



#PERSPECTIVE

RETHINKING TRADITIONS: The double standard of marriages

Marriage is an institution steeped in cultural traditions, religious doctrines, and societal expectations. Among its many archaic customs prevalent in our society, the hypocritical practice of a bride leaving her home to join her husband has fuelled gender debates for years, especially since a groom moving to his wife's home is often colloquially dismissed as being "henpecked."

Patriarchal values have traditionally dominated our societal structure. Most families follow a system, where lineage and inheritance are traced through the male line, placing the responsibility of continuing the family name and legacy squarely on the son while daughters are considered "someone else's wealth" ever since they are born.



A daughter's departure to her husband's home is often seen as her fulfilling a societal role. Economics also plays a role in propagating such customs.

In ancient rural societies, land and property were the main sources of livelihood, with sons taking responsibility for their upkeep. Daughters, upon marriage, would be required to contribute



to the household, necessitating the need to join the groom's family.

Certain religious texts and traditions across the Indian subcontinent have reinforced these practices.

In Hinduism, a bride is often seen as "Lakshmi", or a goddess of wealth, entering her husband's home to bring prosperity. Wedding rituals, such as the "Kanyadaan" (Giving away of the daughter), symbolically transfer the bride's ownership from her parental family to her husband's family.

In Islam, marriage is a sacred contract that emphasises mutual consent and partnership. It recognises the rights of women within marriage, including their right to separate living arrangements, free from undue influence or interference from the extended family. A woman is entitled to her own home after marriage, ensuring

her privacy and autonomy within the marital relationship.

Despite these clear guidelines, Muslim communities within the subcontinent have often normalised joint family systems, prioritising cultural interpretation.

Traditional society in the subcontinent also associates masculinity with independence, and authority, while femininity is linked to adaptability and sacrifice. When a man relocates to his wife's home, it is generally seen as a reversal of roles. Conversely, a woman's departure from their parental home is framed as a sacrifice and a marker of their maturity. Any deviation from this norm often invites scrutiny and judgment on either party.

Shifting trends

A marked change in attitudes has been noticed in recent years, however,

with urbanisation, education, and changing attitudes toward gender equality challenging these norms. Couples increasingly prioritise individual preferences and practical considerations over traditional expectations. Nuclear families and egalitarian partnerships are becoming more common, with some couples opting to establish their own households or even living with the wife's family when it makes logistical or emotional sense.

Media representations and feminist movements have played an active role in questioning stereotypes and promoting the idea of equality in marriage. However, progress remains bumpy, and traditional expectations continue to take precedence in many parts of the subcontinent.

Religious teachings also provide avenues for reform. The emphasis on mutual respect and fairness in marital relationships offers principles that couples can draw upon, to negotiate living arrangements that honour the rights and the dignity of both partners and lead to healthier, more balanced marital relationships.

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Photo: Collected

