



A GUIDE FOR "SOON TO-BE WEDS"



PHOTO: HILL VALLEY WEDDINGS



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MOVIES

Love, secrets, and family in MONSOON WEDDING

AFRA ANIKA NAWAR KHAN

Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* (2001) depicts the monsoon season, a time of love and rain, along with a grand South Asian wedding. The film plays like an ode to most big Indian Punjabi weddings, which are integrated with complex familial bonds, hidden trauma, tradition, and love at the centre of it all.

The film revolves around the wedding events of Aditi Verma, who is set to marry the non-resident Indian (NRI) from Houston, Hemant, who agreed to marry a bride selected by his parents. However, on Aditi's part, the ordeal seems like a rash decision, being frustrated with her married lover's unkept promises about divorcing his wife. While Aditi deals with the complexity of her love life, a split between traditional marriage and modern-day relationships, her father, Lalit Verma, saunters around the house in an attempt to bring the entire family together and arrange the festivities with the aid of the wedding planner, P K Dubey. The movie is filled with many subplots, the most conflicting one being Ria Verma, Lalit's niece's secret, while the most endearing is P K Dubey and the househelp, Alice's, romance.

Monsoon Wedding also does an incredible job blending the bilingual tongue, the code switching from English to Hindi, to the Punjabi dialect, which most bilingual speakers can resonate with. Relatives are flying in from different parts of the world, each character different from the other, with various interests, which serve as a reflection of globalised values,



expressing nuances of each individual's search for an identity of their own in the newfound interconnectedness of the world, establishing a hybrid space where Western culture amalgamates with the traditional *desi* rituals and traditions.

Watching the film today, 25 years after it was made, to the modern-day audience, it may seem like it was way ahead of its time. Nair has touched base with subjects that may sound radical to the contemporary audience, given how a wedding environment has not stopped her from dealing with issues encapsulating sexual abuse and trauma, especially through Ria. However, it is through Lalit Verma, the troubled man who doesn't want to accept his son's identity as a chef, deeming it to be "unmanly", that the plot takes a turn when he takes a stand for his niece, as if breaking

years of generational curses, and that much is evident through Ria's astonished yet relieved glance at her uncle.

Unlike the typical Bollywood movies, where the scene cuts into a dance sequence between the protagonists, Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* depicts a more realistic mode of bursting into songs, which is mostly during rehearsals and the wedding events themselves.

Monsoon Wedding combines joy, humour, music, and heartfelt drama, while also addressing social taboos, and each character's performance is played out beautifully by the extraordinary cast. Over 20 years after its release, the film remains relevant to audiences – old and new – portraying more than a wedding story, offering an experience that remains even after the final dance.

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PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

The crushing reality of knowing that your friend is getting married

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

Along with hoodies and badminton, winter brings with it another pandemic – watching eight people get married in a single scroll. Fridays aren't just about waking up late or *Jumma* prayers; it's also about watching half your social media feed become wedding content. Usually, the people getting married are older than you, so it doesn't affect you very much. Until one fine Friday, it's someone your age.

Suddenly, you feel old and unaccomplished. It hits you that someone in your classroom had life all figured out while you were scrolling through the cake epidemic of Agargaon. Someone out there embraced adulthood while you were considering enrolling on a master's programme just so you could delay the reality of unemployment.

But perhaps the greatest tragedy occurs when the "Brutus" in this story is your childhood friend. Your 25-year-old friend who struggles to mute himself on Zoom calls and uses LinkedIn as a dating platform has been called many names, but never did anyone in the group think he'd be called a "husband".

So, naturally, when he invited you to his wedding, the first response was "How?" Not when or even why. Because how is this man getting married before me?

And soon, it's not just the one, but the entire herd. Even the ones you thought were above romantic attachments are now looking for *holud* song playlists. At first, it was just you and your boys in the group. But by next winter, the group expanded to you, your boys, and their better halves. You're now the group's unofficial couple photographer, smiling and nodding aggressively as you get asked to take a picture of the 12th couple that night.

After devouring two plates of *kacchi*, when you've successfully evaded your deeply rooted insecurities the entire evening, life punches you in the gut. As the bride and groom utter that magical word "Qubool" thrice and smile at each other, the teardrop at the corner of your eye convinces you that this is what you've been missing. As a 26-year-old emotional vagabond who has changed career goals as frequently as Gen-Z youth change their political opinions, you realise that marriage is the band-aid which is going to mend the hole in your heart.

Crazily enough, your friends getting married affects your weekends. Suddenly, you're the only one desperately mentioning everyone in the group chat and begging them to give you one hour of attention on a Thursday evening. Even your BBA graduate friend is too busy for you. I mean, how dare they prioritise their newlywed partners over

their emotionally unavailable friend who's always passive-aggressive about being unmarried?

As you stand by yourself at Farmgate and indulge in fried junk, you try to fill the gap in your heart with cholesterol, which others are filling through marriage. Halfway through your sixth *shingara*, you realise it's time to change things once and for all. You're not going to let your friends' happiness define your sadness. If not through marital affection, you're going to find happiness in your career. After all, the people who changed the world didn't let marriage distract them – Isaac Newton, Nikola Tesla, *Haloom* from *Sisimpur*, among many others. Perhaps it's time to complete that MBA after all.

After changing your bedsheet and cleaning your wardrobe, when you're already halfway into fixing your life, a notification pops up – a junior just invited you to his wedding.

The deafening silence in the room reminds you that you were wrong to think that you've entered the marriage threshold. The truth is – you're way past that. With vision all blurry and lips quivering with shame, you reply, "Congratulations! So happy for you!"

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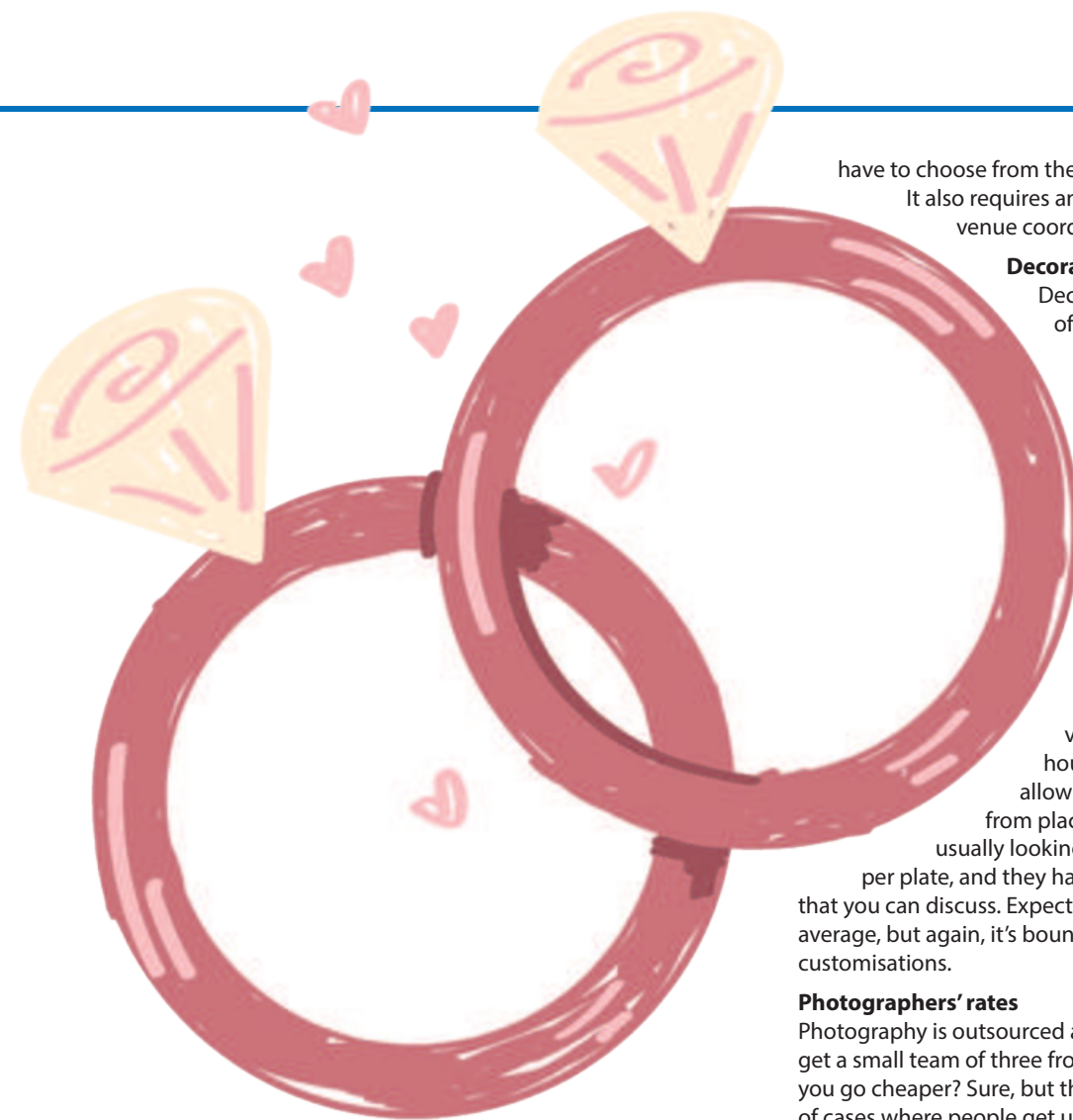
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How much does a wedding really cost?

A guide for “soon to-be weds”



have to choose from their set menus and decor catalogues. It also requires an enormous amount of trust in the venue coordinator themselves.

Decoration costs

Decoration depends a lot on the size of the venue. A very basic standard stage with chairs, lighting, and flowers can cost you between BDT 1,50,000 and BDT 2,00,000 easily. But if you want a beautiful custom setup, it's safer to keep BDT 5,00,000 and BDT 6,00,000 aside for each event. Also, if the hall size gets bigger, the decor costs will also go up, and if this happens, it can really leave a hole in your wallet.

Food costs

Food is another major cost. Some venues require you to take their in-house food vendors only while others allow outside catering. If you outsource from places like Iqbal or Fakrudin, you're usually looking at around BDT 1,000 to 1,500 per plate, and they have many customisable packages that you can discuss. Expect to spend BDT 1,200 per plate on average, but again, it's bound to change if you're making a lot of customisations.

Photographers' rates

Photography is outsourced almost all the time now. You can get a small team of three from BDT 70,000 to BDT 1,50,000. Can you go cheaper? Sure, but that's a bit risky. I have seen plenty of cases where people get unedited photos and low-quality videos. I have also seen people lose video footage of their programmes because of the videographer's poor backups.

Hence, it's always safer to go for a good, well-known team, even if it may not be a cheap option. If your wedding has over 200 guests, you should really take a team of at least five, such as three photographers and two videographers. Their rates are set according to the number of hours and space as well, for example, a package that takes place only inside the venue with no photoshoot outdoors is cheaper than a package that has photographers covering both outdoors and indoors.

Makeup artist packages

Outside of venue, decor, and food, there are many non-events related costs, this is where people really underestimate things.

Consider makeup artist costs as an example. An average bridal package can cost you BDT 25,000, top tier ones go up to BDT 35,000, and some even charge BDT 40,000. Which one you should take depends on what kind of look you want – dewy pink bride, classic red bride, soft glam, bold glam, etc.

Understanding your vision and outfit is also important before booking the makeup artists. Some makeup artist packages include your hair while some charge extra. In some cases, the hair extensions you opt for might add to the cost.

Timing also matters a lot; brides usually book their makeup sessions at least six hours before the programme. Many brides also want to do photoshoots, so they need to get their makeup done accordingly.

Attire costs approximation

Clothes are another important expense as designer bridal outfits easily go into lakhs. But at the same time, places like Anzara, Prem's Collection, and Benaroshi Polli sell beautiful gorgeous outfits between BDT 30,000 and BDT 60,000.

Your wedding dress really depends on you and your budget, so how much you might have to pay for it is something hard to estimate.

Gift-related costs

Making wedding *dalas* at home is very cost effective. Get your preferred gift items at wholesale prices from Elephant Road

or New Market, and prepare the *dalas* at your home getting everyone around you, from your siblings and cousins to your uncles and aunts, involved in the process.

Of course, not everyone has the time or enough cousins to sit and do all that manual work. *Dala* assembly, when you outsource it, alone costs around BDT 2,000 to BDT 4,000 per piece. Usually, it's customary to send six or seven *dalas* but some families go even beyond that.

Some exceptional *dala* setups, which may include more expensive decor and a heavier *dala* base, can cost upwards of BDT 6,000 per piece.

Invitation cards

Wedding or reception cards are available in Eskaton, Elephant Road, and New Market, and they usually cost BDT 600 per piece. Fancier ones with favours—small gifts that a married couple often give to their guests as a little thank you—inside can go upwards of BDT 1,500 per piece.

Overall wedding budget range

In general, a simple wedding event, on average, can cost between BDT 4,00,000 and BDT 6,00,000. Add a bit of grandeur, and you can see the cost go up to BDT 8,00,000 or BDT 10,00,000. And if you're dreaming of a truly grand wedding, you're easily looking at BDT 10,00,000 per event.

At the end of the day, a wedding, no matter how grand or simple, is just one day meant to celebrate love, not stress. Budgets will fluctuate, costs will surprise you, and comparisons will always exist. But the value of such an event can never be measured by how much you spend. What truly matters are the moments you cherish and enjoy with your partner, family, and friends. So, celebrate it fully and remember to enjoy the day for what it is, not what it costs.

Tinath Zaeba is an optimistic daydreamer, a cat mom of 5 and a student of Economics at North South University. Get in touch via mailing to tinathzaeba25@gmail.com

With wedding season in full swing, many of us find ourselves dreaming of a big, proper, grand, and dramatic celebration, just like the ones we grew up watching in Bollywood movies. We also come across photos and videos of such grand weddings on social media, so it's only natural to fill our Pinterest boards with inspiration.

TINATH ZAEBA

But how many of us really stop to consider the costs of turning those grand wedding dreams into reality?

The reality is that wedding costs can vary widely; there's no single fixed price. You have the venue, decor, food, photography, and then expenses like clothes, makeup, and countless smaller costs that slowly add up. No matter when you plan to get married, or how big or intimate the celebration may be, having a clear idea of these expenses can make the entire planning process far more manageable. And that's exactly what we'll do here: break down the costs you need to be aware of when planning a wedding. For simplicity, we'll divide them into two categories: essential event-related costs, such as the venue, food, decor, and photography, and other necessary but non-event expenses, like makeup artists, outfits, gifts, and more.

Venues with no booking fee

Several popular venues, like the InterContinental Dhaka, or Alok Glasshouse, have no venue booking fee. This may sound cheaper but actually, they make that money back through the per plate cost. These per-plate costs usually range from BDT 2,000 to BDT 3,000 per person minimum.

On top of that, these venues often have policies where you can only use their inhouse decorator, which usually adds another BDT 70,000 to BDT 80,000, or more, depending on the size of the venue, to your costs. Hence, even though the venue looks “free” on paper, since you're not having to pay a booking fee, the overall cost is actually very high.

Venues with outsourced decoration

You'll also come across venues that don't charge venue fees and operate on a high per-plate cost. The difference here is that you will be allowed to outsource your own decor, which gives you more flexibility. However, it also adds another task, since you'll

need to manage decorators separately and keep that budget in check as well.

Hall size and guest list

Places like RAOVA Convention Hall, Alok, Police Plaza, and International Convention City Bashundhara (ICCB) have multiple halls. Smaller halls usually fit around 100 to 150 guests while the bigger ones can accommodate up to a thousand people comfortably at times.

Of course, the bigger the hall, the higher the cost, so your guest list alone can completely change your venue budget – same place, different hall, totally different prices.

Venues with only venue fee

Another important venue variation is that some places allow you to only pay the venue fee, and then you're completely free to outsource both food and decor on your own. This option gives you the most control and customisation freedom, because you can choose your own caterers, your own decorators, and manage each cost separately.

But, at the same time, it also means more stress, because now everything is your responsibility – timing, coordination, quality, and budget control.

Also, when looking for venues, it's important to remember that accessibility and parking space availability matter. These details become very important on the actual day, so site visits are always a good idea.

Full in-house venue packages

There are also venues that offer full in-house packages, meaning if you take their food and their decor together, they give you a complete set deal, maybe even at a slightly discounted price.

This is very convenient for families who don't want the stress of having to manage multiple vendors. The downside of this, however, is that the customisation options become limited and you usually

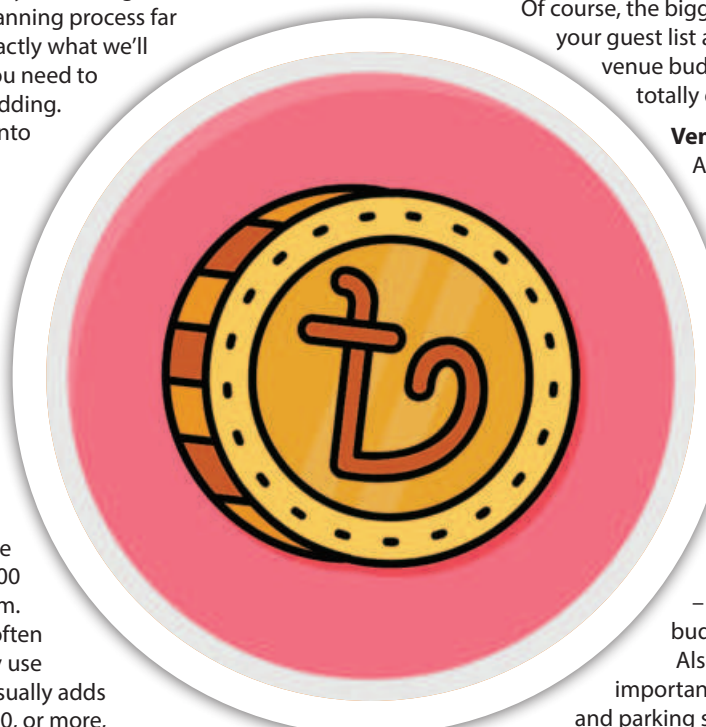


ILLUSTRATION: MONG SHONIE



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Types of people at a holud rehearsal

IRINA JAHAN

The choreographer

This person carries the entire production on their back, and the whole weight of the performance unwittingly falls on them. Nothing starts until this person walks in. The choreographer arguably deserves to be paid, but instead, they survive purely on commitment to leadership and soaring levels of adrenaline.

The deviant

The deviant doesn't follow the steps, and they don't even know it. They follow vibes, and often these vibes put them a beat behind everyone else. Usually, that's something everyone else, apart from him, notices because they are

too immersed in the moment.

The stumbler

Most people forget the steps at some point. But this person struggles extra hard. They're always a few counts behind and constantly trying to remember what comes next. The stumbler can be heard frequently muttering apologies to those around them as they inevitably keep stepping on others like it's become part of the choreography.

The secret soloist

This one definitely does have an innate desire for the spotlight from time to time, but it's not nearly as discreet as they might think. They're convinced that they have a better grasp on the art of dancing than most, and they

always have that one song they desperately want to perform by themselves.

The food enthusiast

They never planned to dance. They're here strictly for cheerleading and snacks. To them, rehearsal is basically dinner and a show.

The professional

Nobody is entirely sure how they know the bride or groom, but someone invited them because if there's a *holud* happening in the city, their name will eventually surface. The professional will arrive with polished moves, unmatched stamina for all the Bollywood songs they will perform, and the confidence of someone who has performed at 30 weddings the past year alone.

SATIRE

Single woman starts third master's degree to avoid getting married

ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single woman in possession of a Higher School Certificate must be in want of a husband.

Anikah Chowdhury, a woman who is about to attend the wedding of a younger cousin, predicts the events she expects to encounter as December rolls around. She expects this season to bring with it an inbox full of gaudy e-cards from people who finally gave up on their avoidant situationships and decided that their parents had a point about arranged marriages.

"As a 25-year-old woman with no money or prospects, my marital status is treated similarly to a matter of national crisis. This leads to an inevitable conversation that unfortunate spinsters such as us are always subject to, turning even the prospect of sneakily acquiring an extra piece of *biryani aloo* into an unappetising affair."

It starts off innocently enough with a simple question regarding your future. But one must remember that social gatherings, aside from being a wonderful way to catch up with friends and family, are a complex ritual of diplomacy that tests how well you can get away with thinly veiled condescension. So, before you start talking about your accomplishments, prepare to be inquired with the age-old question: "So, *maa*, what about marriage?"

"On one hand, you're happy that the conversation has shifted from a fatal flaw in the bride's wedding ensemble or the inadequacies of the food served during the ceremony. On the other hand, you feel tempted to make a snide remark yourself to distract everyone," says Anikah. "But of course, you have to take the high road. You've got to hope that the interrogator in question, who's probably your father's second cousin's wife's third cousin who met you once when you were five months old and is offended

that you don't recognise them, won't start bragging about how much money their son-in-law makes and instead leaves you alone."

When asked about how she has been manoeuvring such tricky situations for the past few years, Anikah shrugs and says, "I think you have to realise that it never gets easier. You'll probably receive your first marriage proposal at a random wedding when you're barely out of college, and your family will probably defend you on account of you being young. As the years pass, you're the only one who has your back, and the attacks get more aggressive. Soon, the marriage proposals go from decent prospects to men with three felonies and a recent declaration of bankruptcy, but what is a marriage without compromise?"

Anikah believes that the best way to dissuade parents who are on the hunt for a daughter-in-law is to establish that you are a person with thoughts and opinions. And what better way to display that than an education certificate?

"When I undertook my first master's degree, it was simply a way for me to delay unemployment for another year. However, after being successfully employed, I ran out of acceptable excuses for why I didn't want to get married immediately, so I decided to get a second degree. This is now my third master's degree, and if all goes well, I'll be able to create a longer delay by signing up for a PhD."



ILLUSTRATION:
RAKEEB RAZZAQ

EDUCATION

Juggling coursework and marriage

FARHEEN RAHMAN

Whilst many of us are excited about enjoying the *kacchi* from our friends' wedding ceremonies and the fun dance routines, many of us forget about the life that lies ahead of the couple on the stage. Under the lustrous appearances, they often have to face the complexities of emotional, academic, and social hurdles that can define perspectives in ways their unmarried peers rarely understand. Marriage adds additional dimensions of financial pressure, shifting identities in society, and academic constraints are often concealed under the delicate veil of romantic optimism.

Finances

Nearly every challenge young couples face is deeply rooted in finances. Firstly, they are mostly not employed. Even if they are, it is mostly part-time, which hardly covers their personal expenses. After you get married, though, the stakes become astronomically higher. Overnight, at least one of these spouses is suddenly responsible for "manning up" and finding work, regardless of where they are in their academic life.

Being forced into job-hunting early, some say, is a blow to academic interests. For others, the emotional pain goes deeper. Zahra Tashrif*, a third-year student of Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), states, "My husband felt pressured that he had to receive financial support from his family. He never expressed anything, but I could always sense it. Alhamdulillah, our parents were very supportive as we were both students, and we overcame it." Her reflection speaks to an experience of many couples, a discomfort that comes with dependence on a partner and family.

This early financial pressure blurs the notion of university as a time to grow and discover. Instead, students are walking a high wire between responsibility and aspiration, often feeling that they are failing in both directions.

A rushed wedding

For most student couples, weddings are quickly set during semester breaks, the only convenient window as far as families are concerned. The truth is though, that few weddings neatly fit into a brief academic break. The madness of preparation tumbles into ordinary school days, eating up study hours with phone calls, shopping trips, venue visits, family meetings, and endless decision-making. Many students are busy writing guest lists between lectures and popping out for dance rehearsals rather than group presentations. Then after the ceremony, post-wedding niceties and social duties leave them with little time for studying. What should be a joyful journey quickly becomes a juggling act, academic obligations dropped so that there are brains left for an elaborate wedding. If not, they are left to deal with the rushed necessities.

Deciding where home is

This is one of the earliest and most emotional dilemmas for young couples: deciding where to settle. Many students must decide whether to live with their own families, move in with in-laws, or rent a home off campus. Each option carries its own weight. Living at home can offer stability but little privacy. Living with in-laws might be accompanied by expectations and circumstances that a young student is not ready for emotionally or mentally. Alternatively, wishing to rent a separate apartment, which is considered ideal for many students, demands financial independence that only a few of them have.

This question of habitat is not simply

a question of logistics. It dictates their freedom, concentration on studies, and ease of finding a footing to adjust in the early days of marriage. For others, it dwindles a sentiment of being "in between worlds", not independent yet no longer a child with their parents taking care of them.

Managing a home while managing coursework

One of the most immediate challenges is dealing with domestic duties. Cooking, cleaning, shopping, and running a household are things most students have little or no experience with. When life in university, from the assignments and presentations and exams, comes crashing head-first with running a household, burnout is almost simply waiting to happen.

The adjustment, for many, has been jarring. "The biggest change in my life after getting married is that I have to handle all my household affairs like cooking, cleaning, and maintaining my academic life, along with handling things in my in-laws' house, which I had never done before. Whereas, in my parents' house I was fully dependent on my mother even for the smallest things," Zahra* says. Her situation mirrors a truth many such early-married students experience: you go quickly, almost suddenly, overnight, from depending on others for everything to carrying all the weight yourself.

Some students have support from their families, but many are on the hook for everything. The outcome is a continual tug of war between household duty and scholarly demands. A student might get up early to make breakfast before an 8 AM class, or spend study time doing errands, or cleaning. Some might have to give up a good grade in class attendance for other chores. This double punch eventually affects academic performance, mental health, and even personal ambition.

The unspoken academic pressure on a budding relationship

Perhaps one of the most significant challenges is the academic burdens exerted on the relationship itself. Coursework requires time, attention, and emotional energy, the same resources that married life also requires. Exam stress, study stress, and not having enough time for each other are reported as causing problems. Rather than a solidified domestic

conception of conjugal life, couples are often stumbling around in environments where frustration and miscommunication prevail.

Academic pressure is also critical in the formation of friendship. University life requires time, emotional energy, and mental presence, all of which relationships also need. Lots of married students struggle to balance taking care of their marriage while keeping up with homework, too. A student of Shaheed M Monsur Ali Medical College, Sabiha Karim* asserts, "My fiancé motivates me a lot regarding my studies. He tries his best to help me study well. But sometimes, when a conflict arises, I cannot concentrate on my studies. Since I live in a hostel, the issues don't get sorted out quickly either."

Social pressure to start a family

Another burdening factor is the pressure of having children. For some couples, it's a subtle nudge; for others, an explicit timeline cited by elders. The pressure to conceive is weighty for students grappling with the responsibilities of study and married life. Not to mention that starting a family at this point could necessitate an interruption in one's education, thoughts of abandoning career plans much earlier than they had envisioned, and even giving up personal dreams. Certain students are not ready for nor willing to make some such decisions.

Social isolation and restricted mobility

Many married students gradually become distant from their social circles after marriage. Friends might think they are "too lost in married life", with reduced invitations to hangouts, study, or university club gatherings. This unintended exclusion causes loneliness and disconnection, and this ironically occurs during the stressful academic seasons when peer support is needed most. As their social lives contract, married students lose not only companionship, but also the informal academic assistance and emotional release that come with close friendships. Even several faculties do not see spousal responsibilities as justifiable grounds to miss a class, turn in late work, or require flexibility.

This isolation grows when married students have restrictions placed on their mobility, especially women who may feel uneasy about going out for late-night group work or study tours and club events.

This also includes the discomfort to conduct research work under the watchful eyes of one's husband and in-laws. Some also have to give up the practice of being a private tutor along the way. Such limitations frequently make it difficult for students to fully engage with academic life or develop experiences necessary for personal growth. Eventually, these barriers lead to a silent disengagement from the youthful campus experience, leaving married students existing in body but living on the margins of university life.

Getting married in university is not inherently bad or universally doomed to fail, but it requires emotional maturity, time management, and resilience that most young adults are still developing. As they balance homes, finances, relationships, and academics, what these young adults show is that marriage isn't simply a romantic partnership; it's a structural union. Their stories are a reminder that for every smiling wedding picture, there is a hidden struggle to become grown-ups far too quickly and too soon. Marriage should be the start of a new journey, not another obstacle on the one they are already on.

*Names have been changed upon request.

Farheen Rahman is an IR student who analyses global trends and occasionally wonders why they all peak during exam season. Reach her at: farheen.subah@gmail.com.

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA





ILLUSTRATION:
SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

What should we make of same-age marriages?

AZRA HUMAYRA

Certain things in life have simply never made sense to me, and relationships are right up there, sandwiched between calculus and people who pay money to run in marathons. I never especially cared about romance, but I told myself, in a pleasantly delusional way, "If it pops up, I'll welcome it with open arms."

Of course, I had standards. The man must wear glasses. He must be taller than me. And, crucially, he must be older. You may ask why I insisted on the last one. The truth is, my mother drilled it into me from childhood: my husband must be older so that his maturity level aligns with mine. I tried to follow her wisdom, but the future had other plans.

I stumbled into my first serious relationship at the age of 20. My partner ticked almost every box on my carefully curated list, except one, the very one my mother feared for reasons known only to her and her peers. Eventually, my mother discovered that I was seeing someone, and her first question was whether he was my batchmate. When I admitted that he was, she sighed, visibly wounded. It was bad enough I was dating at all, but what made it particularly upsetting for her was that my partner was of the same age. This was a calamity, up there with earthquakes and skipping dinner.

Now that I'm approaching what I like to call a "serious" age, I've been thinking about marriage. My partner, inconveniently, has remained exactly as old as I am this entire time, which feels like poor planning on his part. Lately, I find myself wondering why my mother was so squarely opposed to same-age marriages, and why my friends swore by them.

I consulted four fully fledged adults, all well into their 40s and all with at least a four-year age gap between themselves and their partners. Then I interviewed six young adults who believe in "age symmetry" in marriage.

When I asked the pro-age-symmetry crowd to sell me their philosophy, they practically produced presentation slides. They talked first about friendship, a foundation for *everlasting* love. If you're the same age, they said, you're more likely to actually like one another, not just tolerate each other's breathing habits. Then there's communication; you're more likely to communicate openly with someone you can confide in as a friend. That is, until someone forgets someone's birthday.

Being born in roughly the same era supposedly means you understand one another's references, which is vital if you don't want to spend half your life explaining who *Jogesh* is. Shared references eventually ripen into jokes no one else finds amusing, but it hardly matters because your partner will always laugh.

There were other points too. People of the same age often have shared interests, which means a greater supply of conversation topics beyond filing taxes and the outrageous price of eggs. They might relate to childhood experiences in similar ways, bonding over mutual anger involving dial-up internet. And having lived through the same macro environment, economic recessions, questionable fashion trends, and various political disappointments, they tend to form similar worldviews.

One interviewee, who has been married to her partner for over a decade, said they could also understand one another's mental health better because they were travelling through the same life stages at the same time. Apparently, it's easier to unmask your anxieties to someone who remembers the same political turmoil.

In case you forgot, there are cons. Nothing comes without a health warning, and the anti-symmetry adults came armed with theirs. They worried about both partners advancing through illness and creaky joints at roughly the same rate, which sounds sentimental in a film but less so when you're both comparing prescription lists. There's

also the matter of careers. Two ambitious people in the same stage of professional development may find that their home resembles a shared office with laundry, each wondering who will cook dinner and whether capitalism is the true villain in their relationship.

Then there were the classic complaints. Men, someone insisted, are forced into financial responsibility far too early if they date a woman their own age. Personally, I hear patriarchy and capitalism clearing its throat in the background. Besides, plenty of women are marching into the workforce and splitting bills with admirable enthusiasm, which suggests the real task ahead is unlearning our mothers' favourite matchmaking superstitions.

One of the older women, who vehemently opposes same-age marriages, fretted about maturity; the logic seemed to be that men reach emotional adulthood the way slow-cooked mutton reaches tenderness: given time, medium heat, and the firm belief that leaving them alone for long enough will improve the outcome. This is a myth one of the interviewees, who has dated older men, busted. So maybe age doesn't come wisdom.

In the end, it seems everyone has a theory, and most of them sound perfectly reasonable until you start living with an actual human being who doesn't wash their feet before getting on the bed. There will always be pros, cons, warnings, and intergenerational advice delivered with *bhaat* and a hint of doom. But the real truth is that relationships are wildly personal. You don't have to be the same age to laugh at the same things, nor do you need a four-year gap to magically acquire maturity. You just need someone you can talk to, complain to, and occasionally glare at while deciding who's going to make tea in the evening.

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