

8 Negotiating Marriage : Young Punjabi Women's Assessment of Their Individual and Family Interests Hannah Bradby

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is about what marriage means to the daughters of migrants from the Indian subcontinent, who are familiar with the choices available to majority ethnicity women and also schooled to appreciate the central role that marriage plays in the subcontinent's social systems, particularly the system of honour and reputation. Drawing upon conversations with young women in Glasgow, the chapter considers how they evaluated their elders' model of family-contracted marriage, which they called 'arranged'. Where drawbacks of arranged marriage were identified, the strategies that these women employed to mitigate the drawbacks will be described, and the balance that young women draw between their own interests and those of their patriliney will be explored.

Ethnographies of South Asian migrants to Britain have shown the centrality of links with the sending society, established and maintained through marriages (Jeffery, 1976). Marriages are preceded and accompanied by rituals of gift-giving which continue after the wedding as a means of cementing social relationships (Werbner, 1990). The network of kin and non-kin linked by gift-giving and marriage is referred to as the *biradari*. The closeness of the links within this network was seen as important in explaining the relative paucity of links with the majority ethnic group (Jeffery, 1976; Anwar, 1979). An ethnography that included informants who had arrived in Britain as children rather than as adults, or were British born, indicated that negotiations with the older generation over how marriages were to be contracted, constituted a pivotal moment in shaping the future of South Asians in Britain (Shaw, 1988). The marriage system of the Indian subcontinent which forms the model

for the older generation, was likely to undergo some changes after migration in the British context.

According to the 1991 census there are 21,715 people of South Asian ethnicity in the Strathclyde Region which amounts to approximately 1 per cent of the total population (Scotland, 1993, p. 887). The population of South Asian origin is concentrated in Glasgow where it represents approximately 2 per cent of the population (Avan, 1995, p. 7). This clustering is explained by the presence of exploitable economic niches in the city which attracted many of the pioneer migrants. Some of these arrived directly from the subcontinent, and others came via England and Wales, attracted north by the myth of the lack of racism in Scotland (Dunlop and Miles, 1990), and the availability of work in Scotland at a time when workforces in England and Wales were being laid-off in the face of recession (Maan, 1992, p. 162).

In the rural Indian subcontinent, from where most migrants to Britain have come, marriage is almost universal for women, and happens at a young age (Brown *et al.*, 1981; Mandelbaum, 1988; Ballard, 1990). It is contracted by representatives of the woman's patriliney who negotiate the transfer of a daughter to the care, control and responsibility of another patriliney. It is the older generation and not the daughters who contract this marriage. In the rural northern subcontinent women have very few alternatives apart from marriage, as a means of graduating to adulthood while keeping their patriliney's honour intact. Honour rests upon the judgements of others and in a subcontinent village mundane activities take place out of doors, and the community is small, so most actions are subject to the scrutiny of the community. By contrast, in urban Britain anonymity is the norm. Housing is closed to the public view so that daily activities are carried out in private. On leaving their homes South Asians are surrounded by strangers and so are not subject to the scrutiny of others of the same ethnic and religious background. So while in the rural subcontinent every member of the village might belong to the honour community, in the urban Scottish setting one's neighbours probably do not constitute the group who are making judgements about honour and shame. In the rural subcontinent the honour community largely overlaps with the *biradari* which is a network of people joined by kinship, marriage, caste, common locality and a system of gift giving and receiving. Due to the way family networks are confined to a single caste *biradari* is sometimes used as a pseudonym for caste and is also translated as 'brotherhood'.

In any urban setting, the membership of the honour community becomes more ambiguous. For South Asians in Glasgow, unlike in the

rural subcontinent, there are many fora where judgements about honour are not made. There are areas that are private from the honour community, namely in the home. There are areas that are public to the scrutiny of the honour community, such as the temple and mosque, and there are areas that are neither private or public because they are inhabited by people who are not members of the honour community, for instance, supermarkets and public parks.

For young women the membership of the honour community was partly defined by generation because the older generation of kin, and their friends, were all likely to make honour judgements about young women. People of the same generation as young women had a more ambiguous relationship to the honour community. Depending on the space in which they met and their relationship with other people on a gossip network, other young people could affect discrimination on the basis of honour. However, young people were sometimes quite distant from the gossip networks central to the honour community, particularly if they were single, or if they were encountered in a place such as a university campus which was largely unoccupied by elders of the honour community. The honour community was largely limited to people of the same religion as oneself, but there was a certain amount of interchange of gossip between religious groups, through particular friendships or professional liaisons that rendered the religious boundaries semi-permeable. The boundaries of the honour community were not fixed, but were dependent upon context and time in combination with the social, and therefore labile, characteristics of those involved.

The universality of marriage for women in the subcontinent (Jeffery *et al.*, 1988) appears to remain the case for South Asian migrants to Britain (Bhachu, 1985; Williams *et al.*, 1993). Whether this will remain the case for the next generation is not yet clear. In comparison to the situation in the rural areas of the subcontinent, there are a wide range of options open to adult British urban women, of which only one is marriage. One of the crucial differences between the rural subcontinent and urban Britain is that it is possible for a single woman to become an independent householder and wage-earner, without the support of a husband, father or other male kin and without attracting opprobrium.

How marriages are contracted and with whom is crucial to defining the boundaries of ethnic groups and the roles prescribed for men and for women. Diagnosing the likely prospects for change to the ethnic group and to gender roles is therefore intimately entangled with understanding how marriage functions and relates to other social processes.

METHODS

The material in this chapter arises from a three-year study, based in Glasgow, of young women of South Asian origin, all Punjabi speakers. Thirty-two women were chosen at random from the 70 women aged between 20 and 30 and of South Asian ethnicity, registered at a general practice in the north side of Glasgow. They were interviewed twice, and all except three of these interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The English language interviews were conducted by me, and, in the case of five women who preferred to be interviewed in Punjabi or Urdu, a colleague conducted the interview while I took notes. She also collaborated on the translation of the schedule and the transcripts. Interview material was interpreted in the light of extensive participant observation in the private and public fora of Punjabi life in Glasgow, including time spent at a mosque and at a Sikh temple.

The resulting body of transcripts and field notes were subjected to a qualitative analysis. In what follows, all statements are based on what respondents have reported or have been observed doing.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

The composition of the South Asian population of Glasgow, was reflected in the following way; most of the 32 women were Muslim (19) with about a third Sikh (ten) and a smaller minority of Hindus (three). Of these women, 21 were born in the British Isles, nine in the Indian subcontinent and three in East Africa. Seven of those who were not British born received most or all of their education in Britain, after arriving as children. Of the women, 20 were married at the time of the first interview and of these most were living with their husband and children with just two women occupying households with their husband's parents. All of the unmarried women were living with their parents either as spinsters or as fiancées awaiting the arrival of their future husband from Pakistan. The majority of the sample were not in paid employment, but judging by their husbands' and fathers' occupations, the sample reflected the South Asian population of Glasgow by being overwhelmingly involved in small family owned business. Ownership of small grocery shops or take-away foods, or working in restaurants owned by other families accounted for the majority of husbands and fathers who were in paid employment. One husband was studying with a view to entering professional employment.

Although women reported that their caste affiliations were irrelevant to most intra-religious group interaction, marriage was the exception. Sikh and Muslim informants described how their religion emphasizes a brotherhood that overcomes caste differences. None the less, all respondents could name their own family's caste, even if they did not know the names of any other castes. The Sikh respondents reflected Glasgow's Sikh population in being either Jat (land-owning peasant) or Dakhan (carpenter, craftspeople, also known as Lakrian or Ramgharia), whereas the Muslims named a more numerous and wider range of caste groupings, some based on region (for example, Kashmiri, Mirpuri), but given the same status as more obviously caste-based groups such as Rajput, Zaminder and Arain. Jat respondents asserted their superiority over Dakhans and vice versa, and respondents from various of the Muslim caste affiliations explained that they were the 'top caste'. However, respondents' accounts of caste were relatively fragmentary and did not constitute a hierarchical structure. It was also widely agreed that caste differences had no effect on eating, socializing or working together, but only on inter-marrying.

While allowing for the possibility that young women will become more fully informed about caste considerations when they themselves come to contract marriages for younger women, (their own daughters for example), their version echoes analyses of caste from the subcontinent. Rigid hierarchy is not an accurate reflection of the caste system; two castes can claim superiority over one another in an apparent contradiction, yet everyone can agree that unequal caste prohibits inter-marriage (Quigley, 1993, p. 168). Despite the differences that women identified between their own and their mother's generation, the universality of marriage, albeit contracted at an older age, was not one of those differences. At the time of the first interview the 20 (out of a total of 32) respondents who were married all described their marriages as 'arranged', and the 12 who were not married, saw marriage in the near future as not only likely but also desirable. By the time interviewing was over another two women had married and two were engaged to be married. Women's criticism of their elders' marriage systems did not seek to undermine the institution altogether, but rather to modify how it was brought about.

What women described as 'arranged marriages' must, by definition be contracted by elders and a suitable husband is defined by strict rules concerning his background. He must be of the appropriate caste, religion, and age, and the comparison of his family's village of origin, with that of the bride's, is often crucial. The connection between marriage and

honour means that there are strong sanctions against non-conformity that operate in terms of the reputation of the woman's family, and particularly the marriage prospects of single kin. In patrilineal systems sanctioned by honour, a woman's virtue and modesty is central to the good reputation of her family, and honour is a quality of the family, not the individual (Campbell, 1964; Lison-Tolosana, 1966). In discussing their experiences and expectations of marriage, women in Glasgow described the costs and benefits of conforming to the rules of a family contracted marriage. They differentiated between the benefits that they might forfeit as individuals by refusing an arranged marriage, and the hazards to their families if they did not enter an arranged marriage. In contrasting individual interests with those of their families, young women were challenging their traditional place within the honour system.

BENEFITS OF A FAMILY CONTRACTED MARRIAGE

For the Individual Woman

Almost all women's adult acquaintances and kin were in marriages that were arranged for them and, for the most part, they were said to be successful. It was suggested that young people lack the experience to make weighty decisions such as choosing a marriage partner and, therefore, parents' judgement should be trusted, particularly because they hold their children's happiness as a high priority.

Continued membership of the honour community of parents was the major reason for participating in a family-contracted marriage. Refusal of an arranged marriage would amount to a decision by the woman to abandon her parents' honour community and therefore her ethnic identity. As one woman put it, 'you're literally cutting yourself off from the whole Asian culture'. The choice could be a fairly stark one between, on the one hand, acquiescing in a family contracted marriage and staying in contact with Punjabi culture, or, on the other hand, refusing such a marriage and losing that contact for oneself and one's children, since damage done to reputation does not stop with one's own generation, but is passed on to the next.

For the Family Group

The principal benefit for the family of their young women entering into a family contracted marriage is the continued membership of the

honour community, and its accompanying social alliances. An important feature of honour is that it extends through time. Thus, damage done to reputation does not stop with one's own generation, but is passed on to the next. Non-conformity to the rules of honourable marriage has implications for the children of the union. Even if the parents manage to overcome their differences and construct a harmonious life together, their children might not. It is suggested that the children would be pulled in 'different directions' and would not know to which group they belonged:

The question would arise like if a child wanted to marry out of a caste, he would get married off. But when it came to their children one of them would go [to] the mother's caste or [would they go to] the father's caste? That's where the problem will arise...[with] the children. Otherwise they [the parents] could ex-communicate themselves, have a great happy life, but when it came to their children, that's where the problem would arise.

The problem was that the offspring of a marriage between two castes would belong to neither. Both groups, 'may say your caste is not right, not pure' and both might reject the child as a suitable marriage partner.

COSTS OF A FAMILY CONTRACTED MARRIAGE

Costs of the family contracted marriage were not considered to accrue to the family group, because this is the system that perpetuates lineages. In the rural subcontinent, costs of the process of entering a family contracted marriage for the individual woman are not enumerated because there are virtually no alternatives. To forfeit membership of the honour community is to relinquish the only possible social existence. The urban British context, however, offers young women, especially those with paid employment, the prospect of alternative social existences, out of the honour system, and also, a vision of different ways of contracting marriage. Although these alternatives were not being actively pursued by members of this sample, the individualism that characterizes much of the majority ethnic group's social organization was incorporated in young women's ways of thinking about the effects of the family contracted marriage system on their own lives. In thinking about themselves as individuals who can benefit in a distinct way compared to their family groups, women came to identify the costs of the process of family contracted marriages. These include lost occupational and educational

opportunities, the personal costs of being subjected to assessment by strangers, and the possible future cost of having an unsuitable partner. Each of these will be considered in turn.

Women who had experienced pressure to marry when young expressed some regret that they had not been able to follow-up training and employment opportunities which had had to be relinquished when taking on the role of wife and mother.

The process involved in identifying a partner in family contracted marriages was felt to be personally costly in damaging self-esteem. A respondent described how her appearance had been criticized by the parents of prospective spouses, regardless of whether the young man, in her words, 'might look like the back end of a bus', but this was never considered during the negotiations. She, by contrast, said she had been rejected by families on grounds of her height (too short), moles on her cheeks (too many), and a problem she had with one leg. Other women described the process of being betrothed to someone after only a brief meeting as bewildering.

A major personal cost identified with arranged marriages was that they were suspected, particularly by those women who considered themselves to be 'westernized', of being a poor means of identifying a suitable partner. The brief meeting between the prospective spouses was not felt to be adequate to make an assessment of the man's character: 'marry someone that you've sort of spent, say 10 minutes talking with. You know it's very difficult'.

All that could be gathered from the meetings held prior to an arranged marriage was a man's appearance and occupation, which were not considered adequate for a judgement about his suitability as a partner:

He could be gorgeous, OK, [have a] good job and everything, but how are we meant to tell his personality? How are you meant to know? He looks nice, he looks very westernized, oh yes he's got a good job.

Even the upper limit of contact that might be permitted by parents was felt to be insufficient:

I mean, you spend a day talking. I mean I'm sure my mother wouldn't object [if I said] 'I want to go out with him for a week'. But I mean a week [she laughs]. What do you learn in a week? I could be nice to my worst enemy for a week [she laughs].

The penalties of failing to identify the right partner were divorce, or an abusive or adulterous husband and it was said that this might mean,

'being battered or abused really bad' or, 'the man having affairs right, left and centre', and then, 'you've got to live with it'.

Despite identifying these drawbacks, by the time of the second interview one woman had decided that she would ask her mother to contract her marriage. She explained that she had been in conversation with her close friend, also a Scottish woman of Punjabi origin, about their marital futures. Both had non-Sikh, non-Asian boyfriends in the past, but the respondent had recently followed her friend's example and broken off with hers. She explained that the boyfriend had been disrespectful towards Punjabi ways of life, such as food and dress. She valued her relationship with her mother very highly and mentioned watching Hindi movies on video together and cooking as activities that she would miss were she to marry someone who was not a Punjabi Sikh. Although her brother had a non-Asian partner whom her mother had met, the respondent felt the stakes were higher for her as a daughter, and that if she chose a non-Punjabi, non-Sikh partner her relationship with her mother would be jeopardized. In effect, this woman was balancing up a known and valued quantity – her bond with her mother – against an unknown quantity – an imagined relationship with a future husband. If she imagined her future husband to be non-Sikh she had to imagine losing her relationship with her mother, but if she imagined him to be someone chosen by her mother then there was no threat to the status quo with her mother.

Some women who had overcome the quandary that the last respondent described, and had married, were none the less strongly critical of family-contracted marriages. However this did not necessarily mean that they were dissatisfied with the outcome of the process in their own case.

STRATEGIES

There are clear advantages for young women to agree to a family contracted marriage, which relate to the benefits of belonging to a secure social network regulated by honour. There are also distinct disadvantages for individual women of the arranged marriage system, but the group-based advantages mean that the system is not likely to be abandoned, and therefore young women adopt strategies that keep them within the honour community while avoiding the highest of the costs. An ideal situation, where the woman did not have to pay any price to conform to her parents' wishes, was that of a respondent's friend who

was said to be 'quite fortunate' because, 'she and her husband-to-be fancied each other, and both the parents were best friends and that, so it worked out very well, so I mean she's been very lucky'.

The women who were most explicit in describing the process of balancing out benefits to the group and to themselves were single, were wage-earners, and had resisted entering a family contracted marriage. As single women of independent means their activities represented a potential threat to the honour of their families. This threat consists of the increased opportunities that such women have for behaviour that is totally unmonitored by anyone of their community because they tend to work with people of the ethnic majority. Not only was a large proportion of their day spent out of the surveillance of the honour community, but the women were also accruing independent earnings that could facilitate behaviour that may not have been sanctioned by their parents.

Honour is safe-guarded not only by demonstrating the appropriate behaviour but also by being seen to avoid situations in which compromising behaviour would be possible. If a woman is constantly within the gaze of the honour community then no doubts can be raised over the propriety of her behaviour. Honour is regulated by gossip (Bailey, 1971) and gossip can have a damaging effect without being based on empirical fact, but just on the possibility of something having occurred.

It may have been significant that five of the single respondents who were most concerned to minimize the costs of arranged marriages to themselves personally, did not have fathers who were alive, and three did not have brothers living with them. Therefore, the traditional figurehead for the honour of the patriliney was absent, and the young women felt their behaviour consequently to be less constrained.

Despite the absence of figureheads, women reported strategies to contravene the constraints that operated. These included restricting activities that might be questionable to spheres of life that are not subject to the gaze of the honour community, and, more assertively, questioning the moral or religious rationale of constraining secular tradition.

AVOIDANCE OF THE HONOUR COMMUNITY

Even in the absence of both parents, and other Punjabi kith and kin, one woman maintained an elaborate pretence to hide an individually contracted marriage from the view of what she called, 'the community', by which she meant friends and acquaintances of her parents, most of whom she encountered at the temple. Two other women were equally

careful in screening those aspects of their lives considered questionable from the view of their mothers' acquaintances. For instance, one woman had, for the previous 8 years had a non-Asian boyfriend, about whom her mother knew almost nothing. Another woman reached a compromise between her own and her mother's interests by confining her 'dishonourable' activities to a neighbouring city where she lodged during the week with a female colleague. Here, she had a non-Asian boyfriend and visited the pub and the cinema. Most weekends in Glasgow, when staying with her mother, she would wear Punjabi suits and stay at home to watch Hindi movies on video. Eventually she bought her own flat in the neighbouring city, but continued to stay with her mother at weekends. She suggested that her mother would be well-advised not to tell friends that she was living alone, so as to avoid the risk of gossip. Even in the neighbouring city, away from her mother's social network, she felt unable to visit restaurants run by other South Asians because of the, 'dirty looks' she got from men working there, which she assumed to be because she was seen to be unsuitably chaperoned. Thus, for this woman, Glasgow and the Indian restaurants of the neighbouring city constituted a space where honour and shame judgements were made. She therefore restricted her activities that were questionable in terms of honour, to the neighbouring cities, but avoided Indian restaurants.

APPLICATION OF RELIGIOUS VALUES TO SECULAR TRADITIONS

A powerful, but less often used, means of claiming legitimacy for one's behaviour was to point out the lack of religious rationale for the honour traditions. Two Sikh respondents criticized some of the rules about suitable marriage partners on the grounds that they were only secular traditions with no religious basis. One woman reported an argument with her mother over the lack of evidence in the holy book for a ban on co-villagers marrying:

That's their tradition. That's what I quoted to my mum. I said, 'You tell me where it says in the Granth Sahib that I can't marry a person from the same village and then maybe I would, maybe, think twice about it', but they couldn't give me the answer 'cause they know it's not.

This line of reasoning attempts to divorce the moral power that a religious ruling holds from secular traditions of honour. If a woman

succeeds in bringing about this cleavage to the satisfaction of her elders, she could, in theory, redefine her roles as a wife and daughter, without compromising the honour of her patriline. Arguments in favour of women's rights framed in terms of the evidence from the holy text, or the meaning of the words of the Prophet or the Gurus, carry moral weight with elders, whereas framing these claims in the language of secular human rights, feminism or democracy carries little weight.

LONGER TERM STRATEGIES

The acceptance of the elders' marriage system, which is at times tacit, did not of necessity imply that women thought the system was appropriate for subsequent generations. Some women, who did not view arranged marriages as problematic for themselves, said that the system would be outdated by the time their daughters came to marry. They predicted that elders' power would weaken to the extent that their daughters would choose their partners unilaterally without considering anyone else's views

Discussions about marriage at women's meetings at a local mosque illustrated that conforming to the elders' marriage system did not necessarily imply approval of it. These meetings were held weekly and were ostensibly for the study of the Quran and of the Prophet's message. Both informal and formal discussion among the women covered a wide range of dilemmas facing the contemporary Muslim woman. The formal talks tended to prescribe appropriate behaviour and sometimes these lessons were illustrated by means of sketches or plays acted out by younger women at Eid parties. The meetings were conducted in English, with a Punjabi meeting held immediately afterwards in the same building. The English-language meeting was attended by the younger women, with their mothers and mothers-in-law going to the later one. Supportive, sisterly roles were often adopted in informal discussion by young women towards one another as they discussed their problems away from the hearing of the older women. Marriage and a wife's obligations to her kin and affines were often a topic of discussion because many of the women were in relatively new marriages in which roles were still being explored.

Arranged marriage was identified as a tradition that was not prescribed by the prophet, and the religious teachings on marriage that were emphasized by the meeting leaders were the mutual and reciprocal duties between spouses. It was emphasized that it was the role of Allah, and not humans, to judge whether others were fulfilling their

duties properly. Therefore, wives were obliged to continue to act in accordance with their duties towards husbands, even if these were not reciprocated. In private conversations women said that marriage, and family contracted marriages in particular, were a lottery, and the odds of finding a good husband could be very slim. Yet women's religiously sanctioned duties to respect their elders, and husbands meant accepting the traditional system of marriage. Although not actively resisting the arranged marriage system, these women were not committed to retaining it for future generations.

CONCLUSION

The costs of non-conformity to the family contracted marriage system, both to their families and to themselves, were well-understood by young women. However, in the British urban context the benefits to individual women of remaining single were such that a number of strategies were identified by women, whereby marriage could be postponed, and the sanctions of the honour community avoided or attenuated. Women with education that led to professional employment, or with an ability to earn that was independent of their family business, were likely to be able to postpone entering a family contracted marriage in the name of gathering further qualifications or experience. Women whose fathers had died were also more likely to have been able to postpone entering a family contracted marriage, while minimizing the effects of sanctions on their mothers. Women felt their behaviour to be relatively unscrutinized, because their mothers were largely confined to their home and those women who had brothers did not feel that they had taken over as guardian of the family honour.

These women were not attempting to adopt the marriage patterns of the majority population, which were seen in a poor light, but rather, to remain within the same social world as their parents, yet with more autonomy than their mothers enjoyed. By postponing entry to a family contracted marriage, the system was not being rejected, but young women were attempting to reassess and renegotiate their role within it. By preventing their behaviour from coming to the attention of the honour community of their parents, it was possible to do things that would be defined as of questionable honour before entering an arranged marriage. Providing that her behaviour did not become the subject of gossip in 'the community', a woman could have an arranged marriage at a later date. By this time she could be in a position to stipulate certain conditions

regarding her marriage, such as the extent of the obligations that she has towards her mother-in-law and, in particular, with whom she would share her marital home. Postponing a marriage in the name of education or a demanding career could increase the woman's ability to assert such conditions. Alternatively, the benefits of postponement might be so great that women might opt to continue unmarried indefinitely.

However, for this sample, this is purely speculative since the women who had postponed their marriages, had not yet contracted marriages and therefore the conditions to which they would agree, and the risk to which they would subject their mother's honour, were not yet apparent. Assuming that some young women manage to contract marriages that fulfil their own and their mother's needs for both honour and autonomy, the end of the institution of arranged marriages is not necessarily marked. There is anecdotal evidence of parents who contracted their own marriage against the will of their parents, but who none the less insist upon family contracted marriages for their own children.

The factors that seem likely to speed up the rate of change in the institution of family contracted marriage are those that have the effect of divorcing the attribution of dishonour from certain behaviours. Two places where the relationship between traditional married women's obligations and the allocation of honour may be re-worked are religious study groups such as the Muslim women's meeting in Glasgow and paid occupations not connected with the extended family. The women's meeting at the mosque was a forum where women could discuss their personal problems and where the lessons of the hadith and the Quran were applied in seeking a solution to everyday dilemmas. Depending upon the local leadership of such meetings, it is possible that an Islamic analysis of women's duties within marriage may develop that does not give credence to the subcontinent tradition of honour (Jacobson, 1997). This type of issue is being debated on an international level among Muslim women scholars and activists who are attempting to define a new role for themselves within Islam (Mernissi, 1985, 1991; Ahmed, 1992). It is the comparisons of women's roles between Islamic countries and with that prescribed by the Quran and hadith that forms the basis of such discussions.

Religion forms one source of honour that may be alternative to that regulated by elders, and employment, particularly professional employment, forms another alternative. In the rural subcontinent tradition an older woman's power and status often derived from her stake in contracting the marriages of younger members of her *biradari*. Although

a young bride may dislike the duties that are seen to accompany her role, it may be in her interests to enforce them in later life. However, if women in urban Britain are increasingly participating in paid employment, this may represent an alternative source of prestige. It may also represent an alternative or additional route to participation in the community politics, as women qualified in medicine, law and social work are called upon to represent the interests of others of their ethnicity and/or religion in institutions such as regional councils, local councils, hospital trusts and health centres. The precise speed and direction of change in the contraction of marriage among Britons of South Asian origin is not yet clear. Assuming that women continue to attempt to accommodate their elders' wishes in their efforts to contract marriages that fulfil their own needs, then change is likely to be slow and piecemeal. However, the fact that change is underway should not be in doubt.

Ethnic

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Edited by

Rohit Barot

*Lecturer in Sociology
Department of Sociology
University of Bristol*

Harriet Bradley

*Senior Lecturer in Sociology
Department of Sociology
University of Bristol*

and

Steve Fenton

*Senior Lecturer in Sociology
Department of Sociology
University of Bristol*





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