundamental importance that the ideals of marriage and married life in a nation have a direct influence on the nation's well-being and progress, or to put it another way, the opposite is also true. This proposition is completely supported by the history of the Indo-Aryans, which demonstrates that it is accurate. The variations of their ancient and venerable civilization can be traced back to the progressive changes in their views of marriage and married life, as well as the status that was allocated to women in society (Shastri,2014). In our country India, marriage is typically sanctified and exalted with widespread social acceptance as a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence. That is why it is regarded as a divine connection between two people; so, by the marriage vows, two people enter the realm of emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual unity (Saini, 2022). In addition to it, marriage is the most important family event in India, powerfully evoking conceivable commitment to the community, kinship link, traditional value, passionate sentiment and financial resource (Singh & Pandey, 2023). “One is incomplete and considered unholy if they do not marry” (Chowdhury, 2008). People use social networks or matchmaker to locate potential bride or groom of appropriate match based on their socio- economic and most important caste background (Choudhary2010). In most arranged marriages, the man and the woman belonged to the same caste, further restricting a woman’s options (Khaitan,2020). In continuation of above paragraph, the questions like whether she got the chance to meet him, talk to him, whether she, at least, has some say in her marriage, whether parents seemed opinion before fixing the marriage, etc. are always ignored (Prakash and Singh, 2013). After marriage, women typically assumed roles shaped by their husbands' homes where major financial and family decisions were left to male members, and their ability to make judgments was frequently restricted to domestic matters (Jejeebhoy, 1995). If there were any career goals, they were usually pushed aside in favour of family obligations and further the authority of elders next limited women's liberty in joint family arrangements, especially in South Asia (Uberoi, 2006). However, role of women in family and societal decision-making processes has long been a subject of academic and policy interest, particularly in patriarchal societies like India where social norms continue to limit women's autonomy in personal and family decisions, particularly with regard to marriage, notwithstanding notable progress achieved toward gender equality (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001). Because of the intersection of modernizing pressures and traditional cultural beliefs, urban areas like Patna present a unique case study in this regard, providing an intricate landscape for gendered interactions and also the environment of urban Bihar, especially Patna, is important for gendered study since the degree of autonomy frequently differs across regions, class, caste, and rural-urban divisions.

India is distinguished by its continued prevalence of arranged marriage and the narrow definition of who is considered an appropriate marriage partner. Due to custom of arranged marriage, women don’t have the power to choose their spouse (Pasupathi, M. (2023). In the past, neither the bride nor the groom was informed of their prospective partner's identity or asked for their consent (Allendorf and Pandian, 2016). Marriage was frequently viewed as a contract between families rather than individuals, in which women were traded in order to establish political, social, or financial ties (Coontz, 2005). Furthermore, women's autonomy was historically severely limited in patriarchal countries (Kandiyoti, 1988). Male family members dominated decisions about who, when, and how to marry, which served to further solidify the idea that women were property rather than free agents. Women were viewed as major caregivers and lineage bearers in many traditional cultures, and they had limited access to education (Lerner, 1986). In addition to it women also played a very limited role in pre-marriage decision-making in premodern societies. Family honour, dowry negotiations, and the development of socioeconomic relationships were given top priority in marriage arrangements (Chaudhuri, 1993) and their own goals and wants were subordinated to the interests of the entire family. In societies where arranged marriages were common, women frequently had little or no chance to meet possible husbands prior to the wedding and the process was rigorously regulated by societal expectations, religious duties, and parental authority (Mody, 2008) but as time passed, women were gradually given more authority to actively participate in life decisions, including marriage, as a result of the rise of feminist movements in the 19th and 20th centuries as well as changes in educational and economic systems (Freedman, 2002). Young women are increasingly exercising their agency in premarital choices including going to school, picking a career, and choosing a life   partner. However, family expectations, social obligations, and community standards sometimes impact or even override these choices (Desai & Andrist, 2010; Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001). In spite of this, as with the passage of time, society has also undergone a significant alteration. (Allendorf and Pandian, 2016). It is assumed that a husband’s income would be less important to the marriage contract than in the past, particularly for women with advanced degrees. But recent research indicates that is not the case: male breadwinning continues to be central to not only marriage formation but also marital stability (Fan, 2010). In traditional society, ‘marrying up’, meant marrying into higher class or caste. But in present society, marriage revolves around within caste or sometimes outside caste, higher class, high education with government job (Corwin, 1977; Munshi, 2019; Grover, 2017). These days, choosing a partner entails three crucial considerations: the selection field, the selection criteria, and the selection party (Duisters, Duysters & Man, 2011). Although children today believe in joint selection—that is, parents and children choose partners together—individual selection—that is, children choosing partners on their own—is still not unheard of. Parents choose partners based on factors that differ greatly from those of children (Mondal, 2019). This scenario is now clearly appeared in a Bihar like lower economic state (Empowered Action Group) as well. It was found that “the tendency for women to marry men with higher incomes still persisted”. For the younger cohort, a recent study found that economic potential, trustworthiness, and intelligence of the prospective partner are increasingly more valued than other traits, and this is true for both men and women (Prakash and Singh 2013). Marriage, then, and now is never just a matter between two people but usually involves heavily both families if not both communities. The mate-selection process continues to be deliberate, pragmatic and transactional. During this process, the social status of the prospective marriage partner comes under intense scrutiny. It is widely believed that marriages involving families in similar socioeconomic classes are more stable and successful than those that straddle different classes. Hypergamy, or marrying up, is acceptable or even expected for women but almost never for men (Fan, 2017). Assortative mating has for long received considerable world-wide attention from researchers of family studies and demography. In earlier times, marriages between individuals with similar characteristics such as origin, religion, social status, and education make up the predominant pattern. Later, there has been growing interest in analyzing the trends and patterns of educational assortative mating in developed as well as developing countries. Sociologists view marriage as a set of responsibilities and roles that apply to a man and a woman whose union has been socially sanctioned with the labels "husband and wife." In contrast to other nations, India views marriage as a socio-religious ceremony rather than a civil contract. Although the way that marriages are celebrated is evolving, socio-cultural norms continue to influence the majority of marriages (Wimalasena, 2016). Another study agreed upon the transformations in Asian marriage systems under the impact of increase in literacy level, urbanization, and employment. There is no dearth of studies on educational homogamy in developed countries, but the significance of educational attainment in mate selection remains relatively less explored in developing nations, particularly in India. With improvement in overall literacy, the role of education in mate selection is expected to undergo significant changes in India as well. It is rightly pointed out by a recent study that, in order to highlight the changes in marriage patterns in Asia, it is equally important to examine who marries whom in terms of age, education, and other attributes (like job profile) in addition to timing of entry into marriage (Borkotoky and Gupta, 2016). Assortative match-making can be positive or negative. Positive match -making occurs for traits that are complements- for example, education, intelligence, attractiveness, and so forth. On the contrary, negative match- making would be optimal for traits that are substitutes such as wage-earning power (Prakash and Singh,2013). The region with highest female literacy had the highest-level educational homogamy and the region with lowest female literacy had low homogamy but a higher percentage of hypergamy. Therefore, it may be concluded that female literacy is the most important determinant of change in marriage patterns in India (Borkotoky and Gupta, 2016). Modern education has undoubtedly brought greater access to economic resources as well as media exposure among both men and women of the present generation. These have also been found as contributing factors to late marriages, diminishing role of parents in mate selection, increased prevalence of self-selected marriages and greater space for personal choices in mate-selection process in most parts of the developed and developing world (Prakash and Singh,2013). On the other side, many researches have also shown that an increase in women’s education all over the world, educational hypergamy (women marrying men with higher education) has been decreasing over the last few decades in both developed and developing countries; this trend, often referred to as “the end of hypergamy,” is considered to have broad implications for family dynamics and gender equality (Lin, Desai and Chen, 2020). Gender studies and social geography have long focused on women's decision-making roles, both before and after marriage. Women's decisions about their education and careers are also included in pre-marriage decision-making. Girls may face pressure to marry young in some traditional cultures, which might limit their desire to pursue higher education (UNICEF, 2021). In addition, the idea of consent has taken centre stage in discussions nowadays. Many nations' legal frameworks now require both parties to give their explicit permission before getting married, giving women the power to express their choices and reject unsuitable matches (UN Women, 2020). On the other hand, more progressive settings encourage young women to start employment and continue their education before thinking about getting married.

Women's autonomy has historically been restricted by patriarchal institutions in many nations, which frequently assign them to subordinate positions in both natal and marital households (Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1990; Kandiyoti, 1988). However, women's involvement in important life decisions is gradually changing due to changing socioeconomic circumstances, education, and heightened awareness of gender rights (Mukherjee, 2016). Considerable changes have been noted in modern society. Women now have more autonomy due to economic development and education (Nanda, 2011). One example of this shift is the increase in love marriages, especially in urban areas. Women are increasingly choosing their spouses on their own, frequently taking into account personal goals, compatibility, and shared beliefs rather than just family pressure. Additionally, prenuptial agreements, premarital cohabitation, and postponed marriages for professional advancement clearly point to a greater role for women in premarital discussions and decision-making (Cherlin, 2010).

In many societies, the dynamics of decision-making after marriage have changed significantly. Women now have more power over family decisions, financial planning, and childrearing due to dual-career households, nuclear families, and changing gender norms (Sarkar, 2017). Family planning is a key area where women's decision-making power is crucial and the ability to decide when and how many children to have is often mediated by access to reproductive health services, cultural norms, and the support of a partner (WHO, 2022). Empowered women are more likely to seek health care, use contraception, and make informed reproductive choices. Today, a large number of married women actively seek career advancement, bargain with spouses over domestic duties, and make decisions about retirement, relocation, and reproduction. Women in traditional households could experience pressure to put their home duties ahead of their professional goals. However, working moms and wives are now more accepted due to changes in gender roles, especially among urban and educated portions of society and now women frequently have more negotiating power in domestic matters when they continue to work after marriage (Sen, 1999; Agarwal, 1994). Taking the previous argument forward it can be said that there are several key factors which have contributed to these transformations in women’s life that is access to higher education which enhanced women's decision-making capabilities (World Bank, 2012) , laws protecting women's rights in marriage, property, and employment have expanded their autonomy (CEDAW, 1979) along with globalization, urbanization, and exposure to diverse cultures have diluted rigid traditional norms (Inglehart & Norris, 2003).

From being passive recipients of family decisions to actively directing their own lives, women's roles in premarital and postmarital decision-making have changed. Despite notable advancements, full autonomy is nevertheless restricted by enduring institutional, cultural, and financial restrictions. In order to overcome these obstacles and guarantee that women's voices are given equal weight in all areas of life, continuous efforts in the areas of education, legal reform, and cultural change are needed.

**Need for the Study:** In a society like India where arranged marriages are very common, and society is male dominated, it is crucial to understand the women’s freedom on her marriage especially in mate selection and attaining knowledge about the person that she is going to marry. In India, the demand for prestigious job particularly government job is very high among eligible bride and grooms. And it is belief of every family that in government job, they will receive a good marriage proposal. Therefore, presently most of the marriages are influenced by status of government job related hypergamy followed by homogamy phenomena too.

## **Data & Methodology:**

This review aimed to synthesize current evidence on the topic mate selection and female decision making in India. A systematic search was conducted in various databases including PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar with the help of particular keywords and phrases such as marriage formation, marriage & caste, obstacles & opportunity in the process of marriage, cultural factors in shaping marriage patterns, age at marriage and marital satisfaction.

This review synthesizes key findings from global and regional studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the changing landscape of marriage, women's autonomy, and the complex interplay of tradition and modernity in shaping marital experiences. Studies were included mostly the research paper based on India. It also includes few other countries work on this theme, to show the scenario of marriage in detail manner. Total 101 articles were reviewed after screening. Rest no other exclusion criteria were fixed. Titles and abstracts were screened by themes and study design, and full texts were assessed for eligibility. Data were extracted, and findings were synthesized using theme-based method. Based on the research major themes related to the study. In this present study, the literature has been separated into different themes such as follows:

1. Women's Autonomy and Decision-Making in Marriage
2. Socio-Economic, Demographic and Educational Influences on Marriage Patterns
3. Marriage Formation: Arranged vs. Self-Arranged Marriages
4. Beyond Matchmaking: Digital Marriage Platforms
5. Changing Family Dynamics and Gender Roles
6. Marital Outcomes: Satisfaction, Health, and Agency

Taking into account the theoretical concept of the study, the initiative has been taken to draw the conceptual framework for the study of the literature review. It helps us to maintain a flow in the study and stick to particular themes.

**Marriages System**

**Modernization and Technology** helps for increasing women’s participation in marriage decision

1. Socio -Economic Status (Income, Education, Employment, Assets)
2. Demographic Characteristics (Age, Religion, Caste, Class, Years of Marriage
3. Social background characteristics

**Individual and Couple level Factors**

1. Social norms around marriage (e.g., arranged, Love marriages and self-arranged)
2. Gender roles and family dynamics
3. Social homogamy and cultural matching in mate selection
4. Family & Cultural Structures: Patriarchal norms, family control and cultural practices

**Social and Cultural Context**

**Level of marital Satisfaction**

1. Digital platforms facilitating partner search and relationship formation
2. Trust and governance mechanisms on digital platforms

**Institutional and Technological Environment**

1. Marital Outcomes: Women’s Autonomy & Empowerment, freedom of mobility, household decision making, reproductive decision
2. Marriage life Satisfaction, Security & Stability

**Relationship Processes and Outcomes**

**Figure 1 Flow Chart for Review of Literature (Prepared by Author)**

Before going to the literature review, it is essential to understand that how socio-economic & demographic factors (education, employment, age, religion, caste, years of marriage) shape women’s autonomy both directly and indirectly through their influence on family and cultural structures (Patriarchal norms, family control and cultural practices). The type of marriage arrangement (arranged, semi-arranged, self-arranged or love marriage) reflects both family control and individual agency, influencing marital satisfaction and empowerment. Social change, modernization, and technology are catalysts for shifting norms, increasing women’s participation in marital decisions and transforming traditional practices. Marital outcomes- such as autonomy, household decision making process, reproductive health, security and marital satisfaction are the result of these intersecting factors, with greater intervention generally leading to more positive outcomes for women.

This framework provides a comprehensive lens for analyzing how structural, cultural, and individual factors interact to shape women’s experiences in marriage.

## **Women's Autonomy and Decision-Making in Marriage:**

Women's autonomy in decision-making, particularly within marriage, is crucial for both their well-being and the overall health of the family and community. It encompasses the ability to make choices about various aspects of life, including reproductive health, healthcare, and household finances. This autonomy is strongly linked to women's empowerment and overall socio-economic development. Decision making has been considered as the most important contributor for women’s autonomy and empowerment (Kabir & Jahan, 2013) which holds true for a traditional society like India where the male has been predominantly a decision-maker. The Indian family has been a dominant institution in the life of the individual and in life of the community. Families in India adhere to a patriarchal ideology, follow the patrilineal rule of descent, are patrilocal, have familistic value orientations, and support traditional gender role preferences. In addition, families in India are patrilocal there is a widespread perception that the Indian family is robust, secure, intimate, resilient, and long-lasting (Varshini & Naachimuthu, 2018). While looking into the women’s autonomy of India compared to its Neighbouring countries shows that the autonomy of Pakistani women belonging to Islamic country, have less autonomy and control over their lives than do women in India (Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001). The position of women in Bangladesh shows a great deal of respect in society for their responsibilities as mothers; yet, when it comes to their positions as wives or daughters-in-law, things take a very different turn. A woman's level of autonomy and the ability to make decisions regarding her own life increases when she becomes a mother (Barkat,2008). Panday (2021), shows the women's participation in domestic decision-making in Patna Metropolitan City, Bihar. The study objectives were to determine the socioeconomic elements affecting women's empowerment in Patna and to gauge the level of women's involvement in household decision-making. Findings suggests that about 45% of women were treated equally when it came to family decision-making.

Jejeebhoy (2002) work examines the similarities and differences between rural Indian women's and their husbands' perceptions of various aspects of women's autonomy. It also looks into how much each partner's perception of women's autonomy influences different reproductive outcomes, such as contraception, unmet need, recent fertility, and spousal communication. Results shows that women and their spouses loosely agree on the aspects of women's autonomy at the home.

The global level scenario reflects that from the study by Emran et al. (2013) study explores how education affects individual autonomy in marital decisions within the context of arranged marriages in Vietnam. The authors analyze household survey data to assess whether increased education levels—especially among women—translate into greater freedom in choosing a spouse. The finding indicates that higher educational attainment is strongly associated with a decline in arranged marriages and a rise in self-choice or jointly arranged unions. The paper argues that education empowers individuals, particularly women, to negotiate or resist traditional norms, thereby enhancing their agency in crucial life decisions. The research contributes to broader discussions on how human capital development intersects with cultural and familial practices in shaping marriage outcomes.

## **Socio-Economic and Educational Influences on Marriage Patterns:**

The study carried out on a global scale about the marital status of women revealed that it is associated with many outcome variables. Research work of Jejeebhoy and Sathar in 2001 emphasized on how religion and region can affect women’s status. The study by Yabiku (2005) examines how non-family experiences, such as education and employment, influence the age at which people marry in societies undergoing rapid social andeconomic changes. The research focuses on Nepal, a country transitioning from traditional, family-centred norms to more modern, individualistic lifestyles. Another piece of research that was carried out in Bangladesh by Ahmed et.al. (2018) sought to determine the ways in which higher education can empower women's agency. There has been a drop in the percentage of graduates who are actively participating in the labor force, despite the fact that the percentage of women in Bangladesh who have completed their higher education has been increasing.

Study conducted by Borkotoky & Gupta (2016) uses data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) to investigate variations in educational homogamy among Indian couples throughout various marital cohorts. It demonstrates how patterns of educational matching have changed throughout time, impacted by variables including economic background, religion, and place of living. Chandrasekhar (2010) Pointed out that women with higher levels of education tend to marry later and have their first child later. As a result, they are better equipped to make informed decisions regarding marriage and childbirth because they have access to information and opportunities. The age at marriage and first birth is greatly influenced by regional customs, religious beliefs, and cultural norms. For example, because of long-standing traditions, early marriage is more common in some parts of India. The article by South et.al. (2016) explores how gender imbalances in India’s population affect marriage patterns. Specifically, it looks at how the number of available women compared to men in a region influences when and whom people marry, and whether marriages are arranged or chosen by the couple. The study also shows that broader demographic trends, like gender imbalances, can have real effects on personal relationships and traditional marriage practices in India.

Beutel and Axinn (2002), in their article “Social Change, Gender, and Educational Attainment”, explore how broader processes of social change affect educational outcomes for men and women, particularly in developing societies. Using longitudinal data from rural Nepal, the study investigates the gendered patterns of schooling in relation to family organization, economic development, and evolving social norms. The authors find that educational attainment is significantly shaped by both structural factors (such as school availability and economic resources) and cultural expectations tied to gender.

## **Marriage Formation: Arranged vs. Self-Arranged Marriages:**

Work of Parkin primarily concerned with variations in the degree to which the marriage partners individually have the right to pick their wives, as opposed to having their choices made for them by their elders in society. Weddings that are based on the latter practice are regularly criticized in the West for being arranged marriages. The practice is equally applicable to other Asian migrants, such as those from mostly Hindu India and the Islamic Middle East and North Africa. However, in Britain, they are primarily considered to be a characteristic of the immigrant Muslim Pakistani community (Parkin,2021).

Diamond Smith.et.al.2020 work on Nepal emphasized on the ways in which the nature of the process of marriage formation is changing as a result of increased communication, which is made easier by the availability of technology, and which may result in improved relationships after marriage. Young women and even young men may be gaining greater agency in their household and relationships as a result of increased access to and utilization of technology. This is because technology enables them to act more on their own impulses to communicate, which is something that has traditionally been permitted in this society. However, despite the fact that couples are able to get to know each other before to getting married, there is still a fear of how society would perceive this practice, which may potentially limit the amount to which a relationship can develop. Within the context of Indian marriage, Behera et al. (2011) found that the husband is seen as the head of the household and the primary breadwinner. Additionally, sexual faithfulness and monogamy are shown as goals for the marriage relationship between the husband and wife. Both sexes are subjected to a significant amount of pressure from society to enter into marriage; nonetheless, the majority of people marry without giving any consideration to whether or not they want to get married. Findings reveal that having a marriage that is performed under pressure might lead to a worsening of the mental condition of the individual who is suffering from mental illness. Kumari et.al.2019. study has made a substantial effort to comprehend how women's involvement in choosing a spouse is changing throughout generations and how this affects other social behaviours in the Indian context. The results of this study have made it abundantly evident that women's involvement in choosing a spouse has changed between the 1960s and 2000s, and that education, domicile, and religion all have an impact on this process.

Alexander et al. (2006) conducted a study titled "Romance and Sex: Pre-Marital Partnership Formation among Young Women and Men, Pune District, India" that looked at how young people in Pune's rural and urban slum areas navigate romantic and sexual relationships in spite of social norms. This article examines how young people in Pune District, India, form romantic and sexual partnerships before marriage using both qualitative and survey data. The changing nature of marriage customs in India is examined by Allendorf and Pandian (2016), who focus on the fall of completely arranged marriages and the growth of more independent spouse selection. They track generational shifts and investigate the emerging trend of "semi-arranged" marriages, in which parents are still engaged but give individuals greater control over the ultimate choice, using survey data and qualitative interviews. According to their finding’s, fully arranged weddings are still common even though their number has decreased. The most notable change is the increased participation of women in choosing a husband, particularly among educated, urban people. Banerjee et. al. 2013. investigates the influence of caste on arranged marriages among middle-class Indians. Utilizing a unique dataset from matrimonial advertisements in a major newspaper, the researchers analysed preferences and matching patterns in the marriage market. The study found a significant preference for marrying within one's own caste. Both men and women were more likely to respond to matrimonial ads from individuals of the same caste, even when other attributes like education were less favourable. Study conducted by Jejeebhoy, S. J., & Raushan, M. R. (2022) titled "Marriage Without Meaningful Consent and Compromised Agency in Married Life: Evidence from Married Girls in Jharkhand, India" examined how different types of marriage arrangements affect young women's lives. The researchers analysed data from 1,991 married girls and young women aged 15–21 in Jharkhand, categorizing marriages into three types: 1. Self-arranged marriages: Where the girl independently chose her husband. 2. Semi-arranged marriages: Where the girl had some acquaintance with her future husband before marriage. 3.Fully family-arranged marriages: Where the girl had no prior contact with her husband before marriage. Further it underscores the importance of meaningful consent in marriage decisions. Promoting girls' rights to choose their partners can lead to more positive outcomes in their married lives. However, addressing marital violence requires broader interventions beyond the type of marriage arrangement.

In order to define marital roles and marriage conceptions, Kline et.al. (2012) discovered that young adults in the US and Asia consistently selected love/caring, trust/honesty, supportiveness, and respect as essential qualities of a good wife, good husband, and good marriage conceptions, as well as their opposing qualities for a bad wife, bad husband, and bad marriage conceptions. A crucial aspect of these responsibilities, according to Asian young people, is the emphasis on family and home. Adults in the US and Asia similarly identified communication and faithfulness as essential components of marriage roles and conceptions. These results imply that young adults in Asian and American cultures share a comparable set of traits when considering marriage and marital responsibilities.

Ghimire et.al. (2006) study entitled as “Social change, premarital nonfamily experience, and spouse choice in an arranged marriage society” published in American *Journal of Sociology, 111*(4), 1181–1218 investigated the effects of nonfamily experiences on involvement in choosing a first spouse in a society that practices arranged marriages. To explain how a wide range of nonfamily experiences could result in increased involvement in the spouse selection process, the authors created a theoretical framework. According to analyses, media exposure and involvement in youth groups, in particular, as well as premarital nonfamily experiences in general, have a significant favourable impact on an individual's involvement in choosing a spouse. These results offer fresh perspectives on the connection between the shift away from arranged marriage and social development. According to Allendorf (2013), pointed out that marital change in India entails a change in the cultural schemas or frameworks that individuals use to define marriage rather than just a move away from arranged marriages and toward love marriages. Her research in a community in Darjeeling shows that both love marriages (elopements) and planned marriages are becoming more accepted and frequently viewed as desirable. A new, hybrid ideal of marriage is emerging, one in which family acceptance and involvement are prized alongside individual choice. Traditional values are being reinterpreted in light of contemporary influences like education, technology, and exposure to different cultures, rather than being rejected.

Mathur (2007) work entitled “What’s Love Got to Do with It? Parental Involvement in Spouse Choice in Urban India” investigates the extent and nature of parental involvement in the spouse selection process among urban Indian families. Drawing on empirical data from metropolitan areas, the study examines how economic status, education, and family values shape marriage decisions. While traditional arranged marriages are still prevalent, the research finds that many families now adopt a hybrid approach, allowing young adults some degree of autonomy while maintaining parental oversight. The study reveals that love and individual preference are increasingly considered, especially in more educated and affluent households. However, the importance of caste, community, and family reputation continues to influence final decisions, showing the ongoing negotiation between modernity and tradition in urban Indian marriages.

Khandelwal (2009) critically examines the concept of arranged marriage through the lens of cross-border feminism. She challenges Western feminist assumptions that equate arranged marriages with oppression, arguing instead for a more nuanced understanding of how women experience marriage in different cultural contexts. Drawing from South Asian immigrant experiences, the paper explores how arranged and love marriages often coexist and overlap, giving rise to the concept of “arranged love.” Khandelwal emphasizes that many women actively participate in marriage decisions, even within traditional frameworks.

Medora (2009) explores the evolving dynamics of mate selection in India, focusing on the contrast between love marriages and arranged marriages. He outlines how traditional arranged marriages, long regarded as a cultural norm in Indian society, are increasingly being challenged by the rise of love marriages, especially among younger and urban populations. Result shows that while love marriages are gaining acceptance, they still face resistance in more conservative or rural areas due to the perceived threat to family honour and social norms.

Xiahoe (1990) examine the shifting patterns of mate selection in urban China by comparing love matches and arranged marriages. Through survey data and analysis, the authors explore generational changes in marriage practices and attitudes, particularly in the context of China’s transition from a traditional, collectivist society to a more individualistic one influenced by modernization and state reforms. The study finds that while arranged marriages were historically the norm, love matches became increasingly common in post-reform China, especially among younger generations.

Sharangpani (2010) article “Browsing for Bridegrooms: Matchmaking and Modernity in Mumbai” investigates the evolving landscape of matrimonial practices in urban India, with a focus on how technology and modern aspirations intersect with traditional matchmaking norms. Based on ethnographic research in Mumbai, the study explores the role of matrimonial websites and marriage bureaus in shaping how families and individuals seek marital partners.

Sharma’s (2006) doctoral dissertation titled “Girl Seeks Suitable Boy: Indian Marriage Dot Com” explores the growing role of digital matchmaking platforms in the contemporary Indian marriage market. Based on fieldwork, interviews, and an analysis of online matrimonial profiles. She investigates how internet-based matchmaking transforms traditional practices while still reflecting deep-rooted cultural norms.

Jones (2010), in his working paper “Changing Marriage Patterns in Asia”, provides a comprehensive overview of the evolving trends in marriage practices across various Asian countries. The study focuses on significant demographic shifts such as rising ages at first marriage, increasing instances of non-marriage, and a growing prevalence of love marriages, particularly in urban and economically developed regions.

Lessinger (2002) shows that while arranged marriages remain culturally significant, there is a growing acceptance of hybrid or negotiated forms that blend individual agency with familial involvement. Young Indian Americans, especially women, are increasingly seeking emotional compatibility and shared values, though they often continue to value family approval.

Fisman et al. (2006) investigate how men and women differ in their mate preferences using data from real-life speed dating events. The study finds that while both genders value attributes like physical attractiveness and intelligence, their priorities differ: men place more emphasis on physical appearance, whereas women are more influenced by socioeconomic status and education. The experiment also reveals that participants often revise their stated preferences based on actual interactions, suggesting that real-time social dynamics can override preconceived criteria. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of gendered behaviour in romantic decision-making and highlight the complex nature of attraction and compatibility.

## **Changing Family Dynamics and Gender Roles:**

Mason (1997) conducted a comparative study examining how family dynamics influence women's autonomy and authority across various cultural contexts in South and Southeast Asia. Drawing on data from over sixty social groups in countries such as Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines, he found that prevailing family structures and gender norms often limit married women’s participation in economic decision-making. Nonetheless, the accumulation of trust and experience over time—especially for women who have remained in the household for many years or who become the senior female member—can gradually increase their influence in financial matters. Malhotra (1991) arrives at the conclusion that although Indonesia is moving toward a more independent mate selection process, marriage customs are still influenced by generational hierarchies and traditional gender roles. The factors that influence choosing a partner vary by gender, with women being more constrained by family control and cultural norms. The study emphasizes how complicated marriage transitions are in the modern world, where both persistent traditional structures and new patterns appear. Ruwali, 2018 pointed that traditional perspectives were less prevalent in society as modernity, industrialization, and urbanization grew. Nowadays, traditional marriage is seen as a loss of personal identity, privacy, freedom, and personal development, as well as a lack of social and sexual diversity, marital discontent, sexual annoyance, issues with in-laws, and other issues. The structure and goals of marriage have changed as a result of all these causes. Currently, live-in relationships are becoming more and more popular in Indian cities. According to Brien & Sheran (2003) decisions about marriage and starting a family are heavily influenced by factors like economic policies, employment stability, and income levels which helps policymakers seeking to address issues such as declining marriage rates or shifting household structures can benefit from an understanding of the economic factors influencing marriage and household formation. The study conducted by Jejeebhoy et.al. (2013) emphasizes how crucial it is to empower girls and include them in important life decisions, like marriage, in order to enhance their autonomy and general well-being after marriage. It highlights that one of the most important indicators of greater agency inside a marriage is decision-making relating to the marriage. Sandhya (2013) pointed out that parents continue to play a major role in shaping how individuals choose their life partners, particularly in traditional societies. Their influence is often rooted in concerns about family honour, social compatibility, and long-term stability. While young people are increasingly expressing their preferences in partner selection, especially in urban settings, many still value and respect their parents’ opinions. The study suggests that mate selection in such societies is a blend of personal desires and familial expectations, with parental influence remaining a key factor in the final decision. Tahir (2021) supports a study that takes into account the distinct societal values that underlie marriage institution rather than assessing arranged marriages through the prism of individualistic Western ideals. These include the function of parental authority, hierarchy, collectivism, and group loyalty. A more detailed knowledge of how arranged marriages operate in various cultural contexts is made possible by such an approach. By investigating the mediating functions of collectivism and gender role ideology, the research work by Bejanyan et.al. (2014) sought to unpack the impact of culture on romantic beliefs, mate preferences, and projected future marital challenges. Their findings indicated that the current generation of Indian youngsters actually had greater romantic ideals than their American counterparts, which is in contrast to previous research that considered romantic love to be less significant in collectivistic countries. They also discovered that Indians' collectivism and gender role traditionalism were linked to higher expectations of future marital challenges and larger aspirations for a partner with traditional mate traits.

Allendorf (2017), pointed out that South Asians' adoption of contemporary marital values varies by gender. According to the results, women still confront traditional expectations that limit their autonomy in making marital decisions, while men are increasingly embracing passionate love and self-choice marriages.

Uberoi (1998) work critically examines Indian marriage and kinship systems through both sociological theory and cultural analysis. In her book Family, Kinship and Marriage in India (1998), Uberoi presents a comprehensive study of the structural and symbolic dimensions of family life in India. She discusses the diversity of kinship patterns across regions, the roles of caste, gender, and lineage, and the persistence of arranged marriage as a dominant norm despite socio-economic changes. She offers insights into how family remains a central institution shaping identity, social obligations, and marital decisions.

**Beyond Matchmaking- Digital marriage Platforms:**

Chakraborty (2012) work entitled “Virtual mate-seeking in the urban slums of Kolkata, India” focuses on young women's involvement in virtual heterosexual mate-seeking in two bustees (urban slum communities) in Kolkata. He demonstrates how some young Muslim women are turning to online friendship and mate-seeking as a result of their increased social and scholastic accomplishments. He further investigates how these young ladies are expanding their social networks and learning digital skills through educational programs. The study shows that how young women are attempting to change their life paths and widen their social networks through the experimental and developing medium of virtual connections.

Kaur (2021) work titled “Surfing for spouses: Marriage websites and the new Indian marriage” investigates how modern dating platforms are changing the conventional rules and practices of arranged weddings in India. The study looks at how matrimonial websites have become a popular tool for middle-class Indians looking for wives, combining traditional values with modern technology. While these platforms continue to prioritize caste, religion, and family background, they also provide individuals more control over the selecting process. According to the result, the usage of these websites reflects greater social trends such as higher education, urbanization, and globalization, all of which influence how marriage is envisioned and arranged. The result further emphasizes the contrast between tradition and modernity, demonstrating how digital matchmaking symbolizes both continuity and change in the Indian marriage system.

Ivarsson, F., & Svahn, F. (2020), highlighted and discusses the tensions that may emerge for the conventional matchmaker facing digitalization changing organizing logic associated with digital technology adoption and to practice by outlining what it takes becoming a digital matchmaker.

**Marital Outcomes- household decision making, reproductive health and marital Satisfaction:**

The work titled "Marriage decision making, spousal communication, and reproductive health among married youth in Pakistan" by Hamid et.al. (2011) investigates how young women's involvement in marriage decisions influences their reproductive health outcomes. Findings of their study reveals that having a say in the selection of a spouse was significantly associated with agreement with spouse over number of children to have, intention to use contraceptives, and the time between marriage and first contraceptive use. These relationships existed after controlling for education, socioeconomic status, mobility outside of house, and decision making in the home.

According to the findings of a study by Malhotra and Mather, 1997 that was carried out in Sri Lanka on the topic of women's empowerment and autonomy for domestic decision-making revealed that education and employment play a significant role in determining women's input in financial decisions, but they are largely irrelevant in determining household decisions related to social and organizational matters. Within the context of Sri Lanka, social and organizational challenges are mostly the result of life course and structural variables. These elements are responsible for the development of negotiation skills over an extended period of time and play a pivotal role in determining the position, seniority, and interpersonal dynamics within the family (Malhotra and Mather, 1997).

Research conducted by Rammohah and Johar on the subject of women's autonomy in Indonesia found that living in patrilocal groups results in a reduction of physical autonomy for married women, whereas living in uxorial communities’ results in an improvement in personal and child-related autonomy. A higher level of educational attainment, more household wealth, and increased engagement in the labour force are all factors that have a favourable impact on the autonomy of married women in Indonesia (Rammohah and Johar,2009).

Another study conducted by Acharya et.al. (2010) on Nepal explored the influence of women's household status on their ability to make independent decisions. The research revealed that women's autonomy in decision-making tends to increase with certain demographic and social factors, including age, type of employment, marital status, and the number of surviving children. Nevertheless, the study also highlighted regional disparities, noting that women living in rural and Terai areas face greater limitations in exercising decision-making power within their households. Akurugu et al. (2022) found that in certain regions of Ghana, the “house-property complex” system provided married women with substantial access to and use of their husbands’ property. This arrangement contributed to safeguarding women's rights within marriage by granting them a meaningful degree of control and security over household assets.

Kabeer et.al. pointed that as a social institution, marriage frequently signifies a turning point in a woman's life, with several decisions from job and education to reproductive choices being impacted or even reinterpreted after marriage (Desai & Andrist, 2010). Because of expectations related to gender roles, family honour, and household chores, post-marital autonomy frequently decreases, even when women in some urban areas have gained greater say in pre-marital decisions (Kabeer, 1999; Dyson & Moore, 1983). Research work of T. Rajaretnam (1990) highlights the importance of postponing marriage and increasing the time between births as effective ways to manage population growth. These approaches help reduce the number of children a woman is likely to have by limiting the years she can conceive and by extending the gap between pregnancies. Alongside lowering fertility rates, they also improve health outcomes for mothers and children. Using demographic models, the study shows how these practices can significantly slow population growth.

Helms (2003), looked into how men' and wives' opinions of the quality of their marriages were related to how they worked together and with close friends. According to the results, wives performed marriage work with their husbands and close friends at comparable rates, but husbands performed more marriage work with their wives than with close friends. Wives' reports of marital love were adversely correlated with their marriage work with friends, whereas their accounts of unsuccessful arguments were positively correlated with their marriage work with their spouses at low levels. Research highlights the importance of friendships between spouses and indicates that the social milieu that spouses and their close friends establish is correlated with the depth of their bonds with one another.

Banerji and Vanneman (2009) study finds that women in love marriages tend to have greater influence in post-marital decisions compared to those in arranged marriages. This includes decisions about mobility, household expenditures, and children's education. The authors argue that love marriages, often built on personal compatibility and mutual choice, may foster more egalitarian gender dynamics in the household.

Wittenberg and Schmeewind (2006) explore how mothers’ personal standards for parenting, their ability to cope together with their partners (dyadic coping), and overall relationship dynamics influence their satisfaction with motherhood. The study emphasizes that mothers who set very high standards for themselves may experience lower maternal satisfaction, especially if they lack supportive coping mechanisms within their relationships. However, when couples engage in positive dyadic coping mutual emotional and practical support during stress mothers tend to report greater satisfaction with their parenting role. The research highlights the importance of shared coping strategies and balanced expectations for promoting maternal well-being.

Study by Mohammad et al. (2003) examines the influential role of mothers-in-law in the reproductive choices of married women in Pakistan. It highlights how extended family dynamics, particularly the authority and expectations of mothers-in-law, can significantly affect fertility decisions, such as the timing of childbirth and family size. The findings suggest that in many households, reproductive autonomy is limited due to traditional power structures, where older female relatives often hold sway over younger women’s choices. The study underscores the need to address intergenerational power dynamics in reproductive health programs to promote informed and autonomous decision-making among women.

**Conclusion:**

This systematic review highlights the evolving yet complex landscape of mate selection and female autonomy within Indian marital systems. Historically governed by patriarchal norms, caste constraints, and arranged marriages, the institution of marriage in India has undergone significant transformation due to modernization, increased educational attainment, urbanization, and digital connectivity. While arranged marriages still dominate, especially in traditional and rural contexts, a growing number of women—particularly the educated and urban—are exercising greater agency in marital decisions, from partner selection to household autonomy post-marriage.

The review underscores that women's autonomy in both pre-marital and post-marital phases is significantly influenced by socio-economic status, educational attainment, and family structure. Yet, deep-rooted cultural practices and institutional limitations continue to challenge the realization of full autonomy. The emergence of hybrid marriage forms like semi-arranged marriages suggests a gradual negotiation between tradition and individual choice.

Moreover, digital marriage platforms and changing gender roles within nuclear and dual-career households reflect broader shifts in social expectations and marital dynamics. However, intersectional barriers related to caste, class, religion, and regional disparities persist, revealing that empowerment is unevenly distributed.

To foster meaningful autonomy and equitable decision-making for women in marriage, continued efforts in gender-sensitive education, legal reforms, social awareness, and economic empowerment are essential. The intersection of tradition and modernity must be navigated carefully to ensure that evolving marital practices contribute positively to women’s well-being, dignity, and agency within both families and society at large.

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