

Are Bangladeshi youth increasingly avoiding marriage?

Marriage in Bangladesh is never between just two people; it is always about two entire families merging into one. There are endless opinions and numerous expectations, making chaos the uninvited guest. These make marriage less like a happy ending and more like an anxiety attack wrapped in red and gold for many young adults.

"I haven't met the right person yet," Rafid, a fresh law graduate, shrugs. "Plus, I'm focused on my career now. I also want to enjoy my life to the fullest and go on tours with my buddies."

His mindset reflects a larger shift. Once, marriage used to be like a partnership; two people teaming up to get through life. Now, people are capable, as well as inclined, to do almost everything solo — rent, travel, and emotionally overshare online. When everyday life does not require marriage, romance has to work harder. But romance has become lazy these days. The "no strings attached" attitude has spoiled it.

So, some people get caught between ambition and love. "I can't spare time for dating," sighs Elma, a fourth-year med student. "But I wouldn't mind if my perfect match just shows up at my door one fine morning," she adds with a laugh.

Her comment sums it up well; the "career vs family" dilemma is real these days. It seems that while earlier generations married to escape uncertainty, this generation delays marriage because of uncertainty.

And uncertainty is practically a South



Asian birthright. We grow up being told to be successful, respectful, available, adjusted, thin, ambitious, again not too ambitious.

Weddings may last a week, but the commentary

lasts a lifetime. Suddenly, everyone becomes a life coach, dietician, fertility expert, and career advisor!

No wonder memes of brides crying because they thought marriage was only about the photoshoot, only to realise they have to share a room with a man, are going viral. It is funny, but also telling. We desire soulmates, but are anxious about sharing cupboards. Commitment feels heavy when independence has become a badge of honour.

Esha, an assistant lecturer, puts it

humorously, "I had four crushes this year, and all of them were fictional characters. They've set my standards pretty high, and I'm not bringing them down."

It is a perfect depiction of how imagination often feels safer than an unpredictable real-life situation.

"I have been in a relationship with a guy for almost five years now, we are like best friends, but I'm afraid things might change after marriage. Maybe the burden of responsibility changes a person, or maybe, staying with a person almost 24/7 unfolds the unknown side of them," Faria said thoughtfully. "I would just say, I'm waiting for the right time," she added.

For some, the hesitation may not be about fantasy; it is about the past. They do not fear marriage like a gamophobic might; they fear a bad marriage or replicating their parents' marriage. A dinner table argument that plays like a cautionary documentary

can leave lasting marks. Growing up watching couples stay together "for the kids" makes marriage look less like romance and more like a long-term group project no one can escape.

"I had seen her on the very first day on my campus. She is from a different department," Aranya, a university goer gushes, "But I still couldn't find the courage to approach her. She seems, you know, what people say, very high maintenance," the hopeless romantic added.

Exposure has changed things, too. Where, once a mid-twenty girl or boy settled within the first one or two, maybe three proposals, today social media offers 500 potential options within five kilometres. So, we keep swiping, convinced something better is one thumb-move away. But this endless catalogue of choices has made us pickier, and ultimately lonelier.

But does that really bring us to a conclusion of how the new adults want to escape marriage? Certainly not.

Urmi, an independent young woman puts it beautifully, "It was not a love at first sight for me. But, when I got to know Enayet, I felt as if he was the one I have been waiting for all my life, he felt like home," she blushed, "Till date, he is the biggest supporter of my ideas, my cooking and me."

So, perhaps it is unfair to accuse today's generation of fearing commitment. It is not fear, it is exhaustion. They are tired of blind commitments. Perhaps, they are not against marriage as a whole; they are against the idea of a bad marriage. What they want is simple: marriage chosen on purpose, not just because it is expected.

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