Marriage : A Qualitative Study on Gen Z's Point of View

Introduction

India, as a society, is said to be bound to its customs and traditions. Even in the 21st century, these traditions and norms still exist. Most of these traditions and customs still devalue the women of our country and this study seeks to understand the views of Gen Z and how different they are from the traditional views. This study aims to understand the different expectations, experiences and perspectives of undergraduate students at a premier engineering institute on the question of roles for men and women in an arranged marriage and what factors they think influence these roles. Analyzing different perspectives of these participants will help us understand what marriage means to them; it also is a projection of what they desire. Through this study, we will understand not only the desires of the participants but also what they think is expected of them by their parents and other family members. This project will seek to answer the following questions :

- How do perceptions and expectations of an ideal, eligible mate vary for women and men in the context of marriage
- How do these perceptions and expectations compare to those of the previous generation, i.e. parents' generation? Do the parents of the participants have the same expectations, or do they vary? If yes, then in what sense?
- Apart from individual perceptions and expectations, what other factors are involved in deciding upon a mate?

Traditionally we have seen men in a more power dominated position where they had the right to make their own decisions and also decisions concerning their families whereas women were asked to look after the needs of her family and also her husband's family. She had to take care of the families while her husband would make all decisions concerning him and his wife (Menon, 2012; Esteve, García-Román, & Kashyap, 2015). I believe these assumptions of gendered roles are very unfair and this study helps us not only understand what Gen Z thinks about these roles and the expectations of their parents and family members, but also if they are willing to continue with these roles.

Literature Review

Traditionally written history did not consider women to be actively creating history. Problems, unless politicized, remain problems. The issue with the ancient way of writing histories was that women were considered as 'problems' (Kannabiran et al., 1989, p. 25).

With time, contributory histories started accommodating more women. They started from writing about notable women and their achievements to women's participation in mass movements. Even though these histories included women, the cultural and political biases still persisted and women were considered to be contributing, that is, adding to pre-existing history and not as a part of creating history. The only plus point about such contributory histories is that they could account for the different classes of women that came together as a group.

Ke Lalita and Vasantha Kannabiran in their book "We Were Making History: Women in the Telangana Uprising" (1989) make a shift in the way women are addressed in histories. From contributory histories, they move towards a history that "takes women seriously". This history is written with a women's point of view, the values and disciplines shared by them and they are not spoken about but they speak for themselves by sharing their experiences, views and beliefs. New categories, concepts and methodologies need to be created for a shift as such (Kannabiran et al., 1989, p. 26).

Situated knowledge is a state of knowledge production where the individual is actively taking a stand. By "actively taking a stand", Donna Haraway takes into account the lived experiences of an individual, that is, their knowledge produced is situated socially, culturally and historically. (Bjorkman, 2005). The approach of contemporary feminists is that of post-positivists, that is, "social contexts of people's lives are historically situated and constituted through people's activities"[5] (DeVault & Gross, 2012).

When analysing an object, feminist analysis would "de-naturalize" the object, that is, that particular technology is not examined apart from its origins, contexts and/or consequences but the actions and processes invested into making the technology is also considered to be a part of the nature of technology (Bjorkman, 2005).

There are various methodologies in feminist research, one such is the feminist interviewing. Contemporary feminist interviewing does not regard 'women' as the main subject of feminism because of its intersectional nature, that is, since "women" can be spoken about in different contexts like class, race, religion, caste, and more, "women" as such is not a stable subject in feminism. In addition to this, similar to how "women" is not a stable category, all or any genders are not stable and gender itself is culturally produced (DeVault & Gross, 2012).

The feminist standpoint theories (FST) claim that it is situated knowledge that gives different insights from different groups, groups here could be dominant or marginal, and therefore, women belonging to different caste, class, race, and religion would have different beliefs and values simply because of their different social locations which leads to differences in production of knowledge since it is socially situated (Hamel & Linabary, 2017).

For feminist research in technology, it is really necessary for feminists to expand the understandings and concepts of technology since technology creates culture of science which in turn is a part of the process of knowledge production. Therefore, technology undergoing gendered analysis brings in new perspectives and ideas about the technology and for this analysis, it is necessary to view technology from all social and cultural aspects.(Bjorkman, 2005)

A study conducted in 2015 answered questions surrounding the digital dating app ecosystem in India. Focusing on a dating app 'TrulyMadly', the author tried to understand the company's perceptions of "appropriate" male and female behavior on their platform. The main concern for the developers of this application was the safety of women, they should be able to form romantic and intimate connections without feeling unsafe. Therefore, the accounts were verified and trust scores displayed on men's profiles. This technology was created to explore and express sexual desires but it remained deeply gendered since as mentioned earlier, the key concern of the application still remained the safety of women (Das, 2019).

Reflexive interviewing is a method in feminist research in which knowledge is produced by experiences, experiences of the research subjects. Every experience recounted by a participant not only involves their social and cultural contexts but also how it is interpreted depends on the researcher's needs and desires from their projects. This makes it necessary for the researcher to be extra careful during interviews, that is, to not let their desires hinder the interview and when the interview takes a new turn, they might as well go along with it to discover something they had not foreseen. The research should be less of an inquiry and more of a conversation where the researcher and the participant act as co-participants, so that the risk of power hierarchies is somewhat tackled through this approach (DeVault & Gross, 2012; Hamel & Linabary, 2017).

While listening to the research subject, the interviewer needs to be wary of how they are interpreting it. They should actively listen to the experiences of the subject and gain knowledge as that would bring them closer to the interviewee. Since women's demands, experiences, views, beliefs have always been ignored, one of the central claims of feminists is to look out for these gaps and absences when women talk (DeVault & Gross, 2012).
In qualitative interviewing, researchers can adapt and change their questions as and when needed, depending on the situation. Feminist researchers conducting qualitative research produce relational knowledge and use mapping as a methodological tool (DeVault & Gross, 2012).

Feminist researchers wish to break down the power hierarchies, be reflexive during the entire process and include research subjects to actively participate and reflect on the research process (Hamel & Linabary, 2017). The different feminist methodologies claim that since knowledge is socially situated, it becomes necessary for us to look at the social locations of the researcher and participant since the production of knowledge is linked to power and feminist research critically examines the issues of power. (Hamel & Linabary, 2017)

A study conducted in 1968 looked at the institution of mating patterns and explains "variables as a part of the cultural system which help in promotion and sustenance of arranged marriage" (Gupta, 1976). Gupta explains that since a person during their adolescence is not isolated from their family, this individual forms close ties within the family thus receiving care, support, and help from their family members. Due to the constant support, the individual starts becoming emotionally dependent on their family members and consults their family in important decisions like the decision of marriage. Having an extended family involved in your decision making, keeping the circle close thus hierarchies preserved, being emotionally and financially dependent on family, and providing no choice to the individual to make decisions regarding marriage are some reasons why arranged marriages still take place. Migration and media have majorly impacted marriage patterns (Gupta, 1976).
India has a growing number of temporary and circular migrants. Among it's permanent migrants, women make up about 83% of it. A study conducted on socio economic correlates of marriage migration from 1983 to 2008 concluded that marriage migration mostly occurred in households with lower per capita consumption and urban inequality was an important factor in female marriage migration (Rao & Finnoff, 2015).

Another study conducted from 1970 to 2012 examined spouse choice, inter caste marriage, consanguineous marriage, and the length of time spouses knew each other prior to marriage at a national level and analyzed the variations at the regional level, urban-rural residence and on the basis of caste and religion. Their sample included women who married in 1970 or later. They predicted the decline of arranged marriages using two theories, namely, modernization theory and developmental idealism theory. Modernization theory does not view arranged marriage compatible with urban lifestyle and developmental idealism theory predicts the adoption of developmental idealism by urban residents before rural residents but due to the gendered values and popular acceptance of caste endogamy, the chances of developmental idealism being a major factor in marital patterns reduces. This study examined marriage patterns using the above mentioned factors with respect to the demographic divide, that is, on a regional level, and also on the basis of urban-rural lifestyle and religion (Allendorf & Pandian, 2016).

A study conducted using the data from 2005 and 2006 Indian National Family Health Survey and 2004 Socio-Economic Survey used three sets of marriage pairing propensities, namely, contemporary patterns by age, contemporary patterns by age and education, and changing propensities that allow for greater education homogamy and reduced educational asymmetries and projected on future population (year 2050). The authors predicted three trends that would impact marriage patterns in future, namely, female deficit in SRB, declining birth cohort size and female educational expansion. They concluded that men would experience decline in marriage due to shortage of brides, and women with higher education would experience nonmarriage and that pairing towards educational homogamy and gender symmetry can counteract this rise in non-marriage (Esteve, García-Román, & Kashyap, 2015).

A few studies have also conducted in-depth analysis looking at the changing aspirations of unmarried women who work as call center agents in India, inter-caste marriages in the rural Indian context, exploring marital satisfaction among arranged marriage spouses of Hindu faith and much more (Tara & Ilavarasan, 2011; Dhar, 2013; Bowman & Dollahite, 2014).

Reading these articles on qualitative feminist research and a number of research conduced on Indian marriages, I realized none of these studies took young adults, mainly belonging to the age group of 19-21 year olds, as their research subjects. All of the above mentioned studies conducted national level surveys and the articles which did qualitative analysis did not have teenagers as their research subjects. Therefore, an in-depth analysis on students belonging to the age group of 19-21 year olds is something that has not been conducted so far.
Thus, I have decided to study and understand the different expectations, experiences and perspectives of undergraduate students at a premier engineering institute on the question of roles for men and women in an arranged marriage and what factors they think influence these roles. Analyzing different perspectives of these participants will help us understand what marriage means to them; it also is a projection of what they desire. Through this study, we will understand not only the desires of the participants but also what they think is expected of them by their parents and other family members. This study will seek to answer the following questions :

● How do perceptions and expectations of an ideal, eligible mate vary for women and men in the context of marriage

● How do these perceptions and expectations compare to those of the previous generation, i.e. parents' generation? Do the parents of the participants have the same expectations, or do they vary? If yes, then in what sense?

● Apart from individual perceptions and expectations, what other factors are involved in deciding upon a mate?

The expectations and assumed roles of men and women in an arranged marriage usually gives more authority to men in making decisions about their families and their life, whereas women usually end up taking care of the families and their entire life revolves around the needs and expectations of their husbands (Menon, 2012; Esteve, García-Román, & Kashyap, 2015). I believe these assumptions of gendered roles are very unfair and this study helps us not only understand what Gen Z thinks about these roles and the expectations of their parents and family members, but also if they are willing to continue with these roles.

Once I understand the sentiments around marriage in Gen Z, I plan on analyzing different perspectives and desires of Gen X, that is, of parents. This would help broaden my knowledge about perceptions of arranged marriages in the Indian context and the changing sentiments across generations.

Method Description

This study conducted an interview online via a video call and will be recorded with the consent of the participant. 20 research subjects were chosen for the interview and they were college going students pursuing engineering and belonging to the age group of 19-21 year olds. Out of the 20 research subjects, 11 interviewed had gone with the pronouns him/his and the rest 9 had gone with the pronoun she/her. A minimum of one interview and a maximum of 3 interviews were conducted in a day which lasted on an average of 40 mins.

The reason we have restricted the study to 20 participants is because we want to conduct an in-depth study, which yields qualitatively meaningful insights. Even though the research subjects participating in this study have almost the same level of educational qualification, differences in their opinions were expected because of individuality, social location, their parents' expectations, family members' expectations and their own desires (Bjorkman, 2005; Hamel & Linabary, 2017).

In this interview, subjective questions were asked which sought to understand their perspectives and what they think are the external factors, apart from themselves, that influence the process of mate selection. Giving them perspective based questions would help them reflect upon their answers and construct and reconstruct their answers based on their analysis. Reflexivity played a role in the analysis and evaluation of the research process and its outcomes. (Hamel & Linabary, 2017).

There was an initial set of questions prepared to answer the research questions I was aiming to analyze as mentioned earlier. These questions to some extent were personal and before the interviews the participants were informed that they would be anonymous and that anything they say will only remain between the two of us. Almost all of the participants were comfortable with

answering the questions they were asked for the interview. A few questions were modified slightly in case a participant was uncomfortable while answering. This ensured that the participant was comfortable answering the remaining questions. A few other modifications were made in case the parents of the participant have been separated. In such a scenario, all questions regarding parents' perceptions were changed to only ask perceptions of the parent they are currently in touch with.

During the planning, a total of 31 questions, which included 11 questions with follow up questions, were prepared to ask the participants. A few follow ups acted as prompts which helped them think in a specific direction.
A few interviews required me to go back to certain questions and ask the question again in case I felt their answers were contradictory or maybe when they had opened up enough to share more detailed information for some answers. During the course of this project, due to the interview settings around 8 follow up questions were added to the initial set and the same have been added under Appendix.

Analysis and Findings

The analysis has been made under two categories - men and women since all the research subjects either identified as him/his or she/her. Through this, we observe the different views of the two genders on marriages. They were initially asked questions about their current relationship followed by questions on marriages. These questions helped us understand the views of the college students and also of their parents.

I. Gen Z' s Perception

This section focuses on the perceptions and perspectives of the college students on marriages and relationships. The following has been understood through the answers provided to the questions asked during the interview.

A. Women's Perception

Out of the 9 women interviewed, the ones who are in a relationship said that their parents did not know about their relationship and all of them did not want their parents to have a say in who they see while in a relationship and for marriages, they said their parents approval would be a necessity and in case they do not approve due to some logical reason they would leave their partner. Here, a logical reasoning would include arguments based on the livelihood of their partner and anything that would make their parents feel there is not enough compatibility. Therefore, it is important that their parents approve of their partner. One very prominent aspect for compatibility involved financial stability from their partner. They wanted their partner to be financially stable and independent and did not want them to earn very less than the amount they are currently earning. Some have said that physical appearance matters to them since for them to be

attracted to someone they would have that person to be physically appealing. One mentioned that their partner should be "tall, lean" for them to be attracted to them. A few others said that physical appearance will not be an issue in case of a love marriage but in case of an arranged marriage, physical appearance would be a factor for them while choosing a partner.

Almost all of them were willing to do an arranged marriage as long as they had spent enough time with the person. This time period varied in the range of 4 hours to a year. One of them approved of arranged marriage saying it was a "parental approved tinder since we don't need to be scared when we go for dates around the city, scared if parents find out."

All of them respected other people's opinion on whether or not they would want to get married but they saw themselves getting married at some point in their life. For some, this point in life was defined by age which was in the range of 23 years to 31 years old where 31 is the upper limit so in case they do not find a partner by a specific age they would go for an arranged marriage and be married by the age of 31. For others, this point in life is defined by their financial stability which implies if they are not financially independent by their upper limit they would put a hold on marriage and continue pursuing their career.

Additionally, they also say marriage is essential in their lives as they have been told since childhood that they will get married.

For all of them, marriage was more "serious" than seeing someone before marriage. The reason given by them for this had a lot to do with the involvement of society. Once married, your families are also involved, everyone around you will know about your commitment to the other person and "going through the process of divorce is a whole lot harder" said one participant.

One participant on marriage commented, "after marriage, life is different. Parents won't control everything that I say. It is an important decision that requires planning and rational thinking and a decision cannot be made emotionally. More than love, there are other factors which are important in marriage and love has a chance in the future but to be compatible, rational and logical thinking is required."

Regarding the age of the partner, they did not have a problem marrying someone 3-4 years older than them but that's the upper limit on the age gap.

B. Men's Perception

Out of the 11 men interviewed, only one or two had told their parents about their relationship and the rest who were in a relationship, did not.

All of them did not want their parents to have a say in who they see and in the case of marriage, almost all of them decided that they would continue to stay with the person even if their parents disapproved of them. In terms of compatibility, they wanted their partner to have educational qualifications similar to what they have attained or more but not less.

In case they agreed to an arranged marriage, they would want to know and be in touch with the person for a time period in the range of 2 months to a year or two of living together and the age at which they would want to get married ranged from 27 years to 32 years old and if age was not a factor then once they had attained financial stability, they would marry.

Almost all of them agreed to having no change in priorities before and after marriage. "Life will not be very different from before marriage", said one participant.

These participants wanted their partner to pursue their goals and also be driven in their life. One of them also said they wanted someone who had a higher paying job than them for there to be some healthy competition.

One of the participants said that he would be staying with his parents after marriage and wanted a partner who could "look after my parents' needs, take care of them and manage everything at home" but at the same time wanted her to pursue her dreams and career. For a few of them, the ideal was to alternate between caring for parents and work implying that he would work for some time during which his partner would stay at home and after some time he would sit at home and his partner can pursue their goals.

II.   Parents' Perception

A. Daughter's Parents

All parents of the women participants had an arranged marriage.

For some participants, their parents would disapprove of finding a partner and would rather prefer an arranged marriage. They would want someone from a "proper financial background, good family background, good qualities which would mean they don't smoke or drink and would look at the medical history of the person and their family." They would look for someone who is educated and is financially stable and whose family would be compatible with their family. They would look for someone older or someone of the same age but not someone who is younger. For most of them, religion and caste was a factor.

Only one or two agreed to an inter-religion marriage otherwise for most it was necessary that the child's partner belongs to the same caste or a caste that is similar to their caste. For them, physical appearance is not a factor they would consider while looking for a partner for their child.

All of them would disapprove of a live-in relationship. They also think that marriage is essential. One of them said that for their parents, "marriage is more of a responsibility. They would want me to get married."

For them, in terms of age, they would want their child to marry in the range of 18 years to an upper limit of 30 years old. By the age of 30, they would start pushing for marriage. When discussing financial stability, one participant mentioned that her parents are of the opinion that "if the girl earns more than the boy then the

boy's family might have some issues and therefore the boy should earn more than me".

Some of the participants said that their parents want them to be happy and independent by the time they are in their late 20s and then they would want them to get married. For some other participants their parents want them to "get married by 22, first child by 23-24 and second child by 25" as said by one of the participants.

Therefore, marriage is not the top priority for all of them but it is essential and it is a part of life for them.

B. Son's Parents

Almost all of the parents of these participants had an arranged marriage except one who had a love marriage. All of them were alright with the participants finding their own partner except for one or two.

They would prefer someone who is as educated as their child and someone belonging to the same caste and if the person is compatible enough they would approve an inter-caste marriage as long as the partner is of the same religion since as said by one participant, "they will tell me that people of different religion are brought up differently and you would have to adjust". Another participant mentioned that the first question his parents asked when he told them about his relationship was "what caste was she from?". Therefore, religion and caste play a very important role while choosing a mate.

In terms of age, they would prefer someone of the same age or someone younger. In terms of age, the range within which they would want their son to marry was 24 years to 30 years old.

For them, marriage is an essential part of life and thus by the age of 30, they would start pushing on marriage even if their child is not financially stable.

For some of them, physical appearance is an aspect while choosing a partner for their child where physical appearance would include height, weight and complexion. They want someone who is shorter or of the same height as their son, someone who is physically fit and of fair complexion. One participant mentioned that for his parents " physical appearance matters and they would want someone who is beautiful. They want the general traditional norms like *gori*, *patli*, *sanskaari* and know how to work in the kitchen". Another one said that his parents " don't want her to be of dark complexion since a little preference for appearance is given".

In terms of values, one participant said that their parents want someone who is "educated and respectful of me and this is a minimum requirement". Another participant mentioned that "my parents want a girl who is a bit old-fashioned and not modern. She has to be traditional. In my community, a girl should not have a job after marriage and her intention should be to stop working after marriage. Her family should own good land and property and my family would also expect some dowry".

III.   Analysis

For parents of both genders, extended family played a role to a certain extent. The extended family's opinions would generally be heard but not paid much attention to. They would still go ahead and marry their partner even if some other members of the family do not approve of them.

We notice from all the interviews that while mentioning arranged marriages, participants also specifically mentioned that their condition would be that they would want to know the person for a certain amount of time before getting married to them. This points to the fact that for them, arranged marriages are marriages where the parents select the bride or the groom without any consultation from the person getting married. Love marriages according to them happen with the person they found and if their parents agree to the marriage then the marriage is an arranged cum love marriage. Therefore, arranged marriages happen without their consultation and love marriages happen without their parents' approval. Thus, according to the participants, approval from both themselves and their parents would be an arranged cum love marriage.

From the findings mentioned in the above two sections, we also observe that parent's approval for marriage is necessary for women whereas for men they would still continue to be with their partner even if their parents have not approved their relationship with this partner implying that men have more authority in decision making and women think about their parents and families before making any decision.

One more important observation we make is that physical appearance matters more to the son's parents than to the daughter's parents. Some of the male participants' parents want a "sanskaari, fair skinned, slim" girl whereas female participants' parents do not have such specifications.

In terms of age, we notice that women and men do not have a problem in being with someone younger, older or of the same age and a maximum age gap of 4 years whereas women's parents would look for someone who is older or of the same age and men's parents would look for someone who is younger or of the same age.

In terms of educational qualification, both men and women want someone who at least has the same educational qualifications as them and women's parents would also look for someone who is financially stable and independent whereas men's parents will look for some minimum educational qualifications without much emphasis on financial independence.

Conclusion

In this project, interviews were conducted with students belonging to my generation, receiving the same education I am. This study interviewed 20 students in total and tried to understand and analyze their views depending on the expectations of their family, their own desires and experiences. Along with this, questions regarding their parents' desires and expectations were also asked and a comparison was made between their views and their parents' views which tried to understand the difference in opinion between the two generations. It looked at various factors like age, education, social factors including caste, religion, values, opinions of extended family, physical appearance and a few others while analyzing and interpreting the perspectives of individuals on marriages and especially the role of husband and wife in an arranged marriage which helped in observing shifts in norms and values, if at all. It sought to answer the three research questions as mentioned earlier which helped in recognizing different views present within Gen Z.

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Appendix

Following were the questions designed for the interview and were prepared before starting the interviews :

1. What is your age and could you let me know about your pronouns?
2. May I know where you are right now? Is it okay for me to ask you a few personal questions?
3. Is it okay to ask if you are single or seeing someone?(You don't have to tell me who it is).
   a. Do your parents know about your relationship?
      i. [If not] Follow up question - How do you want to find your partner?/ Do you want your parents to have a say in who you see?
         1. [If yes] Do you want to elaborate on that?
   b. Are your parents okay with you finding your own partner?
      i. Follow up question - Do they have any particular expectations or restrictions?/ Are there any particular qualities they are looking for?
      ii. What about social factors, is religion important, is there anything else that you think your parents would be concerned about?
4. What about your parents' marriage? Was it an arranged one or a love marriage?
5. What do you think of marriage?
   a. [Alternative] What do you think about the institution of marriage? Would you do it? Are you planning to get married?
6. Do your parents think marriage is essential?
   a. [If yes] Follow up question - Is there a particular age by which you think or your parents think you should get married?
7. Who do you think you will be most compatible with?/ What qualities in your partner do you think will ensure a long term relationship?
8. Is it important to you that your parents approve of your partner? Is your marriage a topic of conversation in your house? Do you want to share that?
   a. [If yes] How do you feel about that?
9. Are there particular expectations [For eg : how often you can meet your friends, work expected to do at home] about how you will prioritize and organize your life when you get married? Do you think your life will be different, and how so?
   a. Are you thinking about your career and the possible problems that your relationship/marriage is going to pose to your career?
10. What are your parents' aspirations or goals for you?
    a. Follow up question - If their goals for you are in the following order - career, marriage, happiness - which of these is more important?
11. Do you have a timeline for your goals? Is it okay for you to run me through it once?
    a. Follow up question - What do your parents think of these goals?

Eventually during actual interview settings, extra questions had to be added and those have been added after the initial set of questions :

3.b.iii. Would they also be looking at the medical history of your partner's family?

5.b. [Follow up] What are your thoughts on the legalization of marriage?

6.b [Follow up] What age would you want your partner to be at the time of marriage?

7.a [Follow up] Would you want your partner to be financially stable at the time of marriage?

7.b [Follow up] Do you think there is more commitment in marriage than in a live-in relationship?

    7.b.i [If yes] Why do you think that is the case?

7.c [Follow up] What are your thoughts on open and/or casual relationships?

7.d [Follow up] Do social and political views of your partner also matter to you?

8.b [Follow up] Is it important to you that your extended family approves of your partner?