

## Socio-Cultural Transformation in the Institution of Family in Pakistan

Amna Rasool<sup>1</sup>

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Article Information		Abstract
Received:	August 25, 2024	The present paper attempts to analyze the changing dynamics of family structure and dynamics in Pakistan during the last couple of decades, with a special focus on socio-cultural transformations. It investigates the shifts brought forth by these agents within family systems under the impact of urbanization, economic change, and globalization. It traces a shift from the joint to the nuclear family structure, changing marriage practices, evolving gender roles, and tensions between traditional values and modern aspirations. It pulls in historical perspectives as well as contemporary research to reveal its argument that these changes pose a host of challenges and opportunities for Pakistani society. It contends that while many of the conventional elements in family life remain, the major transformations in family functions and forms are changing Pakistan's social relations and personal identity.
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<b>Keywords</b>		
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<i>Marriage practices</i>		
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### 1 Introduction

The institution of the family is the basic unit of society, inextricably linked with other social institutions, such as education, politics, economics, and religion (Robertson, 1991). This background study has observed that the institution of family structure in Pakistan has made radical changes on its part throughout history. It has also shown influential reflections of wider socio-cultural changes taking place within the country. This paper attempts to examine the changing nature of family dynamics in Pakistan, more particularly how traditional structures respond in the face of modernization, urbanization, and globalization. The structure of Pakistani families has historically comprised joint family systems, patriarchal structures, and interconnected households. There is an assertion of shared decision-making, sharing of resources, and strong kinship in such traditional forms (Pakistanis, 2021). Over the last few decades, however, a slow change in families' structure and functions is understood to have taken place due to various changing factors such as economic stress, enhanced mobility, and changing social norms (Hareven, 1991).

Some of the noticeable changes include the shift from joint to nuclear family systems, especially in urban areas. Another accompanying feature was that of changing gender roles, wherein women began to participate in the workforce and assume a more autonomous role in family decision-making processes (Saqib Lodhi et al., 2019). While mate selection practices have evolved from purely arranged marriages to more flexible approaches wherein individual tastes and preferences are considered with some degree of family involvement, the institution of marriage itself underwent a sea of change, with marriages becoming more and more ostentatious and thus an expressional display of social status (Yu & Hertog, 2018). The problems of dowry have continued to plague many families, especially those from lower socio-economic groups.

The changes that have occurred within these forms and the functions of families in Pakistan will be further elaborated in this article. It argues for how urbanization, education, and economic factors have resulted in different family structures, marriage practices, and intergenerational relationships (BABAR<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Centre for South Asian Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore. Email: [amnarasool9@gmail.com](mailto:amnarasool9@gmail.com)

et al., 2018; Nixon et al., 2023). In addition, the tensions between traditional values and modern aspirations, and how families go on to negotiate these complicated dynamics in contemporary Pakistani society, will be discussed (Naeem et al., 2023). It tries to portray a picture of the changing nature of the institution of family in Pakistan through an analysis of these sociocultural transformations, its implication for social cohesion, and the challenges and opportunities it presents to future generations. (Sharif et al., 2023)

The family has remained an institution and a backbone of society, counted among the most important units in the social structure of any nation, since the very beginning of the modern science of sociology (Goldthorpe & Goldthorpe, 1985; Nicholson, 1986; Nisbet, 1993; Stinchcombe, 2013). Family structure has changed much with time in Pakistan, a country rooted in culture with strong traditions but undergoing rapid modernization; it reflects broader socio-cultural change in the nation (Mughal, 2014; Qadeer, 2006). The present paper is an attempt to investigate the changing nature of family dynamics in Pakistan because of the processes of modernization, urbanization, and globalization. Traditionally, the Pakistani family had been marked by a joint family system, patriarchic structure, and interconnected households. The Pakistani family unit has always had the functions of social support, economic cooperation, and cultural continuity (Mirza, 2013; Tabassum, 2011). In the past few decades, however, with changing economic pressures, greater mobility, and finally changing social norms, there has been a slow but sure change in family structure and function, opines Talbot (Talbot, 1998). The most prominent change has been toward the nuclear family system from the joint one, mainly in urban areas. Another change that can be traced is in gender roles, with women increasingly joining the workforce and gaining greater autonomy in decisions pertaining to the family (Damaske, 2011). Moreover, the practices in mate selection have changed from arranged marriages to more flexible ones where individual preferences are taken into consideration alongside those of family members, all in a single matrimonial system, as observed by Korson in 1975 (Chevan & Korson, 1975). Marriage itself has changed in terms of wedding ceremonies, which have become overly elaborate, very expensive, and a means of showing off social status to the concerned people (Alam, 2013). Customs such as dowry practices still tend to burden many families, especially those belonging to relatively lower socio-economic strata, even today.

These changes will be reviewed in this paper in terms of changing forms and continuing functions of families in Pakistan. It will discuss how the impact of urbanization, education, and economic change has affected family structures, marriage, and intergenerational relationships. First, it will delve into the tension between traditional values and modern aspirations and describe how families negotiate these complex dynamics of family life in contemporary Pakistani society. The paper, therefore, tries to bring out how these socio-cultural changes affect the changing nature of this family institution in Pakistan, its consequences on social cohesion, and the challenges and opportunities brought forward to the newer generations. In a world where Pakistan is still grappling with a balance between modernism and traditionalism, understanding such family dynamics has become imperative not only for policymakers and social scientists but also for the general masses at large.

## **2 Research Methodology**

This paper uses a qualitative review approach in gathering data from materials such as journals, books, and empirical studies that address the socio-cultural transformations of Pakistani family structures. All works done within the last thirty years have been considered, taking into focus relevant issues like urbanization, economic shifts, and changes in gender roles. This data is systematically organized by themes useful to facilitate comprehensive analyses: family structure, marriage customs, and intergenerational relationships. This approach ensures the analysis captures historical patterns and contemporary dynamics.

### 3 Family

Family is one of the basic and crucial social institutions. Among other institutions of society (education, politics, economics, and religion) family occupies much importance as compared to others because the institution of family is the building block of any society (Longo, 2023). No doubt, all these institutions are correlated with each other, and change in one affects the others as well.

#### 3.1 The Institution of Family in Pakistan

Family structure in Pakistani society is very complex. It varies differently within each social class and the role of men and women also varies accordingly. Pakistani society is presumed to be very much united, coupled with the clan and (“imagined” reflection of our society) (Metlo, 2012). But there are so many superstitious behaviors found in our society that are not only discouraged in Islam but also none of the society encouraged them, but such cold-hearted activities are part of our culture. Like, the historical conflict between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law in our families sometimes ended up in severe family clashes (divorce), etc (Brard, 2007). On the other hand, female births are negatively perceived in our society. These are some of the issues that are very contradictory between the imagined and lived reality of our society. Below are a few characteristics of the Pakistani family (Mohammad, 2015). In Pakistan, many people live in joint family systems where resources are shared among family members. The grandmother often holds significant control over the family's income, with all earnings typically submitted to her or the father if he is still alive (Babu et al., 2017). Before passing away, grandfathers usually attempt to delegate responsibilities to their sons. Men in these families take on the role of caretakers for the female members. It is customary in Pakistani families for women not to work outside the home. Instead, females are provided with all their necessities, including food, clothing, and jewelry, by their husbands, fathers, or brothers. Marriages are generally arranged by family elders, often within the same caste or sometimes across different classes or castes. Family members typically gather together at mealtimes (Shekhani, 2024).

There are several major issues facing families in Pakistan. The tradition of dowry (Gulzar et al., 2012a) and other customs during marriage ceremonies are often practiced as a way to display social status. This leads to excessive spending on weddings. In the past, elders were often opposed to girls receiving education in schools, colleges, and universities. Additionally, younger family members are expected to obey the decisions made by their grandparents, particularly grandfathers and grandmothers.

#### 3.2 Family Structure of Pakistani Society

But, along with the passage of time, there were certain changes in this structure. Here is a brief description of all those issues under the family institution. There are different types of family systems in Pakistan.

#### 3.3 Joint Family System

Generally, Pakistani families live in a joint family structure. In which all members of the family follow the instructions of the eldest person (granddad or grandmother) of the family (Afzal et al., 2024). All younger brothers and sisters live with the whole family together even after marriage wives and children will also be part of the same family (Lodhi et al., 2021).

Within this structure, married couples typically maintained close ties to the husband's family. However, the strength and nature of these attachments varied based on regional customs, rural or urban settings, social class, and occupational caste affiliations. All major decisions are managed by elders, and income and kitchen operate on a shared basis (Jamil et al., 2023). Marriages in this structure or generally arranged within the family or within the caste. Women have self-respect in the family and are involved in decisions and all other matters (Ahmad et al., 2015).

### 3.4 Patriarchal and Interrelated Family System

The second structure is patriarchal, in which the elder male is the head of the family he controls all the family matters, the role of the male is dominant in such type of family (Moghadam, 2003; Syed et al., 2019). Interrelated households would often share a single compound but separate kitchens, running independently of one another, yet relying upon one another for mutual care and support and thus recognizing themselves as family (Jafree, 2023). This extended family unit of conjugal households is properly speaking more accurately described as an extended rather than a joint family although it has been loosely referred to as a joint family (kunba) (Jafree, 2023; Russell & Yang, 2024). Poor families had to work independently for survival of food and shelter hence living in separate groups where they found jobs, work, etc., and settled their lives accordingly. Historically, across all ethnic groups - including Punjabis, Pashtuns, Balochis, and others - the family structure was predominantly patriarchal. The concept of a 'joint family' was more a result of practical needs, shared activities, and ceremonial requirements rather than a fixed condition. This flexible approach characterized the traditional family structure in the region. The tradition of giving dowry to girls for their marriages affected thousands of poor families. Poor girls were unable to get married. Even cases were reported in which a mother-in-law fire burnt her daughters-in-law by not having a dowry at marriage (Gul & Farooq, 2020).

### 3.5 Persistent Forms and Changing Functions

Due to various environmental situations; increasing globalization, economic structures, terror, increasing needs, and lacking resources have changed the family structure in Pakistan (Qadeer, 2006). Family structures in Pakistan are undergoing significant changes. Family sizes are decreasing due to two main factors: declining birth rates and the gradual dissolution of extended family structures. This shift is accompanied by an expansion of women's rights, with women increasingly becoming part of every facet of life (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987). There is a growing trend towards nuclear families, moving away from the traditional joint family system (Zaman, 2011). This change is accompanied by a vision of a society where status is accorded based on personal merit and intellect, rather than qualities ascribed by others due to family, clan, or gender identity (Gulzar et al., 2012a). The influence of clans and kin groups is diminishing, with individuals increasingly pursuing their own ambitions in life (Isran, 2012). To fulfill these ambitions, many are seeking opportunities away from home or even outside the country (Hafeez, 1991). Young people are pursuing advanced education in universities and schools, further driving this societal transformation (Arif & Chaudhry, 2008).

One of the most popular questions among sociologists of all time is the joint family system held in particularly Pakistan and Indian cultures, sociologists put questions in history during the development and modernization what will be the scope of a joint family, whether it will influence environmental changes or not? (Madan, 1979). But now the effects of such changes induced on family structure and jointness of family turns into a different shape (Wilcox, 1968). A family might be "joint" in various senses and according to various criteria, whereby its members reside in the same household, inhabit the same or adjacent houses, or even reside far apart but are united by a single ceremonial head or common property (Shah, 1986). Alternatively, jointness might be confined only to activities or worship, such as caring for the aged and widowed or undertaking religious observances (Khalid & Hassan, 2019). Research on the Indian family reveals the family as a changing institution, with a level of unity that changes as the social order changes (Desai, 2016). For this reason, "extended family" is a better term for this complex phenomenon than the concept of a single joint household, which rarely existed even in the traditional setting (Dyson & Moore, 1983). The same kind of diversity of forms can be noted in the Pakistani family, both historically (Donnan, 1988). Significant functional jointness still exists in certain parts of the country. Even though the great majority of families can be classified as being nuclear, many extended and joint families live close to each other, hence, resulting in numerous visits among family members (Chevan & Korson, 1975).

It's evident that there has never been a single-family type, but rather multiple forms, all grounded in values of kinship, solidarity, and mutual support (Alavi, 1988). Family structures haven't undergone substantial changes in form; however, their functions and meanings have evolved (Zia, 2009). To

understand the changing nature of families, one should focus on tracking these latter attributes - the shifting functions and practices - rather than just structural forms (Bittles, 2002).

## 4 Marriage

Marriage is a social act that binds males and females to start their social life (Bhatti & Jeffery, 2012). It is very important for every society to treat this matter very seriously (Khan, 1999). As Pakistan is an Islamic state and Islam has properly defined rules and regulations and terms and conditions for marriage, but, in Pakistani society marriages follow some different rules and people here prefer to marry between cousins (first or second) (Shaw, 2001). Almost all Punjabi, Pushto, Sindhi, and Balochi preferred to cousin marriages (family-based marriages) but Muhajir's Karachi is the only community in Pakistan that doesn't have norms to marry with cousins (Hussain, 1999). From its inception till now, in Pakistan marriages have been arranged by the elders (granddads) of the family but it depends on the class and social structure of the family and individual (Ahmed, 2022). According to different studies about marriages in Pakistan 50% of marriages are decided by the elders of the family (Zaman, 2011).

### 4.1 Dowry

The biggest custom for marriages in Pakistan is to give a dowry to a girl on her marriage. The idea behind this tradition is to give all the necessary assets that her daughter will use in their next home (Ali, 2013; Gulzar et al., 2012a). However, with the passage of time, this tradition became a burden and mental stress for poor and middle-class families because they were unable to arrange dowry for their daughter's marriage (Nasrullah & Muazzam, 2010). Even family members including brothers and fathers work overtime to manage dowry for their marriage and this custom has stuffed in this culture that without it, even poor people do not think for the marriage of their daughter, middle-class families manage it by taking loans from friends, family, or colleagues for this purpose to keep their status in the society (Antu et al., 2022). Marriage within the family is a reason because family members are part of the same chain, they generally ignore taking dowry (Charsley, 2006). Secondly, marriages within a family also strengthen the social perspective of the same family because it keeps property, and wealth within the same family (Afzal et al., 1994). Dowry culture is common in Punjab and Sindh provinces (Chowdhury, 2010). Historically, the Pashtoon practice of *sar paisa* or *vulvar* (bride wealth) discouraged marriages for poor young men (Jamal, 2016). The practice of cousin marriage, especially the exchange of daughters in marriage between brothers' sons (*badal*), allowed poorer young men to secure brides (Front Matter, 1985). Parents alone traditionally made mate selection, and children were expected to abide by their choices (Fischer, 1991).

"Thus, such marriages are closely related to institutions of property, inheritance, and caste or clan; however, it is ultimately based on a society with limited social and geographical mobility. When skin begins to differ in education, employment, and residential location, the task of finding suitable relatives for marriage becomes increasingly difficult. As social and geographical mobility increased, marital customs have been changing and gradually reorganizing the family"(Afzal et al., 2024)

In traditional society, parents, or guardians typically select spouses for young eligible individuals, often with little or no input from the prospective bride and groom (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001). Among the purdah-observing middle and upper classes, it was common for the couple to meet for the first time on their wedding day (Chevan & Korson, 1975; Korson, 1971). These arranged marriages served various purposes: maintaining extended family cohesion, resolving longstanding family feuds, and ensuring family harmony by choosing agreeable daughters-in-law. The couple's compatibility or romantic feelings were considered largely irrelevant in these arrangements (Rao & Rao, 1982).

## 4.2 Matchmaking: Stretching Traditions

Till 1960, endogamy was one of the popular types of marriage practiced in Pakistan which is the practice of marrying within a specific ethnic group, class, or social group and in which boys and girls did not see each other before marriage (Korson, 1971). But, after 1960 concept of mate selection was changed in different social strata within Pakistani society particularly in urban areas, it was popular mostly among college and university students (Donnan, 1988). Mate selection was changed from arranged to love marriages and people of the upper-middle class often asked the choice of their son and daughter for marriage within the same caste (Shaw, 2001). Even people also started different ways for mate selection like promoting one name in the newspaper as well as consulting the marriage firms for the perfect match (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002).

Islamic institutions reject this approach of “love matches” and discourage this phenomenon of meetings with selected mates before marriage (Marsden, 2007). But people from upper-middle-class or even average-middle-class started this practice, and the voice of Islamic institutions was not so effective (Fazalbhoj, 1998). The demand for love marriages was due to the mobility and awareness factor in a society like a boy studying in university who doesn't want to marry the simple girl in the family (Qadeer, 2006), this change not only affects the future of good and pious girls because then they have to wait for some boys to marry with them (illiterate) also this change brought a revolution in Pakistan society for the study of girls education that was not common before this, then parents realized if they will not teach their daughters then anyone will marry them. During this time prospects for marriage could choose their mate but the final decision was often kept by their parents, and they finally selected after a few meetings with them (Hussain, 1999). Though, this time marriages were taken place with selected mates, but marriages were simple (Fischer, 1991).

## 4.3 Expanding the Circle for Mate Selection

Mate selection (within the same caste) based on affection was already within the society but now this concept further changes in this way that couples started to rank their mate based on his/her class despite the same caste (Charsley, 2006). Like if a family is brought up in the city and his/her relatives are living or Bradari is living in the village then at this age of mate selection people start to choose their mates among the same class or environment (Hasan, 2010; Zaman, 2011). Urbanization played a vital role in this regard (Hasan, 2010). "Boys and girls grow up without knowing their relatives. Disparities in income, education, or lifestyle serve to distance relatives from one another. For those who move to different cities, regions, or even countries, contact with relatives becomes increasingly infrequent. These social and geographical distances undermine the norm of marrying within one's kin" (Alam & Saeed, 2020; Valliani, 2012). The trend is changing towards arranging marriages based on class and lifestyle compatibilities more than on caste or familial connections (Mahmood, 2014).

This is because, with increased urbanization and migration to various towns, most people end up marrying within their social class or family setup because they do not know other potential spouses (Sathar & Kazi, 2000). This has contributed to both parties excluding each other in mate selection, leading to cousin marriages within the same family (Afzal et al., 1994). This type of marriage and alliance may strengthen social bonds and promote development within the family (Fischer, 2006). The women, however, are uniquely disadvantaged in the complexity of finding the right spouses for them (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987). This has been a widespread social problem in Pakistan: the plight of young, unmarried women "waiting for proposals" has been a source of great anxiety for their parents (Hafeez, 1991). Traditional means of arranged marriages are in crisis, while new ways of finding a marriage partner have not yet had time to mature (Zia, 2009). Entrenched societal habits have left an entire generation trapped; a situation partly alleviated by resorting to cousin marriage (Bittles, 2002). The new customs that have evolved, including elaborate marriage ceremonies, feasts, and expensive dowries, are also due to difficulties in finding suitable mates (Qadeer, 2006).

#### 4.4 Weddings: Simplicity to Extravagance

Weddings have traditionally been a source of family and baradari (kinship group) unity and were once much simpler than they are today (Mughal, 2015). During Ayub Khan's era, social reforms were implemented to address various social issues (Talbot, 1998). The Commission for Eradication of Social Evils (1965) identified problematic customs such as the large Mehr (bridegroom's gift to the bride) among Pashtuns and Northern tribes, and the practice of demanding and giving substantial dowries (dahej) and hosting expensive feasts among Punjabis and Sindhis. These customs often led families into heavy debt (Gulzar et al., 2012a). The reforms aimed to promote simplicity in marriages through public campaigns (Malik, 2008). As a result, two costly pre-wedding customs - mehndi (applying henna to the bride's hands) and mayun (where the bride and groom wore tattered clothes before the wedding) - became less elaborate (Ahmad et al., 2021). However, this trend towards simplicity was reversed by the upper middle class in the 1970s, with dowries steadily increasing since then (Zia, 1994). Since the 2000s, weddings have become even more elaborate, often extending over several days (Ali, 2013).

By the 2000s, weddings had evolved into multi-day extravaganzas, serving as platforms for families to showcase their social status and connections to the wealthy and influential (Zaman, 2013). The quality of these events is now judged by several factors: the lavishness of meals, the prominence of guests, the grandeur of receptions, the entertainment provided, the size of the dowry, and the honeymoon destination of the newlyweds (Gulzar et al., 2012b). *Mehndi and mayun* ceremonies have been revived with elaborate feasts, music, and dancing ("Pakistani weddings: A celebration of love, tradition," 2023). Modern technology has transformed weddings into extended celebrations (Fatima et al., 2022). Even families of modest means can now afford features such as loudspeakers playing popular film songs, professional video recordings of the ceremonies, and bright decorations for the homes of the bride and groom (Nasrullah & Muazzam, 2010).

These elements have become the defining criteria for what is considered a 'good' wedding in contemporary society (Qadeer, 2006). The rich indulge in thematic decors and fancy foods, are serenaded by TV and film stars, honeymoon abroad, and hire event managers to plan their weddings (Zubair, 2016). A whole industry has developed all over Pakistan for weddings, from banquet halls to caterers, dress designers, decorators, and jewelry shops, among others (Mughal, 2019). Probably one of the highest ratios in the world for jewelry shops, and fabric/cloth shop/s, particularly for population, rest in the cities and towns of Pakistan, related to the demand spawned by dowry and weddings; arguably, only India might approximate this ratio in comparison (Weiss, 1991). The title of an article in a Pakistani weekly sums up this change in wedding ceremonies: "Weddings from dreams to themes." (Daechsel, 2017). Marriage ceremonies, particularly practices like dowry and bride price, have consistently strained family resources (Chowdhury, 2010). While this has always been the case, the trend toward conspicuous consumption and status displays is a recent phenomenon (White, 2013). Examples of extravagance among the elite, such as a senator's daughter wearing rubies on her wedding gown or a Karachi business tycoon's son having rose petals showered from a helicopter at his reception, set elevated standards that influence broader society (Jones, 2010).

Attempts to curb these excesses have been made periodically (Alavi, 1988). The Justice Rashid Commission in 1956 recommended abolishing large dowries, with similar advice given in 1961 (1976), and 1984. In 1997, the Nawaz Sharif government passed an ordinance limiting wedding reception catering to tea and cold drinks (Malik, 2001). While this initially showed promise, the effort was disrupted by the government's ouster (Waseem, 2006). The Supreme Court upheld this ordinance in 2004 following an appeal (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987). The marriage reforms brought about by some Baradaris, the Kashmiri, the Sheikh, and the Memon, to name a few, were short-lived (Donnan, 1988). The continuing practices underline deep-rooted traditions in marriage and family (Shaw, 2001).

## 5 Conclusion

Family in Pakistan is a confluence of tradition and modernity. While going through this paper, it has come across the fact that one-third of changes have taken place with respect to family structures, marriage practices, and gender roles, though most of the core values of the traditional family system are still intact. However, changing patterns from joint to nuclear families mainly in the cities disturb the pattern of support and decision making at the household level. At the same time, however, the practices of marriage changed to a system that has gradually evolved from one of pure arranged marriages to more flexible ones which can take individual tastes into account.

These changes reflect broader societal changes with increased urbanization, higher education levels, and better economic opportunities available to women. These have created a whole new set of challenges, including strain on traditional support systems and the potential for intergenerational conflict. Thus, the continuous practices of dowry and more elaborate wedding rituals are creative innovations that survive together and attest to the complexity of this transformation. The Pakistani family will evolve due to global influences and local contexts. Unless the policymakers and civil society are pragmatic, they will fail in their functions towards the emerging social needs. Future research should take account of the long-term implications of these changes on social cohesion, well-being, and national development.

The institution of the family in Pakistan stands at the crossroads of cultural heritage and modern-day demands. These changes must be understood if future social and economic growth is to develop in this country.

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