

**Pashtun Women's Choices in the Institution of Marriage: A
Case Study of District Bannu**



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**“Thesis submitted to the National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Quaid-I-Azam
University, Islamabad, for the partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of
Philosophy in Pakistan Studies”.**

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CERTIFICATE

I hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under my supervision by **Maria Khan** entitled **“Pashtun Women’s Choices in the Institution of Marriage: A Case Study of District Bannu”** be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Philosophy in Pakistan Studies.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the presentation of my original work. Every attempt is taken to identify where other people's contributions are involved, with appropriate references to the literature and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions. There has been no previous publication or presentation for any part of this thesis for any other degree or certificate. Dr. Ahsan Kamal of the National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Quaid-I-Azam University, Islamabad has supervised the completion of this thesis.

Maria Khan

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ABSTRACT

This thesis engages with three debates concerning women's agency in making choices within the institution of marriage. The first debate revolves around the interplay of culture and economic independence within the private sphere. The second debate focuses on the impact of modernization on women's choices in marriage. Additionally, the third debate addresses the relationship between structure and agency. The theoretical framework of this research draws insights from feminist and Islamic feminist discussions, such as Saba Mahmood's work on religious agency, Afiya Zia's exploration of secular autonomy, and the contributions of Humaira Iqtidar, Amna Jamal, Anoosh, and Amina Ahmad on Pashtun women's agency within patriarchal structures, specifically within Jamat Islami and Jamat ul Dawa. A review of existing literature on Bannu reveals that women in the region have limited agency and decision-making power in marriage institutions, as their choices are constrained by a patriarchal society. To investigate this further, twenty semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted and qualitatively analyzed using thematic analysis. The study describes the current status of women in decision-making processes and explores how Pashtun women have limited choices in marriage. It highlights that women's agency within the private sphere is heavily influenced by male family members and elder females. Despite modernization and economic independence, culture and tradition still influence choice-making processes. This study seeks to conceptualize gender as a social structure within the context of the Pashtun structure of Bannu. It acknowledges that social and cultural norms play a significant role in shaping gendered power dynamics within this structure. Within this framework, women encounter numerous challenges and barriers. The study aims to examine the intersections of cultural and socio-economic factors that affect women's status, roles,

and experiences within marriage. Which are influenced by various factors, including limited choices, agency, and cultural expectations.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<i>Bibiane</i>	Affluent older women or well-off senior women
<i>Gham</i>	Grief or sadness
<i>Ghairat</i>	Honor
<i>Gham-Xadi</i>	Social Network
<i>Hal Wyel</i>	Personal narrative, personal testimony, or personal account
<i>Jirga</i>	Conflict Resolution Body
<i>Karo Kari</i>	Honor killing
<i>Kashra</i>	Younger women
<i>Lena Dena</i>	Gives and takes
<i>Mor</i>	Mother
<i>Mashra</i>	Older woman
<i>Payghur</i>	Taunt
<i>Quom</i>	Community or nation.
<i>Qabila</i>	Tribe or Clan
<i>Riwaj</i>	Custom
<i>Sharam</i>	Shame or embarrassment
<i>Sarai pat</i> <i>Sarai</i>	One in exchange for one" or "girl for a girl" exchanging girls for marriage
<i>Tora-Tora</i>	Black (Dishonor)
<i>Taklif</i>	Pain, distress, or hardship
<i>Tapos</i>	Tapos refers to the act of going to someone's home to inquire about their well-being, particularly when someone is sick or in need.
<i>Tor</i>	Tor in Pashto can refer to a form of punishment or penalty imposed on a woman for committing a perceived wrongdoing or transgression
<i>Walwar</i>	Bride price
<i>Zan</i>	Woman or wife

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Agency is a term used in post-colonial theory which shows the ability of actions, and voice in a colonized/ oppressed/ disenfranchised, subjugated, or subaltern subject against the colonizer/ oppressor, dominant or norms of patriarchy. This voice or resistance is represented in history, literature, and discursive practices (Nasir 2018). Agency refers to the individual actors' power to operate independently in his/her respective society. Burns (1986) describes that the individuals' expectations are not tied to societal rules and regulations and can express his/her purposive nature and it sometimes could represent the collective will or consciousness of people, a group based on caste or class. Touraine's (1977) analysis focuses on the imaginations of social classes as actors in a social hierarchical system (Ritzer 2011, 521). Whereas Barbara Risman argues that gender should be seen as a social structure, similar to economy and polity. She says that gender is not an individual characteristic but a social structure that permeates society. Social and cultural norms shape gender dynamics; consequently, women face problems and encounter challenges. Apart from this, Risman emphasizes the importance of intersectionality; recognizing that different forms of inequality have distinct characteristics and causes (Risman 2004). Afiya Zia's work on agency and subjectivity of women-to-men relationships provides insights into how cultural norms and male domination shape women's decision-making processes. Arabandi's study suggests that economically empowered women who have financial stability and successful careers, exert more power in their relations and have the agency to make choices within their marriages (Arabandi, Globalisations, Mobility and Agency Understanding Women's Lives through Women's Voices 2016).

Regarding modernization, Bhattacharya points out that modernization has been imposed on Pakistan from above without effectively transforming society from within. The clash between traditional customs and borrowed modernity has negatively impacted the female population. The author also suggests that an enlightened environment is necessary for implementing legislation that protects women's rights, but due to rising radicalization and the influence of Islamist extremism in politics, it is unlikely that a supportive and secure environment for women will be established in the foreseeable future. (Bhattacharya 2020). Similarly, by building on the works of scholars like Saba Mahmood, Afiya Zia, and others, I have explored the power dynamics, social structures, and cultural norms that shape Pashtun women's agency and decision-making processes. In the context of feminist perspectives on agency and empowerment, scholars often explore how women navigate and negotiate social structures to exercise agency in their lives, particularly in patriarchal societies. Mahmood draws on Muslim women's ability to resist hegemonic forces through the mosque, highlighting the role of agency within the religious framework (Mahmood 1998). Afiya Zia, on the other hand, looks at how secular agency can be used to challenge oppressive structures (A. S. Zia 2018). Jamal's book provides an insightful look into women's agency in the context of the Jamat Islami movement. She argues that the traditional attitudes of the movement should be viewed in the context of broader societal and political changes (Jamal 2013). The academic work of Humera Iqtidar has examined the multifaceted meanings of the veil and how it has become a symbol of empowerment and resistance for many women (Iqtidar 2011). While the critique of Aasim Sajaad Akhtar shows that these movements primarily prioritize Islamic agendas and often neglect sustained campaigns to address class and gender exploitation and Akhtar's research also shows that the members of radical

organizations have made personal gains and have turned Islam into a business. This viewpoint of Akhtar questions the genuine intentions of religiopolitical movements and emphasizes that a true subaltern movement based on the intersectionality of class, caste, gender, and religion in a true sense should ensure the “ethno-religiopolitical” causes of poor masses and females (Akhtar 2018). In addition to the choices and agency of women in marriage institutions, Enright highlights the politics of South Asian Muslim communities, that Women are expected to play a passive role in the choices of marriage, and their agency is seen as protecting family honor and saving male face from dishonor (Enright 2009). While on the other side, Gohar presents the true face of Pashtun society, that the traditional view of gender roles in Pashtun society - women are not seen as having the same rights as men and are thus not given the same decision-making power in matters of marriage (Gohar, 2005).

In this thesis, women’s choices are operationalized as empowering women by having decision-making authority in the private sphere in marriage institutions. As a result, the focus of this research is on three key debates about women’s choices or empowerment. Pashtun communities have traditional gender roles and expectations that can impact women's agency and decision-making in marriage. The first debate that this study aims to address is economic independence vs Cultural/ societal norms? Economic factors, such as financial independence or access to resources, can also play a role in shaping Pashtun women's decisions related to marriage. The interplay between economic independence and cultural/societal factors may manifest in various ways. For example, economic independence may provide Pashtun women with greater autonomy and decision-making power in choosing a spouse, negotiating marriage terms, or asserting preferences related to the timing or type of marriage. On the other hand, cultural and societal expectations may limit Pashtun women's choices

by imposing traditional norms and values that prioritize family or community interests over individual preferences or economic considerations. Further, my data shows that which one is playing a dominant role in contemporary Bannu society. This research examines whether economic independence is enough for making free choices in the institution of marriage in the private sphere or if this is only the aspiration and desire of other people about working women.

The second debate that this thesis tries to address is the debate of Modernization versus Gendered dynamics. How globalization, urbanization, education, and other modern influences are shaping Pashtun women's perceptions of marriage, their aspirations, and their choices in the context of changing societal norms and values?

As a researcher, I have studied Pashtun society through the lens of women's empowerment in decision-making within the institution of marriage, the third debate revolves around the interplay of structure and agency which shows how the women's agency functions within the Pashtun structure and how it is suppressed in the context of marriage decisions? The literature review chapter cover in detail these three debates. In the developing world, the choice and agency debate are old and are addressed in all sphere but in underdeveloped countries and especially in the Pashtun belt it is under debate. The two prominent feminist scholars Saba Mahmood and Afiya Zia and Pashtun anthropologists Amina Ahmad and Anoosh Wisal's debates on women's autonomy and agency shed light on this debate. In a nutshell, the discussion shows that certain areas of women's status in society need extensive research. Women face a lot of problems in marriages. In rural areas of Bannu women faces a lot of problems as compared to urban areas. Parents, society, and traditions impose their

own will on children, especially on females. Hence it is important to analyze the effects of tradition and religion on the lives of women. In this kind of patriarchal society, women's conditions are deplorable. Often women's choices are suppressed.

The discussion in the literature shows that the institution of marriage is the hand of male members of society. The biggest issue in the institution of marriage is the lack of choices and the stronghold of men. There is excellent work on different angles of work done on women empowerment around the world but scholars have not addressed the limited choices Pashtun women have in the process of marriage. Traditional norms, customs, and societal expectations often restrict Pashtun women's agency and autonomy in making choices related to marriage, resulting in potentially negative consequences for their well-being and empowerment. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by conducting extensive fieldwork to identify the underlying causes that contribute to the limited choices within the institution of marriage. This research investigated the influence of various factors including gender dynamics, family structure, and social, economic, and cultural elements that affect the decision-making process of Pashtun women regarding marriage in the Bannu district.

The goal of the methodology is to obtain genuine and helpful information about a specific domain of phenomena. This study used a qualitative research approach to explore Pashtun women's choices in the Institution of marriage, specifically in the district of Bannu. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the topic and can provide a rich understanding of Participants' experiences and perspectives.

The sample for this study is Pashtun women aged 18 and above living in the district of Bannu,

Pakistan. Purposive sampling was used to select participants, as it allowed for the selection of

women who had direct experience with marriage and could provide rich and diverse perspectives

on the topic.

The primary data is collected through four rounds of semi-structured in-depth interviews. In the first pilot study round, I just conducted three interviews with females of age 18 to 22. In the second round, I interviewed five females and five males who were married and unmarried and especially non-working. The logic behind this was that the majority of my non-working male and female participants said that we are choice-less and that working women have choices in marriages. And literature also proposes that working women have more choices and agency. So, I found a contradiction in this round. In the third round, six professional working women were interviewed, to know whether it is true or wrong that the job gives them choices. In the last fourth round, I interviewed five professional males to know their opinion on women's marriage choices and one divorced female.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data for this study. It allowed participants to provide detailed and nuanced responses to questions about their experiences and perspectives on marriage. An interview guide was developed based on research questions and was pilot-tested

with two Pashtun women from the district of Bannu to ensure its appropriateness and effectiveness.

The pilot study helped me to detect potential problems in research design and instrumentation. This study gave me an idea about feasibility, duration, and cost, reduced my fear, and, provides me with experience. I made changes to the interview guide accordingly. During a pilot study, I changed three interview guides. Interviews were conducted in Pashto, the native language of the participants, and were audio-recorded with the participant's consent. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour. When I came back from the field then I transcribed it into English which took three hours. The interviews were conducted in a private and comfortable location in the district of Bannu to ensure participants' confidentiality and comfort.

The data collected through semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. It is a qualitative research method that seeks to understand the meaning perceptions and experiences of participants. In this study, thematic analysis was used to identify and analyze patterns and themes in participants' experiences and perspectives on marriage. The data analysis process involved transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews and reading them multiple times to identify themes and patterns. According to Michelle and Lara, Varpio "Thematic analysis involves a six-step process: familiarizing yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report" (Varpio, 2020). Following this method, I then coded and categorized the data into themes and sub-themes. Themes were identified through a process of constant comparison and discussion among the research team. The analysis process aimed to identify commonalities and differences among participants' experiences and perspectives on marriage in the district of Bannu.

This research consists of five chapters. The first chapter is of Introduction and methodology giving basic and necessary background. The second chapter is comprising a theoretical framework and Literature review. The literature review contains significant debate on the marriage of women in the Pashtun society, in Pakistan and the world. The third chapter is Data Analysis. This chapter includes the qualitative analysis of data collected through semi-structured open-ended interviews with Pashtun women about their decision-making authority and choices in the private sphere. The fourth chapter is on Discussion. The last chapter is based on the Conclusion and will recommend future research on the topic.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter delves into the theoretical framework and literature review for the research on Pashtun women's choices within the institution of marriage. The theoretical insights entail the exploration of essential terms and interpretations of specific concepts related to the subject matter. By examining the ideas put forth by feminist theorists in the existing literature, a robust theoretical framework has been formulated to serve as the basis for supporting and directing the subsequent analysis.

2. Theoretical Debates

In the first debate, we examine the interplay of economic independence and cultural factors in shaping Pashtun women's agency within the institution of marriage. By analyzing Zia's framework, we can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural constraints and possibilities that influence Pashtun women's agency in the context of marriage as she gives an example of Faqir of Api, who decides the fate of a Hindu woman. Additionally, we consider the research of other scholars, such as Arabandi's work provides insights into the potential influence of economic independence on women's agency within their marriages.

Arabandi's work explores the economic dimensions of women's agency. By examining the economic factors that influence women's choices and decision-making power, we can develop a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play in Pashtun women's lives (Arabandi, *Globalisations, Mobility and Agency Understanding Women's Lives through Women's Voices* 2016)

Moving on to the second debate, we explore the impact of modernization on Pashtun women's choices in marriage. Anthony Giddens' theory of modernity and

social change helps us understand the transformative effects of globalization and modernization on traditional societies. We can draw upon Giddens' framework to analyze how modernization processes, such as urbanization, education, and access to information, shape Pashtun women's decision-making processes and expand their choices within the institution of marriage. By considering the implications of modernization, we can gain insights into the changing dynamics of Pashtun women's agency and empowerment (Giddens 2004)

In the third debate, we engage in the structure and agency debate within the context of Pashtun culture and its impact on women's choices in marriage. By critically examining the interactions between structures of power and individual agency, we can better understand the complexities of Pashtun women's choices within the institution of marriage. The concept of "structure and agency" is highly relevant to understanding feminist theories and their implications for women's empowerment and decision-making in various contexts, including marriage. The debate on "structure and agency" revolves around the interplay between individual agency (the capacity of individuals to act independently and make their own choices) and social structures (the larger systems and institutions that shape and constrain individual actions). To understand Pashtun women's choices in the institution of marriage, it is crucial to examine the work of feminist writers like Saba Mahmood, Afiya Zia, Amina Ahmad, and Anoosh Khan, and consider the debates surrounding "structure and agency" within their analyses. Mahmood's and Zia's works shed light on the complex interplay between individual agency and cultural structures. Both authors emphasize the importance of agency in creating a more just society while acknowledging the constraints imposed by existing structures. Ahmad and Khan's research further adds to this debate, illustrating how women's agency is exercised within the context of

patriarchal norms and gender roles. Ahmad and Khan argue that women can, and do, make choices that challenge and undermine patriarchal forces. Their works provide valuable insights into Pashtun society. (Ahmed 2004.)(Khan A. W,2012). In addition to agency, the structure and patriarchal nature of Pashtun society significantly impact women's choices in the institution of marriage. Scholars like Amina Jamal and Humaira Iqtidar shed light on the structural constraints faced by women and religious movements.

To add to the above discussion, the scholarly work of Asim Sajjad questions the agency of women. The passage as the researcher took from his work discusses the religiopolitical movements in Pakistan and their focus on Islamic causes, despite using issues like poverty, illiteracy, and women's rights in their rhetoric. Additionally, he mentions scholars like Humaira Iqtidar and Sadaf Ahmad who have explored the agency of women within religious movements. Some argue that women can enhance their agency by participating in these organizations, challenging gender norms, and engaging in the male-dominated public sphere. However, others suggest that religious movements reinforce existing power structures and propagate a hegemonic ideology, limiting the true extent of women's agency. The author cautions against fixed notions of agency and liberation based solely on secular commitments. They emphasize the need to critically examine the complexities of women's agency within religiopolitical organizations and the influence of religious ideologies and power dynamics (Akhtar, *The Politics of Common Sense State, Society and Culture in Pakistan* 2018).

To see the general debate on structure and agency as the Enlightenment thinkers believed that agency is the inalienable right of the individual to think for him/herself and no external authority can strip it away from him/her. Thus, moving

away from the non-rational explanation given by church, tradition, and myth. Individuals should govern collective life through reason rather than non-rational beliefs and opinions. Thus, the relationship between society and the individual is the main theme of sociological analysis, as sociologists try to find individual autonomy versus society (in the form of social institutions, relationships, and other social forces) (Dillon 2014). The debate of structure-agency is, therefore, the analysis of the individual being the center of analysis, as Ritzer quotes Dawe that the entire history can be written as *“the problematic of human agency”* (Ritzer 2011).

“Structure usually refers to large-scale social structures, it also can refer to microstructures such as those involved in human interaction.” It can be identified as the external influence on the behavior of humans, which can come from various sources from outside individual control. Giddens’s *systems definition* implies both types of structures because it involves *“reproduced relations between actors or collectivities”*. Thus, both *agency* and *structure* can refer to either micro-level or macro-level phenomena or both” (Ritzer 2011).

Regionalization is another factor meaning that some actions are not displayed in certain regions. For instance, an individual would wish to exercise choices in marriage, but societal rules would not permit him or her. This means that the region would have played a critical role in controlling the behavior of an individual. The researcher will see Bannu as a region that how controls women’s choices.

Regarding structure, Giddens observes that structures have rules which regulate human behavior in society. Individuals are supposed to memorize these rules every time they interact or relate to society. During any given circumstance agents

uses their will to solve the problem having the capability of being knowledgeable of society's rules and regulations.

According to Giddens structures are part of individual memories, signifying that the structure's existence is because of individual presence. While structure simultaneously enters the social life of the agent. Structuration theory is about the duality between agency and structure. For Giddens, they are two sides of the same coin, and they cannot be conceived separately (Ritzer 2011).

The structure agency debate is not simple and the Pashtun culture which mainly revolves around *Pashtunwali*, religion, and power politics within the family and tribal community structures along with the circumstances of lack of choices in marriages and insecurities are the underline causes that need to be thoroughly considered when exploring the norms and forms of women agency.

In conclusion, this chapter has explored three key debates: the interplay of economic independence and cultural factors, the impact of modernization on women's choices, and the structure and agency debate within Pashtun culture. By analyzing these debates, we have gained valuable insights into the multifaceted factors that influence Pashtun women's decision-making processes and agency within the institution of marriage. These insights will serve as the foundation for our subsequent analysis, enabling us to comprehensively examine the experiences and choices of Pashtun women in marriage.

2.1. Literature Review

This thesis engages with three broader debates about the problem of women's agency in marriage. The first debate is about the interplay of economic independence

with cultural norms within the private sphere. Private sphere means within four wall spheres. The debate will engage Pashtun women where Pashtun women are defined according to the male members of their family. As in the process of marriage, males define everything for the daughter and sister. Due to the fear of society and cultural hold, the male does not willing to give them choices in marriage. Through literature the researcher highlights the gray area where women's voices are silenced and society does not allow women to raise voices for themselves and the main target institution is marriage. And to find out the gap through literature that whether economically independent women are bold or not in making free choices in marriage.

The second debate is about the impacts of modernization on the Pashtun women's agency in the institution of marriage. As many writers claim that due to technology love marriages also happen and it need no intermediate. To find out the gap through literature that whether it is true or not that due to media and education Pashtun women achieve some level of agency. The third debate is about feminist perspectives and social theorists on agency and structure-agency debate.

The literature review provides the different levels of debate on women's choices from broader debate to a particular case of this research. It will start from the world level, then the country level, and then specifically to the Pashtun society. That whether Pashtun women according to the literature is free in choice-making.

2.2. Role of Economic Independence in Choices

The study of Arabandi highlights the impacts of economic independence on women's Choices within the institution of marriage. It discusses the experiences of Indian middle-class women who have achieved career and financial stability. These

women earn more than male members of the family and to some extent, it not only changes traditional gender dynamics but also exposes them to new opportunities. This study provides insights into the potential influence of economic independence. It suggests that when women have financial stability and successful careers, they may have more agency to make choices within their marriages. However, it also acknowledges that traditional gender norms and expectations can still pose challenges (Arabandi, Globalisations, Mobility and Agency Understanding Women's Lives through Women's Voices 2016).

The findings emphasize the importance of understanding the changing attitudes toward marriage and the influence of economic factors in shaping union outcomes. However, there are gender differences in the impact of traditional gender roles on marriage probabilities. Women who adhere strongly to traditional gender roles are less likely to marry, while men who adhere strongly to traditional gender roles are more likely to marry. The study also examines the influence of economic factors on marriage outcomes. It finds that economic independence does not diminish women's desire for marriage but increases their likelihood of marrying, albeit at older ages. Full-time work has different effects on men's and women's marriage probabilities, with men being more likely to marry at younger ages and women at older ages (Schoen 1999). Both structure and agency are two important but mutually exclusive concepts of social theory. They pose a particular kind of dilemma to academic research focusing on the issue of gender, politics, etc. As Rehana Wagha quote *“Alexander and Smuts that there is a huge debate over the relative contribution of patriarchy and capitalism in creating male domination over women. These scholars view men's control over women's labor as a product of a capitalist system aimed at strengthening patriarchy. Those who explain gender segregation while keeping an*

emphasis on patriarchy tend to highlight the prominence of agency while those who view economic processes as central to men's domination over women adopt a structural position" (Wagha 2022). The Maoist perspective on the women's question in India identifies patriarchy as an institution that has been the cause of women's oppression throughout class society. In her writings on socialist feminism, Anuradha emphasized the need to overthrow the whole social order of what some call capitalist patriarchy, in which women suffer alienation in every aspect of their lives. Overall, Anuradha Ghandy recognized the importance of women's agency and participation in revolutionary movements as a means to challenge patriarchal power structures and bring about social change. (Ghandy 2016).

2.3. Sex Roles and Modernization

The writer argues that attitudes toward women's roles are regarded as measures of modernization in developing countries. He says in general attitudes changes started with young and educated mothers and society changes toward women from traditional to modern (Ei-Waheshy Biri 1991). In contemporary Arab society, the impact of modernization has been far-reaching. Strict seclusion has disappeared; the right to vote has been given to women in several Arab countries; women are now permitted to engage in several occupations, especially those that do not involve contact with men. Education for women is now widespread, especially at the elementary level (Dodd 1968). However, as in any dynamic and open, modernizing society, Pakistan is also undergoing changes in its traditional patterns of endogamous marriage (Das 1991)

The author says that women's role in the decision of household is increasing day by day and Lena Dena also plays a major role in the marriage prospect for their

children. Now in marriages status and socio-economic interests are involved. Now migrants to Britain give room for new alliances and stopped marrying daughters to poor relatives. Moreover, a mother and daughter together can influence the deliberations of a girl's father (Selier 1997)

Susan York describes the socio-economic features of the Yasin Valley, northern Pakistan, and examines local ideas about household and their members and their relationship to society as a whole. He is talking about agencies and male-female private and public domains. In particular, a dual system of categories seemed appropriate- the male/public domain as opposed to the female/private domain. He says that compared to the men, female spheres of activity seem, on the surface more restricted. Cross-cousin marriages are common in this community to keep females in the private sphere strictly (York 1982). Anthony Giddens's work is based on how and why globalization is reshaping our lives and the effects it is having. Globalization influenced our family and marriage structure also. The traditional family is under threat, is changing, and will change much further as particularly women stake claim to greater equality. Marriage and family are much more traditional. However, men and women by this time are more equal than they had been previously. Family and marriage have still institutions but inside their basic character has changed (Giddens 2004).

The main argument of the reading of Bhattacharya is that Pakistan is grappling with a complex situation regarding the status of women, as it tries to balance repressive customs and borrowed modernization. The author highlights the existence of apparent rights for women, such as the right to vote, own property, and access to education, but emphasizes that these rights do not guarantee women equal status in

society. The author also discusses the prevalence of violence against women and the societal conditioning that perpetuates it (Bhattacharya 2020)

While discussing the pros and cons of modernization and digitalization, Dr. Asim argues that the digital lifeworld has empowered tech-savvy young women and girls, even those from conservative backgrounds. However, this empowerment also exposes them to increased violence and patriarchal control, including honor killings and sexual violence, particularly when they challenge societal norms in matters like marriage and relationships. The author also emphasizes that patriarchal control is not limited to rural areas but also exists in more urbane and bourgeois settings (Akhtar 2022).

To relate it to the Pashtun women's choices in the institution of marriage, there is a clash between traditional customs and modernization that affects the choices available to Pashtun women in marriage.

2.4. Role of Digitalization on Pashtun Women's Choices

Digitalization has got broad meanings and many theorists take the meaning of the word by the field they intend for, social media and mobile phone is one of the revolutionary inventions that had affected the lifestyle of people in the present age there are many debates around globalization and some theorist talk on its impact on the political and economic sphere, others focused upon its societal impacts (Leigh Maxwell 2009)

In short, romance is the root cause due to which privacy is breached. How people in the west are looking at online friendships and how people in developing countries and the Arab states have got two or three social accounts, and how they can

end up marrying online partners. Apart from it, different online scams are discussed that how hacking and impersonation are a great problem associated with digital spaces often male, hide behind an account made in the name of a female, and they often told boys or girls to send them money. Here she starts with the concept of exoticism how people beyond the West were looked upon as exotic in every term. She talks that how in the past mission of colonialism, people and their cultures were dealt with as uncivilized and the minority modern culture was imposed upon the people. and the civilized were being kept at a distance from the uncivilized here she makes the case that the current targets of such exoticization are the poor of the Global South and their digital cultures (Arora 2019)

The relationship between technology and man is one of the major problems caused by modernity. The traditional worldview that ‘man can only know what is natural, but cannot change it’, the modern worldview and conception of science, putting in practice the principle that man cannot only know but also change and thus rebuild what is natural, prevailed in the modern world. The modern outlook opposes the traditional world and man, having a relatively static rhythm of change, against the present world and process of change. Though technological development continues unceasingly, the effects of this development are avoidable. No society gives free rein to technical change. In this connection, social scientists distinguish between the direct and indirect impacts of technical change, claiming that the latter can be controlled. The fact that culture and its core values resist technology shows that they are not so weak as to give in to technical change right away. The ongoing debates over what can be done to fight the unwanted consequences of technology also show the potential power of culture and values to resist (Ayhan 2017).

Afiya Zia explores the relationship between media and women. She argues that –Media includes various expressions of self-representation such as writing, art, singing and dance and many other forms of popular culture. Media in Pakistan has always been controlled and censored by the state, by capital, and by patriarchy” (A. Zia 1995). As Anoosh claims in her research work the media gave Pashtun women greater agency (A. W. Khan, *Contesting Subjectivities, Negotiating Agency and Redefining Boundries: The Ideological Subject Formation and Positioning of Pakhtun Women* 2012).

2.5. Debate on Decision-Making, Choice, and Agency in the World

2.5.1. Decision Making

Many factors influence an individual in making certain decisions to engage in the process of marriage. An-Na'im explores ways of addressing concerns about forced marriage among women who originate from the Indian subcontinent but are currently living in the UK. Migrants to Britain maintain their links to the sub-continent and cultural traditions through marriage (Abdullahi An-Na'im, 2000). Research within India by Allendorf (2013) suggests, many positive rationales, to opt for an arranged marriage, for example, it is perceived as more prestigious and honorable than love marriages. It also benefited intergenerational relationships as they feel they had a role in choosing their child's potential spouse (Allendorf, 2013). In more Western communities, it is perceived as an alternative way of meeting a potential partner, and South Asian arrange marriages are different from the West (Bhopal,1999). Other research argued it is a way of adhering to the cultural tradition which maintains the family honor women navigate ‘choice’ and ‘agency’ in cultural practices such as arranged marriages (Mohee, 2012). Religious belief is also found to have a strong

influence, as Hindu scriptures view marriage as an obligatory and sacramental bond between two individuals (Harlan and Courtright, 1995). Within Islamic scripture, Quran also endorses marriage to protect individuals from sexual desires but it is also considered a legitimate relationship that strives to preserve the human race (Adamczyk and Hayes, 2012). For this purpose, women are encouraged to engage in marriage partnerships, and those who fail to conform to traditional cultural practices and remained unmarried are found to bring disgrace and shame upon the family.

In early traditional arranged marriages, men and senior family authority figures had more influence on marriage decisions because they held more power and status and their children have no choice and decision in this process (Shaw, 2001). Nevertheless, there is a strong narrative that parents feel the need to influence their children's decisions as a way of maintaining the conventions of their culture (Allendorf and Ghimire, 2013). The importance of group image and cohesiveness is a priority, which is problematic as it limits the consideration of alternative options in the decision-making process, such as individual needs and desires. For South Asian people culture is a fundamental element in the decision-making process (Oliveira, 2007).

2.5.2. Choice

Choices can also bring freedom, autonomy, and empowerment. Choice can enhance overall well-being. In the context of discussing choice and autonomy, it is important to recognize that social bonds can limit freedom, choice, and autonomy in various ways. (Schwartz and Ward, 2004). Choice is considered a fundamental factor within the decision-making experience in arranged marriages. As highlighted previously, it is often difficult to distinguish when consent involves pressure,

coercion, or force and therefore it is perceived as a 'grey area', grey area refers to arrange marriages when it became force. She says that not all South Asian women can use agency and choice and they are under strict patriarchal rules (Anitha and Gill, 2009). Parent or family-arranged marriages continue to be the norm for young women. Jejeebhoy, Santhya, Acharya, and Prakash (2013) reported that, of those married individuals in India aged 15 to 24 who had an arranged marriage, 70% of the respondent had no say in the choice of spouse and 24% expressed a semi-arranged marriage. Just 6% of the young women had self-arranged or love marriages, in which they had selected their husbands independently. Modernization and foreign culture greatly changed the structure of marriages and choices in the young generation (Shireen J. Jejeebhoy 2013). Similarly, the majority of young Indo-Canadians in their twenties felt their marriage decision was ultimately up to them, however, if their parent did find something seriously wrong with their choice. They would carefully reconsider (Netting, 2006). Zaidi et al (2002) reported many young Pakistani in Britain would like to modify or replace the arranged marriage tradition with one that had more freedom of choice. On the contrary to marriage trend research in India, that found the practice of arranged marriage is shifting rather than declining. Young women are now active and choosing their husbands with the help of their parents (Allendorf and Pandian, 2012). Rathor (2011) reported that now changes occur in culture and society, and the concept of marriage is changing from a union between two families to a union between two individuals (Rathor, 2011). The author says that a man has such freedom in divorce while a woman has not had such freedom and choice. The divorce rate was low because parents arranged daughter marriage to near relatives, and this makes it possible for them to intervene effectively in the case of family discord. In a nutshell, women still face a lot of problems in the patriarchal

feudal setup of the state, and social and economic factors also favor men, not women (Ahmad, 2003).

2.5.3. Agency

Literature on well-being found that life satisfaction and emotion are based upon many factors, with agency considered one because people go back to their own decisions (Diener, Lucas, and Scollon 2006). Pande says there is a strong assumption that who have an arranged marriage are perceived as victims of their South Asian culture. But culture and agency change in different environments (Pande, 2015). The degree of choice varies within an arranged marriage; however, it is important to highlight that not all arranged marriage practices are the same. There are opportunities for women to exercise choice and agency. For example, in Pande's (2015) research, women are found to exercise some choice and agency through actively discussing with their family to gain; personal wishes through their arranged marriages. Pande interviewed different cultural backgrounds of women who used a personal agency in choosing their partner (Pande, 2015). The world development report (2012) highlighted those women can exercise personal agency by high their bargaining power by increasing their ability to earn and control their income, to be part of the decision-making process, have a voice, and increase their position in the household (Boudet, Petesch and Tusk, 2013). In a world where women's empowerment is increasingly discussed, Naila Khabir delves into the complex dynamics of agency, resources, and achievements, shedding light on the often-overlooked realities faced by marginalized women striving for autonomy in their lives. Empowerment is seen as the process by which individuals who have been denied choices acquire the ability to make choices. Gender-related inequalities can limit meaningful choices. The agency

represents the processes of making and implementing choices, resources are the means through which agency is exercised, and achievements refer to the outcomes of the agency. The main argument is that empowerment involves actively exercising positive agency while challenging negative agency and power relations. Resources play a crucial role in enabling individuals to exercise their agency, and empowerment is deeply connected to individuals' sense of self-worth and how they perceive themselves to others and society (Kabeer 2005). Due to the modernization process, parents lose control over their children in the decision to marry. Netting's study found 27 Indo-Canadians of mixed genders were able to break the decision of parents in the matter of marriages and now parents are more flexible than they imagined. Now young generation is active and creative in decision-making and using personal agency (Netting, 2006). In support, Pande argues that those who were able to exercise some degree of agency were of Indian origin, educated, middle class, and adopted openness to religious belief (Pande, 2015). The main argument of Sathar's reading is that women's autonomy is highly constrained in South Asia and women in these regions (specifically in Pakistan's Punjab Province and in north and south India) are largely excluded from family decision-making and are often subjected to threats and violence from their husbands. It emphasizes that autonomy levels are shaped by a combination of factors such as religion, regional social systems, and cultural differences and these things play a significant role in shaping women's autonomy (Sathar 2001)

2.6. Debate on Decision-Making, Choice, and Agency in Pashtun Society

As Critelli notes that traditionally, within a patriarchal society, women have no voice or choice in the private sphere of their lives, and family honor is attached to them. In many cases, women are married without their choice and consent, even

though laws provide them the right to decide for themselves (Critelli 2012). Berrenberg's (2003) article explores the dynamics of endogamous and exogamous marriages in Pashtun society, with a specific focus on the limited agency and choice of women. The author emphasizes that women's choices are greatly constrained in both types of marriages, as they lack individual agency in deciding their life partners. In tribal areas, endogamy is strictly adhered to, and daughters are never married outside of their social group. This restriction on women's marriage options reflects the absence of agency and choice in their personal lives. The article highlights those marriages in Pashtun society are often driven by power dynamics, with external variables exerting significant influence on the structure of these unions. Overall, the literature suggests that women's agency and choice in marriages are compromised within the Pashtun cultural context, where social norms and power considerations play a central role in shaping marital decisions (Berrenber 2003). In the Way of the Pathans, James describes the Pathan's men's behavior toward *Zan*. The article explores the role of women, or "*Zan*," in Pathan society. It highlights the patriarchal nature of Pashtun society and the insecurity faced by women. Women are viewed as men's honor, and their freedom is limited in both public and private spheres. The article also notes that Pathan men rarely speak about their women in public, and poorer tribeswomen tend to be more liberal than upper-class women. The article also discusses how women are often murdered by Pathan men for the sake of honor. Overall, the article emphasizes the limited agency and oppressive nature of women's lives in Pashtun society. Overall, the literature review reveals the lack of freedom and agency afforded to women in both public and private spheres within Pathan society, illustrating the deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and their impact on women's lives (Spain 1962, 1972). Grimma says that Pashtun women are under the domination of

males, they even can't go to doctors with their husbands because of *sharam*. Women have no public or private places for discussing their own emotions. They search a suitable person for *Hal Wyel*. She says that women's life rotates around men. Pashtun women have *gham* story a lot. She says with the begging of marriage, women *Gham* and *Taklif* started. Marriage is marked with the introduction of *gham*. Before marriage, there is no concept of *gham* and *xadi*. Grimma noticed a change in Pashtun society those urban middle-class women deny the *gham* stories and say this was the job of uneducated traditional women who feel fear from other evil eyes. She experiences that *gham-xadi* and *tapos* visits are private and public spaces for Pashtun social behavior and they exchange their miseries and life stories. Pashtun women believe that *xadi* events offer no such opportunities for narrative and identity. She says *Gham* is a cultural phenomenon. Grimma explains the romance of Pashtun that romance ended in *gham* a happy ending is inappropriate, especially for women. Those women who involve in romance are killed in the Pashtun structure. She quoted Lindholm, 1982 that, in death romance lives, while in marriage romance is dead. Women *Sharam* and stigma attached to women and they can't show love to their husbands in public (Grima 1992)

The article by Lindholm (2008) focuses on the practice of polygyny and female subordination in Pashtun society, which is justified through Islam. The author argues that Pashtun men use religion to justify their practice of polygyny, stating that it is done to snatch happiness from the first wife. The article also highlights the subordination of women in Pashtun society, with women being seen as inferior to men and their lives being controlled by male family members. The author emphasizes that religion is used as a tool to perpetuate this subordination, with Islamic teachings being manipulated to suit patriarchal cultural norms. The article suggests that the practice of

polygyny and female subordination is not inherent to Islam, but rather a cultural practice that has been justified through religious interpretation (Lindholm 2008). Akbar's perspective on the impact of colonialism on Pashtun society, as presented in Selier's book (1997), highlights the complex dynamics of gender and power. Akbar suggests that in Pashtun society, women are categorized into two contrasting and polar types, *mor* and *Tor*, and are often excluded from traditional sources of prestige and influence. However, Akbar also acknowledges that despite their marginalized status in theory, many women in practice exert significant influence and even dominate over men. Overall, Akbar's perspective emphasizes the complexities of gender dynamics in Pashtun society, shedding light on both structural constraints and the agency of women within those constraints. The discussion contributes to the broader discourse on the interplay between social structures and individual agency, offering insights into the nuanced experiences of women in a post-colonial context (Selier 1997). Gohar's (2005) literature examines the clash between traditions related to family laws in Pashtun society and the teachings of Islam, particularly regarding the lack of inheritance rights for women and the absence of choices in their marriages. The article sheds light on the negative implications of the *Jirga* system, a traditional Pashtun institution, on women's lives and their violation of fundamental human rights as recognized by the United Nations. One specific tradition highlighted is *Sawara*, where girls are offered from one family to another as a means of achieving reconciliation. This practice directly undermines the agency and free will of girls, perpetuating a system of internalized oppression (Gohar 2005). Ahmad's (2017) article sheds light on the significant role of marriage and funerals in Pashtun society, where endogamous marriages are prevalent, particularly through the practice of patrilineal parallel cousin unions. The author highlights the limited agency of Pashtun

girls in terms of their marriage prospects, as they are rarely given to non-Pashtun individuals. This indicates a form of internalized oppression and a restriction on women's autonomy to choose their life partners. Furthermore, the reluctance to marry daughters into junior lineages reflects the social disapproval faced by women in Pashtun society. The practice of mothers booking girls for marriage at birth further reinforces the lack of agency for girls, as their fate is predetermined without their consent. Violation of these verbal agreements carries severe consequences, involving the entire community through practices such as *Badal* and *Tor*. Overall, the article highlights the presence of internalized oppression and limited agency for women within the context of Pashtun marriage customs (Ahmad 2017). Akbar S. Ahmad describes *Mor* and *Tor*: binary and opposing models of Pashtun femalehood. He presents the position of women in Pashtun tribal society and Pashtun honor is tied to that of his female and preferred marriages are to patrilateral parallel cousins. Pashtun women are conceptualized as *Mor*, the mother on one hand, heaven beneath the feet of the mother, and *Tor*, literally black on the other side, symbolizes the color of death and evil. Chastity and seclusion are two laws rigidly observed by society. Marriage is strongly endogamous and the preferred form is patrilateral parallel cousin marriage (Ahmad 2017)

Dr. Hanif Khalil highlights the gender dynamic of Pashtun women. According to him, marriage in Pashtun societies is a political institution, and ‘Pashtun marriage is.... primarily concerned with politics in the very broadest sense-that is, in the pursuit of power’ (Khalil, 2021). According to S.S Thorburn, Bannuchi women are a marketable commodity and only secure under lock and key. He says that owners of women are men before and after marriage. Further, he says that Marwat and Wazir’s tribes allow their women as much liberty as they can see without a veil as compared

to Bannuchis. He quoted their local proverb that “A woman is well either in the house or in the grave”. The “Pardah,” concealment, is good for a woman (S.S.Thorburn 1876). Lack of agency for women is a pervasive issue in Pashtun society. As Charles Lindholm notes, “The Pashtun have a saying that husband is another name for God,” implying that the husband has absolute authority over the wife”. This means that women are not enjoying their lives in freedom, with their choices and interests not taken into consideration (Lindholm, C, 1982). Grimma's assertion that women have no public or private spaces to discuss their own emotions This is a direct result of a patriarchal system that has been in place for centuries, one that disregards women's autonomy and agency, and instead perpetuates the notion that women should be subservient to the men in their lives (Grima 1992).

Noreen Nasir explores the topic of marriage and women's rights in tribal societies of KP in Pakistan. She highlights that marriage in these societies is based solely on men's permission, and women have no choice or consent in the matter. Women are expected to follow the tribal tradition and respect the decisions made by male family members or elders. The *Riwaj*, a customary law, reinforces the belief that a woman's honor is tied to the honor of her family and community, and thus she can be killed without breaking any laws if she violates this honor. After marriage, a woman's ownership and honor are transferred to her husband through the payment of bride price *walwar* which varies depending on the woman's status and social class. Nasir notes that even educated and economically independent women in urban areas can be sold or refused access to the court or the ability to make independent decisions about their lives. In some cases, women are used as tools for settling family disputes. Nasir's work highlights the severe limitations on the rights and choices of women in tribal societies (Naseer 2019). According to Anoosh Wisal Khan, Pashtun men have

more exposure to the outside world compared to women, which results in men exerting a significant influence over women due to their limited education and exposure. In Pashtun communities, women have limited agency, particularly when it comes to choosing a life partner. Various ideological apparatuses such as family, religion, and culture can restrict Pashtun female agency, while other factors like education and media act as tools that empower women and raise their awareness. These factors contribute to the development of Pashtun women's agency within their cultural context (A. W. Khan 2012).

Amina Ahmad describes the segregated zones of *gham shuddi* as a space where Pashtun women have agency, meaning they can make choices and take action in their own lives. The Pashtun anthropologist, Amina Ahmad, sees the agency question differently from the feminist writers Saba and Afiya. She is talking about social networks, through which Pashtun women achieve agency. She is talking about agencies but these agencies have only aged Bibiane in *gham-xadi* matter in Pashtun society. The agency that she is talking about is the private sphere but in those things which they can express. So, the *gham shuddi* agency is not enough for choice-making in marriages. While participating in *gham shuddi* festivities may provide Pashtun women with a sense of community and support, it is important to note that the extent to which they can exercise agency in their own lives, including making free choices in their marriage-making decisions, may still be limited by cultural and social norms. Amina does not specifically address the issue of marriage-making decisions concerning *gham shuddi* festivities. Bibiane is responsible for maintaining the cultural traditions of Pashtun society and transmitting cultural knowledge through their performances. By doing so, they gain social status within their communities and are respected for their knowledge of Pashtun culture and traditions. These Bibiane

promote patriarchy along with the senior male of the family, not giving choices to younger women in marriage (researcher's observation in this line) (Ahmed 2004.). Salma Rahim study's highlights that women in Pashtun society face limited access to public spaces (*Due to fewer or no public spaces for women*), hindering their participation in politics. Overcoming conservative norms and empowering women economically can create opportunities for them to claim their rightful space in public life, leading to greater gender equality and decision-making power. However, achieving meaningful change requires acknowledging and supporting the struggles of women from all economic classes (Rahim 2021).

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that structure plays a dominant role in Pakistan and especially in District Bannu. Women have restricted agency in marriage matters because the marriage institution is wholly in the hand of male members of the family. In Pashtun society institution of marriage is greatly connected with female honor. Modernization and digitalization role is still unacceptable in Pashtun society. Age matters a lot in Pashtun society as the elder female also controls the marriage institution.

Now that the theoretical framework has been set and we have understood the debates in the literature. Gape in the literature has been found out and also the gap has been addressed in the literature. Further empirical data will answer the questions. The next chapter will further clarify the gap.

CHAPTER 3

DATA ANALYSIS

In the literature, on the world level, Pakistan level, and Pashtun level, there is a belief that women have no decision-making authority in marriage institutions. This study is attempted to probe the causes of the lack of choices in marriage institutions. In this chapter, I discussed the qualitative analysis of data collected through semi-structured open-ended interviews with Pashtun males and females. The researcher used the Qualitative Thematic method to analyze the data. “Women's Choices” is the “Global Theme” in this study. Economic independence, Modernization, women's agency, and male opinion are four “Organizing Themes”.

Table 1: Master Theme and Subthemes

Master Themes	Subtheme
Cultural Interplay with Economic Independence	Economy Role of Cultural and religious belief Systems as an Influencer
Modernization Impacts on Choices	Technology Secular education.
Women's Agency	Family Background, Role of traveling and Exposure in Choices, Women status in Decision-making of Marriage, Choices, Agency
Male Opinion on Choices	Support / Oppose

Table 2: Details of Respondents**Details of Respondents**

Name	Status/Profession	Background
Ayesha	Un Married/ Lecturer	Rural
Ghalib	Un Married/ Student	Rural but living in Islamabad
Hina	Married/ House Wives	Peshawar/ Capital City
Haris	Un Married/ Student	Islamabad
Kohinoor	Married/ Student	Rural
Munawar	Married/ Assistant Professor	Rural
Muqadas	Divorced/ Graduated	Rural
Nilofar	Married/ Associate Professor	Rural
Palwasha	Unmarried/ Student	Capital City Islamabad
Sadiq	Un-married/ Student	Urban
Sara	Married/ Student	Rural
Shahnaz	Married/ Assistant Professor	Urban
Tahira	Marred/ Lecturer	Rural
Ullah, D. S	Married/ Assistant Professor at QAU	Capital City Islamabad

Uzma	Married/ Working	Urban
Zeb, N	Married/Sub Divisional Officer	Urban
Zeb, S	Unmarried but above 60/ Local Arbitrator	Rural

3. Organizing themes

The four organizing themes, Economic independence, Modernization, the private sphere agency, and male opinion are four _Organizing Themes that did not emerge from the data because I used a deductive approach in thematic analysis.

3.1. Role of Economic Independence in Choices

Economic independence can certainly provide individuals with greater choices and agency in their personal lives, while in Pashtun areas, the reality is often more complex. While in Bannu, even when women can earn their income, social norms, and expectations may still limit their ability to make independent decisions about their personal lives, including their choice of marriage partner. Women still face social pressure to abide by traditional gender roles and expectations. This theme examines the extent to which Pashtun women's financial autonomy affects their decision-making power in choosing a spouse and the dynamics within the institution of marriage.

To see the effects of economic independence in the institution of marriage, I interviewed both working and non-working women to check the limits of choices in marriage. I also note the opinion of male respondents too.

My conversation with male and females' respondents showed different perspectives. My three senior males' respondents negate the role of economic independence in choices, my younger unmarried respondents' responses only show desires.

Different viewpoints emerge regarding the significance of economic independence in marriage choices among Pashtun women.

During interviews with male and female respondents, varying perspectives emerged regarding the role of economic independence in marriage choices.

Shahzeb acknowledges the desire of men to marry educated and earning women for economic reasons but notes that societal power dynamics still prevent girls from marrying of their own choice. It is considered pyghur when a girl gets married of her own choice as it shows the power dynamics that are prevalent in the society, where men have seemingly unquestioned authority over women.

According to Shahzeb;

"In Pashtun society, it is considered pyghur when a girl gets married of her own choice. Every man in society wishes to marry an educated and earning woman for the sake of economic reasons but does not allow the girl to marry of her own choice. Both earning and non-earning women are equal in this matter. (S. Zeb 2023)

However, Noor Zeb also noted that in Pashtun society, economic independence has no great role in marriage choices. so economic independence is not seen as a particularly important factor in marriage choices.

According to Noor Zeb

“It is not true that in Pashtun society a job gives you 100% security. Working women are 50% independent in matters of gham-shuddi and other aspects. Higher education raises the demands of girls only, but society has objections to it.” (N. Zeb 2022)

While these perspectives differ, they shed light on the complex interplay between economic independence and marriage choices in Pashtun society.

The impact of economic independence on the Rishta process, which involves finding a suitable marriage partner, is a crucial aspect to consider. This thing is also a part of our culture.

The notion that every man in society wishes to marry an educated and earning woman for economic reasons is highly problematic. It reinforces the idea that women are only valuable for their financial contributions, rather than for their intelligence and character. This is a damaging outlook and one that should not be accepted in any society.

As Sami explains;

“Although males are traditionally considered the breadwinners of the family if a female becomes economically better off, it can play a significant role in choices and marriage. Presently, the demands of working women are increasing. A woman who does not earn may have her Rishta, marriage, and choices affected. Earning women have greater choices.” (Ullah 2022)

My other respondents, who are unmarried and away from Bannu, show their fear that an economically dependent girl can be a victim of forced marriage and the chances of the agency being crushed.

Ghalib emphasizes the negative consequences faced by economically dependent girls, who are often married at a young age without their consent.

Ghalib's statement shows that;

“Economic independence plays a major role in granting women the right to make choices. Typically, a dependent girl relying on her poor father or brother is married before the age of eighteen and without her consent, as a means to alleviate this burden.” (Ghalib 2023)

The discussions on Rishta highlight the potential for economic independence to provide women with the right to choose their spouses and avoid forced marriages.

What is even more concerning is that this inequality applies to both earning and non-earning women. This implies that there is no escape from this oppressive system, regardless of a woman's financial situation. This could be because the traditional values and norms of the Pashtun community are closely intertwined with culture, and so economic independence is not seen as a particularly important factor in marriage choices.

In conclusion, while economic independence may not have a significant role in marriage choices in some societies, it can still be an important factor for many individuals. It's important to understand the cultural context and societal norms before

making any assumptions about the role of economic independence in marriage decisions.

It's true that traditionally, men have been viewed as the primary breadwinners in many societies, but in recent times, women have also entered the workforce and have become more financially independent. This has led to a shift in the dynamics of marriage choices, where a woman's economic status can play a significant role in the decision-making process.

Having a job after marriage can provide economic assistance to the family, which is an important factor in maintaining stability and security. This is especially true for women who may face societal and cultural pressures to fulfill traditional roles as caregivers and homemakers.

My ten female respondent's experience highlights that, while some may believe that earning women have more agency in marriage choices, this is not necessarily the case in reality. Not a single economically independent woman in the whole study used their own choice in marriage.

Despite being economically independent, working women encounter limitations and societal pressures that restrict their agency in marriage choices.

Uzma statement shows;

“Both earners and non-earners are equal, and neither has the option of choosing their marriage partners. I got married without having a choice.” (Uzma 2023)

My one working unmarried respondent Ayesha expresses that working women have authority only in rejection matters, as an unmarried working woman, the respondent feels that she does not have a say in her marriage choices. While in the proposed study view the rejection is also some sort of agency.

Ayesha states that,

“Decision of parents is seen in the Pashtun society. Earning women have some authority but not in matters of marriage, their authority is more in rejection not in selection. In our society, it is said that earning women have more agency, but this is not based on reality. As an unmarried working woman, I can’t make the final decision. 80 % of working women have no say or choices in marriage at all, but the 20% are those who can only say.” (Ayesha 2023)

These narratives underline the challenges faced by economically independent women, revealing the complexity of balancing financial autonomy and societal expectations.

Pashtun society's cultural norms and expectations interact closely with economic independence, shaping women's marriage choices.

Shahnaz's experience demonstrates that job security does not guarantee freedom of choice in marriage. She highlights the future insecurities of women if they exercise choice in marriage. Despite having a job and being respected in society, it seems that women still encounter significant hurdles and limitations in matters of marriage.

Shahnaz expresses that;

“Job gave me no security before marriage. If you are a CSP officer, you still have nothing and no choice in marriage. If you marry by your own choice, your family will throw you out of your family. Due to fear of throwing women suppress all their desires in their hearts. I am the clear example.” (Shahnaz 2023)

Being an independent woman, the researcher understands how difficult it could be to navigate these cultural and societal norms that often prioritize traditional gender roles and expectations.

Munawar states that;

“As a mother and economically independent woman, if I take bold steps for my daughter’s choice then I will face a lot of hurdles. Job is not a sword for me that I can do whatever I want before or after marriage. I can’t use my job as a weapon. Well, people in society respect you because of your job but they don’t prefer you at all in marriage matters. If working woman refuses any Rishta or relationship in Pashtun society she can never marry another person and she always stays at home forever.” (Munawar 2023)

The stories reflect the intricate relationship between economic independence, cultural norms, and the agency of Pashtun women in making marriage decisions.

Muqadas's statement highlights an important point about the benefits of economic independence for women. Financially stable women may feel less pressurized to get married quickly or compromise on their values and priorities to secure financial stability through marriage. This can be especially important for

women who have experienced divorce or other challenges that require them to support themselves financially.

Muqadas states that;

“Yes, I believe that when a woman is economically independent, they are not as pressurized to get married as soon as possible, nor are they bound to the nightmare known as a compromise as compared to those who are not independent. I am a divorced lady now and need economic assistance. Sometimes I thought that if I had a job before marriage no one was able to pressurize me for early marriage.”

(Muqadas 2023)

However, it's unfortunate that some women who hold jobs may feel restricted in expressing their marriage choices due to cultural or societal pressures. It's important to recognize and challenge these norms that may limit the autonomy and agency of women in making decisions about their own lives. It's unfortunate that, as an unmarried working woman, the respondent feels that she had not said a single word regarding her marriage decision. This highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing the societal and cultural norms that limit the agency and autonomy of women, particularly in the context of marriage.

It's frustrating that even when women have achieved economic independence and gained respect in their professions, their choices and agency may still be restricted in other areas of their lives.

However, it's important to acknowledge that economic independence is not a guarantee of freedom from social or cultural pressures related to marriage. Women may still face challenges and limitations in navigating cultural expectations and

gender roles, regardless of their economic status. Therefore, it's important to continue advocating for gender equality and empowerment at all levels, including through education, policy, and social change.

3.1.1. Role of Cultural and Religious Belief System as an Influencer

3.1.2. Culture

The Pashtun culture and religious belief system have a significant role in influencing the choices of Pashtun women in the institution of marriage. Pashtun culture is patriarchal and gives importance to family honor. Religious beliefs also play a significant role in Pashtun culture and prescribe specific roles for women in the institution of marriage and women are expected to be obedient and faithful. Cultural and religious beliefs play significant roles in Pashtun women's choices in the institution of marriage.

When I asked my respondents about the role of culture in the institution of marriage. They highlight many factors which influence Pashtun women's choices.

Sami, Ghalib, Tauseef, and Haris shares similar views and raise some valid points about the impact of culture on the Pashtun society and its negative effects on marriage and gender roles. Regarding the influence of Pashtun culture on marriage practices, it's important to recognize that there is often a complex interplay between culture and religion. While Islam provides certain rights to women, cultural traditions can sometimes be at odds with those rights.

According to Sami;

“Cultural factors are many impacts on Pakistani society and especially Bannu culture has influence on us. Due to cultural aspects, we make the relations very complicated. Culture misleads us from the track. Due to the heaviness of culture, our marriage contract badly suffers. Although in Pashtun society, culture resists Islamic things. Islam gives rights to women but our culture stops it. Islam gives us permission to ask both boys and girls but culture is not allowing us. Education is bringing changes now. Over all Pashtun culture is good but their applications are change. Pashtun is culturally, religiously, and educationally backward. They misuse these things. Our society is not as exposed to take actual understanding. I will never do not ask my daughter in the marriage process.” (Ullah 2022)

My two respondents say that Pashtun cultural decision is very successful and that society should respect it.

Fazal Rahim States,

“In Pashtun society culture's dominant role is very successful. Pashtun tradition is a very successful tradition. The best decision comes when the family members come together in marriage matters. Single-mind decisions are not successful meaning the choices of one individual in a marriage matter are not a good thing. So, decisions of elders in marriage matters are a part and parcel of our culture”. (F. R. Khan 2023)

In addition to the above statement, Haris states that marriage is not just a religious practice, but it also has a strong social and cultural impact on Pakistani society. Furthermore, the joint family system is a socially constructed institution that

is not necessarily supported by the Islamic religion. It is important to consider the impact of this system on marriages, as politics within joint families can lead to divorce and other conflicts.

“Marriage is not only a religious practice but it also holds strong social and cultural influence. For example, from the Islamic religion's perspective, the concept of marriage contains two significant practices; Nikah and Walima, but if we take a look at how marriages are celebrated in Pakistan, we come to know that events like Mayu'n, dholki, mehndi, and even Bara'at have social and cultural bases. In another context, the Islamic religion doesn't manifest the institution of a joint family system but in the society, it can be seen that hundreds of thousands of marriages result in divorce because of the politics in joint families. This institution of a joint family system is also a socially constructed one. There are plenty of other examples and dimensions in which, this subject can be addressed.” (Haris 2023)

Tahira suggests that in Bannu society, culture and tradition hold significant influence, resulting in parents making all decisions on behalf of their daughters.

According to Tahira;

“I think in Bannu society culture and tradition play a dominant role. It has become a cultural ideology that parents will decide everything on their side and the girl has no role in it. Pashtun people give a lot of importance to caste and hujra. And those who don't have these things don't have relationships with them. Culture creates hurdles for Pashtun women. If we remove this caste barrier then things can be better.” (Tahira 2023)

Shahnaz, Munawar, and Uzma reveal that when women assert their choice in marriage partners, the culture, society, and parents often resist and subject them to mental and physical abuse. Such resistance is justified using the notions of gherat (honor) and Ana (respect).

According to Shahnaz;

“If women show choices for someone to marry then our culture, society, and parents show resistance and mentally and physically torture their daughter. Males become the problem of Gherat and Ana. And I face this problem. Culture plus tradition, have more than 80 % role in the marriage institution.” (Shahnaz 2023)

The lack of agency given to women in making marriage decisions is a huge problem that needs to be addressed. Tahira's point about the dominant role of culture and tradition in Bannu society is certainly valid. However, I would like to add that this culture is deeply patriarchal and reinforces gender roles that limit the agency of women. The idea that parents decide everything for their daughters in marriage is one such manifestation of this patriarchal culture. This not only robs women of their autonomy, but also perpetuates harmful practices such as child marriage. Furthermore, the statement implies that women in Pashtun society do not have the freedom to choose their life partners. This is a concerning issue and goes against the basic human rights and Islamic principles of consent in marriage. All individuals, irrespective of their gender, have the right to choose their life partners and make decisions about their own lives. The issue here is the patriarchal system that dominates Pashtun society, which often leads to the marginalization of women's voices and rights in decision-making processes. Women should have the right to choose their life partners, but this is not always the case in Pashtun culture. The fact

that religion is often sidelined in favor of cultural norms only reinforces this inequality.

3.1.3. Religion

The majority of female respondents say that Pashtun people prioritize cultural tradition over religion. In Pashtun Bannu culture marriage is viewed as a central aspect of social and familial life. Religion has been a significant part of human society since ancient times, and it continues to play a vital role in many communities today.

However, as Nilo points out, religion can sometimes be misused for personal gain or to enforce cultural norms that may not be entirely in line with the original teachings of the faith.

According to Nilo;

“Yes, religion has a great role. Our Pashtun use religion for personal benefits. We only fit religion in Pashtun society. They only use it for their benefit. Peers do not practice religion outside of their culture. But now changes came. In marriage choices Pashtun problematizes religion. Our Pashtun society does not correctly follow religion. Pashtun society does not give women a share in inheritance. Islam has given free choice in matters of marriage like Hazrat Khadija sent a marriage proposal to Holy Prophet. This kind of Islam is not followed in our Pashtun society. For this, it is necessary to have a trained society. Then children will not do mature decisions.” (Nilofar 2023)

In the case of Pashtun society, it seems that religion has been adapted to fit into cultural traditions and used for personal benefits, rather than being followed

strictly according to its teachings. The argument put forward by Munawar, Tahira, Ayesha, and Uzma raise an important point about the influence of society and traditions on religion.

“No religion does not impend the choices but our society impend. We have placed our outdated traditions above religion, so we don’t follow religion freely. We believe blindly in society rather than in religion. Religion gives us choices. Society overpowers religion.” (Tahira 2023)

It is important to distinguish between religious practices and cultural traditions to ensure that individuals have the autonomy to make choices that align with their beliefs and values.

According to Fazal Rahim;

“Religion gives them the right to ask. Pashtun society in some matters did not follow Islam and overpower their traditions. They love Pashtunwali from the core of their hearts. In female matters, they do not follow religion. They give importance to traditions and Pashtu.” (F. R. Khan 2023)

The statement made by Ghalib and Sadiq is a valid one. It is often seen that religious scholars in our society mix the principles of religion with the conservative and radical Pashtunwali, which in turn hinders the free choice-making ability of women regarding marriage. However, it is also important to note that it is not just the religious scholars who are to blame for this. Society as a whole has also played a role in promoting and perpetuating these conservative and radical beliefs.

“Yes, the religion which the religious scholars are interpreting on a daily basis greatly impedes the free-making choice of women regarding marriage. These religious scholars have mixed the principle of religion with the conservative and radical Pashtunwali, a social code of Pashtuns.” (Ghalib 2023)

From the above discussion, it is concluded that the teachings of Islam provide women with the freedom to make choices regarding their lives, including their marriage partners. However, the interpretation of these teachings by some religious scholars and society at large has resulted in the imposition of cultural and traditional practices that limit the choices of women.

However, it is important to acknowledge that culture is not inherently bad or good. It is a dynamic aspect of society that can evolve and adapt to changing times and values.

Overall, while tradition and religion can play a role in shaping our beliefs and practices, it is essential to prioritize individual autonomy and agency in matters of marriage. Patriarchal systems often restrict the agency of women in decision-making processes, leading to unequal power dynamics in relationships.

3.2. Modernization

It explores how changing societal norms, globalization, and modern influences i.e., mobile phones affect Pashtun women's choices in the institution of marriage, and how traditional practices might be adapting to these changes. The literature says that it has had a significant impact on marriage choices by expanding the range of options available to individuals and changing traditional norms and expectations. My respondents accept the other impacts of modernization like

individualism, gender equality, and globalization but when it comes to technology, especially mobile, they express great anger that it has corrupted our Pashtun society, and mostly parents showed outrage.

3.2.1. Technology

It's important to acknowledge that attitudes towards modernization and its impact on marriage choices can vary greatly among different communities and individuals. While some may embrace the changes brought about by modernization, others may feel that it threatens traditional values and ways of life.

The majority of my females' respondents in Bannu are showing concerns about the role of mobile phones in marriage choices and are declaring it a threat, it may indicate that they feel that mobile phones are facilitating changes that undermine traditional gender roles and expectations. For example, that may be concerned that mobile phones are making it easier for young women to connect with men outside of their immediate community and family, which could be seen as threatening to traditional ideas about female purity and honor. They may also be worried that the increased access to information and communication that mobile phones provide could lead to greater cultural and ideological differences between partners, which could pose challenges to the stability of the marriage.

Tahira and Uzma strongly condemn the use of technology;

“In our Pashtun society, it has worsened the situation. Due to the misuse by some people, it has become completely useless in Pashtun society. Due to this Pashtun males not included females in decision-making and feel fear of personal involvement. Modernization spoils Pashtun society. Modernity has given choices to

women but it has gone wrong. People tend to build relationships the wrong way on mobile and its disadvantages outweigh its advantages.” (Tahira 2023)

The opinions shared by Sara and Kohinoor show the contrasting experiences of modernization in the context of marriage. While Sara believes that modernization has negatively impacted the institution of marriage by allowing politics and family interference to dictate the process of finding a partner, Kohinoor suggests that modernization has not brought significant change in the traditional approach towards marriage where females are still hesitant to express their preferences.

According to Sara, a first-year College student;

“Overall, it impacts the structure of marriage but not in our family. We use all modern technology but no one listens to us in marriage kind of matters. I am forcefully married to my cousin. Politics of joint family, in my Rishta process, ruined my life and my happiness forever.” (Sara 2023)

Kohinoor statements highlights;

“Modernization I think so have not much greater impacts on marriage institution because females still feel shy. I was using a mobile but knew about my mangni after two years. So, I have noticed no change and impacts of modernization will take a lot of time in Pashtun society to change the marriage institution”. (Kohinoor 2023)

Shahnaz's perspective on modernization and its impact on Pashtun society is quite interesting. While it is true that modernity has brought about changes in the thought process and decision-making of the younger generation, it is not necessarily

true that it has caused a significant change in the traditional norms and values of the Pashtun society. While on the other hand Shahnaz says that modernization and our old norms and tradition contradict badly;

Shahnaz states that;

“No modernization brings no changes in our society and family. In our area, mobile towers have also been demolished. Modernity gave the children so much confidence that they could express something to their parents. Even if they don’t see their choices, they still have a say in decision-making. Modernization does not tell us personality wise but it means to enlighten. Modernity creates a lot of hurdles in Pashtun society in regard to marriage. Now daughters show their preferences to their parents because they are influenced by seeing things of modernity. Mobile has spoiled the whole story. The norms of our society are the same as the old ones. So, the old norms and the new modernized generation’s digitalized era contradict in many ways and created a lot of hurdles. It created gaps between parents and children and created a lot of frustration. Overconfidence leads to rudeness. Our guardians are not modern, that’s why there is never a change in society.” (Shahnaz 2023)

Regarding modernization, the author Bhattacharya points out that modernization has been imposed on Pakistan from above without effectively transforming society from within. The clash between traditional customs and borrowed modernity has negatively impacted the female population.

On the other hand, Ayesha is talking about digital space and inequalities that men are taking advantage of modernization and mobile, etc.;

Ayesha shares her opinion and said that;

“It has a great impact on women's desires and wishes. Most of our minds are formed accordingly. The role of modernity is more in men's decisions but it has no significant effect on women's choices.” (Ayesha 2023)

My two respondents, both living in capital areas are of the view that modernity especially the use of the mobile phone in Bannu society brought somewhat changes;

According to Hina;

“In my village, modernization has changed the traditional gender roles, especially education, mass media and technology made it possible. Now the females have equal rights in decision making, have the choice to marriage and even if the marriage doesn't run family men support her in taking divorce too and stand with her side by side.” (Hina 2023)

The statement made by Palwasha highlights the impact of modernization on the process of arranged marriages. While it is true that mobile phones have made communication more accessible and convenient, it is important to consider whether this has had a positive or negative impact on women's choices and agency in the process of arranged marriage.

Palwasha's statement highlights;

“Now a lot of women have mobile phones now. And I am surprised that they get a man on the phone. The boys' family sent Rishta and they get married. If mobile came in the modernization and these digital things come in modernization. So yes, it has

impacts. Bannu is a very small city and everybody knows each other.” (Palwasha 2023)

The debate around modernization and its impact on women's choices and marriages is complex and multifaceted. While some argue that modernization has brought positive changes in terms of expanding women's awareness and choices, others believe that it has created a materialistic mindset and led to unsuccessful marriages. As Naheed says;

Naheed, a retired principal shares her thoughts;

“Modernization naturally education brought liberalism in women. But it brought a lot of negative things. In many places, we do misuse it. In some areas there are positive aspects that mean women are now more aware of the globe. They know about life partners and can present their choices in front of elders. But in my view, its negative implications are a lot. Mean now a lot of women are materialistic and they demand a lot from their husbands. Girls now prefer wealthy standard men. Now a day a lot of marriages are broken due to this reason. Relations based on the choices of modern girls are mostly unsuccessful. Their marital lives are disturbed. They saw all these things on TV, Mobiles, etc.” (Naheed 2023)

It is important to note that modernization is a gradual process and its impact may vary depending on various factors such as cultural norms and individual experiences. One of the major challenges that arise due to modernity in the Pashtun society is the widening gap between the older generation, who adhere to traditional norms and values, and the younger generation, who are influenced by modernity. This gap often results in frustration and a lack of understanding between parents and children, which

ultimately creates a lot of hurdles in the decision-making process, especially in matters related to marriage. In conclusion, it is important to have an open and honest debate about the impact of modernization on the Bannu society. While it is true that modernity has brought about changes, it is equally important to recognize that traditional norms and values still hold significant importance in society. Ultimately, the impact of modernity on men's and women's choices and decisions is complex and multifaceted and requires a nuanced understanding of the intersectionality of gender, class, race, and other factors. In terms of women's choices in marriage, modernization has provided them with greater agency and the ability to make informed decisions. However, it is also important to acknowledge that this newfound agency is not always supported by traditional societal norms and can lead to conflict with family and community expectations.

Fazal Rahim highlights the dynamics of marriage institutions. That changes with time.

According to Fazal Rahim;

“In modernization accessibility became easy. Through mobile phones, one can easily contact the other person and know their qualities. Modernity and marriage choices have a close connection. The marriage institution is not dynamic and a lot of changes occurred over time.”

While Sadiq highlights the rural-urban gap that urban have an advantage with the use of technology.

Sadiq states that;

“Modernization has not impacted the traditions of rural inhabitants as it did to those living in urban. But yet I would say in rural areas as compared to past, female is somehow considered to be asked for her consents.” (Sadiq 2023)

Sami and Ghalib have shared similar thoughts that,

“Modernization in the shape of technology and social institutions is greatly impacting the decision-making power of women in our area. This has empowered women in our society.” (Ullah 2022)

But my majority respondents are not accepting the modernization role in Pashtun society and showed negation to the above observations. They say, in Pashtun society, it has negative impacts. A lot of deaths occur due to mobile. Girls demanded to marry on their own choices but society never accepted their choices.

Noor Zeb stated that;

“Modernity has negative impacts on Pashtun society. In marriages matter it is highly condemnable.” (N. Zeb 2022)

Haris Khan's statement highlights the potential dangers of modernization without sufficient education. In terms of marriage choices, Haris Khan's observation that modernization has not necessarily brought about positive change is worth considering.

Haris Khan stated that;

“Modernization can be very fruitful and can be very fatal as well. Modernization without education results in destruction. Take an example of a knife, it can be used to cut a birthday cake and if don't know how to use it, can cut the finger as well. Modernization in our area, instead of improving people's thought processes, has further added insult to injury, majorly because of the very low literacy rates. In terms of marriage choices, I observe that it has not brought about much improvement. Instead, it has negatively destabilized the social settings. Trends of before-marriage sex are increasing with every passing day; the ratio of court marriages is also on the rise etc. This is not a portrayal of improving women's choices in marriage positively.”

(Haris 2023)

In the Pashtun culture, for example, arranged marriage has been a longstanding tradition, with parents and elders playing a central role in selecting partners for their children. However, with the rise of modernization and globalization, younger generations have increasingly been exposed to different cultural norms and practices, including the idea of love marriages.

This cultural clash can create tension between older and younger generations, with younger individuals often facing pressure to conform to traditional expectations while also seeking to assert their autonomy and make their own choices.

Haris Khan's statement highlights the potential dangers of modernization without sufficient education. In terms of marriage choices, Haris Khan's observation that modernization has not necessarily brought about positive change is worth considering. While individuals have greater access to information and communication

technologies, and thus greater opportunities to connect with potential partners, the rise in trends such as premarital sex and court marriages may suggest a destabilization of traditional social structures and values.

However, it is important to note that these changes are not necessarily inherently negative. Rather, they reflect shifting cultural attitudes and evolving social norms.

The majority of my female respondents are showing concerns about the role of mobile phones in marriage choices and are declaring it a threat, it may indicate that they feel that mobile phones are facilitating changes that undermine traditional gender roles and expectations.

For example, that may be concerned that mobile phones are making it easier for young women to connect with men outside of their immediate community and family, which could be seen as threatening to traditional ideas about female purity and honor. They may also be worried that the increased access to information and communication that mobile phones provide could lead to greater cultural and ideological differences between partners, which could pose challenges to the stability of the marriage.

3.2.2. Secular Education

It is true that while education can shape attitudes and choices, it may not necessarily translate into changes in practices in Pashtun areas. Despite the increasing access to secular education, traditional cultural practices and beliefs continue to hold significant influence in Bannu society.

In many cases, social norms and expectations regarding marriage are deeply entrenched and may be resistant to change. For example, arranged marriages based on considerations such as family status, tribal affiliation, and other social factors remain a prevalent practice in Bannu society, despite the increasing role of secular education in shaping attitudes towards marriage.

Additionally, the influence of traditional gender roles and expectations may also limit the impacts of education on practices related to marriage. Even when women are educated and empowered to make informed choices about their marriages, social pressure, and expectations may still lead them to conform to traditional practices and expectations.

The points made by Nilo and Tahira highlight the importance of education in bringing about change in the traditional marriage institution. While Nilo points out that many women are still restricted in their access to education and therefore have limited agency in the marriage decision-making process, Tahira notes that education can lead to a more open-minded and supportive attitude among family members toward women's choices.

Nilo States that;

“When you completed education, your age is also increased, and you became mature. Due to education, you know about different cultures and interact with different people. Higher education and hostels also play a good role. However, the majority of women have no rights or permission to go outside of Bannu for education and live in hostels. That is why marriage institution is still in the hands of men and women do have not much agency.” (Nilofar 2023)

On the other hand, Tahira's statement highlights the importance of education and exposure in broadening the mentality of family males and giving choices to women. It suggests that cultural relativism, which acknowledges the value and significance of diverse cultural beliefs and practices, can be applied here.

According to Tahira;

“Education plays a major role. Due to education and exposure, our family males have a broad mentality and give choices to women. They practice.” (Tahira 2023)

In this case, Uzma's statement highlights that the family's decision will be her decision may be an example of internalized oppression, where she has internalized the belief that women should have limited agency and control over their own lives regardless of their education or job.

Uzma negates Tahira;

“I don't have any experience in it. Education and job have played no role in my marriage. Because from the beginning, I had this thought that the family's decision will be my decision. Education has no role in it. I didn't even want to do it of my own free will.” (Uzma 2023)

My respondents say that education has played no role in giving us choices in marriage.

According to Sara;

“I will say no, because our elders don’t consider education as a female right. I am educated but have no choice and married without choice. Education without a job is coming in no category in our society.” (Sara 2023)

Both women are working but instead of that, they don’t use choices in marriage.

Shahnaz shares her experience;

“Higher education gives them confidence in other things but no power in marriage matters and education has no role in it. I am highly educated but give me no choice in marriage decision. I was against my marriage”. (Shahnaz 2023)

Munawar shares similar thoughts with Shahnaz;

“However, even if she has a very high job, she can’t marry at her own will. Women can’t use their jobs as sword. Education is not giving them marriage choices in Pashtun society even though I am a working woman too. I was forcefully married to my cousin. I am in between neither happy nor sad.” (Munawar 2023)

Palwasha, Anila, Hina, and Noor Nama, say that education can broaden the horizon of females in the decision-making process but as I experienced these are only their aspirations not practically, they experienced the utilities of education in the selection of life partners based on their own choices.

Education can have a significant impact on changing traditional norms and empowering women in Pashtun society. However, it is important to note that access to education is still limited for many women, which limits their ability to exercise agency in marriage choices. Education can be a powerful tool in promoting gender

equality and improving women's agency in all areas of life, including marriage. However, it is also important to acknowledge the barriers that still exist, particularly for women in more traditional societies where access to education may be limited.

It is evident from these statements that in Bannu society, higher education does not necessarily guarantee agency for women in marriage decisions. Despite being educated, women are still bound by cultural and traditional norms that prioritize men's decisions. This highlights the need for a shift in cultural and societal attitudes toward women's rights and autonomy. It is important to recognize the internalized oppression that exists within the community, where women themselves may believe that their role is limited to marriage and family responsibilities.

Many women in Bannu feel that education and job do not necessarily translate into agency or power in marriage decisions. It is important to recognize the cultural context in which these women live, where traditional norms and customs hold significant influence. While education and job opportunities may give women some level of confidence and exposure, they do not always guarantee them the ability to make their own choices when it comes to marriage.

However, it is important to also acknowledge the impact of internalized oppression in shaping women's attitudes towards their agency and autonomy. The belief that marriage decisions should be made by elders or the family may have been internalized by some women, leading them to feel that they have no power in such matters. This highlights the need for cultural sensitivity and understanding in addressing issues of women's agency and empowerment.

The perspectives shared here highlight the complex role of education in women's empowerment and marriage choices in Bannu society.

Fazal Rahim, Shah Zeb, Noor Zeb, and Haris, share similar thoughts on the question of education

“In my view education plays a better role when you secure a good job. Then a female has more independent choices in marriage. If you are living in the same area, in the old structure then education can’t play an important role in choices. Education is a broad term and we relate education with job. The graduate level is not enough. Due to the job whole structure dependency come on you. So, we can’t relate education directly to marriage choices. Often in capitalist societies education has a great role in making choices but not in Pashtun patriarchal societies. It depends upon the parents, not on education. If a girl does MPhil and Ph.D., even then parents will decide. In Pashtun society, education can never make a woman empower.” (F. R. Khan 2023)

In Sadiq's views education without a job is incomplete but this is his aspiration. The reality is change.

“Not just the education. I believe authentic education that could spread awareness for equal distribution in economic factors would help female empowerment in marriage decisions.” (Sadiq 2023)

These perspectives suggest that education alone may not be enough to empower women in Pashtun society and that other factors such as economic opportunities and cultural and religious beliefs must also be considered.

It's interesting to see that both Sami and Ghalib agree that education plays an important role in empowering women to make their own choices in marriage matters. The reason is this they are living in Islamabad and away from Bannu.

Sami states that;

“Education has 100 percent role and educated women convey her message nicely to parents. She knows techniques that how I will convey my choice to my parents. Educated women have broad mindsets. I took education as a free thing and they will not be blamed by their families. The family will respect their choices.” (Ullah 2022)

Ghalib's statement highlights that;

“Education plays a vital role in empowering women to make their choices. It brings boldness and awareness in women to express their wishes and decide the basic of their lives.” (Ghalib 2023)

From the above discussion, it's worth noting that education alone may not guarantee women's empowerment in patriarchal societies, where deep-rooted cultural and social norms restrict women's agency and autonomy. Nonetheless, education can be a powerful tool in challenging and changing such norms, as well as providing women with alternative options and opportunities beyond traditional gender roles.

Some female respondents are working women but they are also victims of Pashtun tradition and denied their basic right in marriage choice.

3.3. Agency in the private sphere

This theme delves into the concept of agency and autonomy within the private sphere of Pashtun women's lives, specifically concerning marriage.

Agency means power and authority to decide something independently. The private sphere means within the four walls, so the majority of my respondents say that women are independent and have agency in gham-shuddi matters but not independent in the decision of selection of a partner. When I asked my respondents if Pashtun women have decision-making authority in the private sphere, the data showed the basic themes of women's status in decision-making of marriage, negotiating agency, and experience choices.

3.3.1. Family Background

According to most respondents, Pashtun's decision-making authority in marriage is influenced by family background, does the family live in a rural or urban area, whether they have exposure and traveling to other culture, and or they change their mindset towards choices making in the institution of marriage.

In rural settings, Pashtun women may be socialized within more traditional and conservative norms. This could involve strong adherence to cultural traditions, emphasis on family honor, and limited exposure to external influences. In urban settings, Pashtun women may experience a different socialization process influenced by urbanization, modernization, and exposure to diverse ideas and lifestyles.

By examining how socialization processes differ between rural and urban areas in District Bannu, I explore how these contextual factors shape Pashtun women's choices in the institution of marriage. This analysis helps to understand the interplay between cultural traditions, modern influences, and the agency of Pashtun women in their decision-making processes, providing valuable insights into their experiences and perspectives within the specific context of District Bannu.

When I asked my respondents about that why rural woman face more cultural restraints in marriages as compared to urban, the respondents showed different perspectives on this question.

The majority of my respondents say that;

“Due to lack of education in a village area and strong cultural hold, they face more cultural restraints in marriage as compared to urban women.”

According to Nilo;

“Rural is a tribal society. Everyone knows each other and has close interaction and a strong gham-shuddi structure. But urban people are isolated and busy and have no interaction with the surrounding people. In urban areas, different people from different cultures are living but in rural areas, you have a specific setup and all people belong to a specific mentality. They think that act of one person affects the whole village structure. Quom, qabila matter greatly. If one person will do married in lower or out caste so it is dangerous for the whole village. Our culture never gives us freedom. But our females don't want this and they have accepted the belief that our parent is everything to us and their decision is good for us. They give whole agency to their parents.” (Nilofar 2023)

My one respondent says that areas do not matter but mindsets matter a lot; being an urbanized educated and economically independent, Shahnaz was subjected to societal pressure and scrutiny for her job. This shows that while women may have some decision-making power in other matters, marriage remains a domain where societal and cultural norms override personal preferences.

According to Shahnaz;

“My job became a shameful act for me. They sit jirga on me. To some extent, urban women have decision power as compared to rural. As I was not given a choice in marriage as a resident of the city but in other matters, I have more decision power. Environment plays a role but not in marriage if you belong to an urban or rural you should obey elders. In urban they don’t give free choices. Mindset plays an important role, neither education nor residential background. Man is born free but everywhere he is chained. Educated women play a great role after marriage.” (Shahnaz 2023)

From the participant views on choices, it is important to note that the level of agency given to females in rural areas is heavily influenced by cultural and societal norms. These norms often prioritize the reputation and honor of the family and community over individual desires and choices. However, it is also important to recognize that there are variations within these cultural and societal norms, and some females may have different beliefs and experiences regarding agency in marriage. Additionally, as society evolves and modernizes, there may be shifts in attitudes and beliefs toward individual agency in marriage, particularly in urban areas where there is more exposure to diverse cultures and ideas. It is important to recognize that the limitations placed on women's choices and agency are not just limited to geographical areas or communities, but are a result of deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes and beliefs. We need to work towards dismantling these structures and creating a more equitable and just society where everyone, regardless of gender or background, has the freedom to make their own choices and live their lives on their terms.

Males' perspective on the rural-urban gap is different and as more negates the importance of the area. Shahzeb claims that rural women are not facing cultural restraints in marriage choices.

As Shahzeb points out, we are living in a time of rapid modernization and digitalization. By modernizing our cultural institutions, we can ensure that our traditional values and beliefs are preserved and our culture remains strong. Urban and rural areas often have different ways of thinking, but it is important to be mindful of traditional Pashtun culture and keep it alive.

According to Shahzeb;

“Now the era of modernization and digitalization is going on. Urban and rural have different schools of thought. We must go with the Pashtun culture. If we modernize the institution of culture, we will forget our culture. The benefits of culture in the long run of life are greater. No rural is not facing more restraint.” (S. Zeb 2023)

Ghalib, Haris, and Tauseef emphasize the gap between rural and urban areas, where urban women have more exposure to modern facilities, education, and interaction with educated peers. In rural areas, the families are mostly conservative and follow the old traditions and norms of marriage practices and also due to a lack of awareness and education they face more cultural restraints.

My one respondent, Fazal Rahim highlights that the strict veil and purdah system, along with a lack of education, impose cultural restraints on women in rural areas. This can limit their freedom and opportunities.

Fazal Rahim States;

“Veil and purdah system are very strict in villages and a lot of care is taken in the chadar and the boundary wall. And due to a lack of education they face cultural restraints. The urban girl goes to school, university, everywhere, even to the cinema.”

(F. R. Khan 2023)

From the above discussion, it is concluded that culture and traditional norms are strictly followed in rural areas as compared to urban ones. They say that educationally rural area is backed into education. Due to these reasons, they are not giving choices to women in marriage institutions.

While it's true that the benefits of culture are important to preserve, it's also important to recognize that cultural practices can sometimes impose unnecessary and harmful constraints on individuals, particularly women. In the case of rural Pashtun culture, women are often subject to strict rules and norms surrounding marriage. For example, they may be expected to marry within their tribe or caste, regardless of their personal preferences or desires. This can limit their choices and agency in a significant way. Ultimately, it's important to strike a balance between preserving important cultural traditions and promoting individual freedoms and agency for all members of society. While it is true that education and exposure to modern facilities are important factors in promoting gender equality, it is also essential to address the root causes of the problem, which are deeply embedded in social and cultural norms. It is necessary to challenge patriarchal beliefs and practices and promote gender sensitivity at all levels of society, including rural areas. Education alone cannot solve the problem of gender inequality if social norms continue to discriminate against women.

3.3.2. Role of Travelling and Exposure in Choices

It explores how Pashtun women's exposure to different cultures, ideas, and experiences through travel impacts their preferences and decision-making process related to marriage.

Travel and exposure do not play a significant role in Pashtun women's choices due to the importance placed on preserving cultural values and practices.

My 10 respondents are of the view that lack of exposure and traveling is the ultimate reason for Bannuchis people to not give choices to women in Bannu. And due to lack of exposure, they don't give their daughter to non-Pashtuns.

Shahzeb seems to believe that Pashtun culture is unique and should be preserved by adhering to traditional norms and practices, including marrying within one's clan. He suggests that allowing women to make their own choices in marriage would undermine the Pashtun culture and lead to social instability

According to Shahzeb;

"We have not any exploration in every aspect of life especially in the Pashtun belt. Exploration means to get some knowledge about the environment. Pashtuns are such a culture that they don't allow anyone to break them. If this thing ends, then there will be no difference between Pashtun and Punjabis. We sacrifice our personal choice for the choice of society and for that, we put our choices back. It's against our Pashtun culture that a woman or family goes out to other cities and she marries her own choice. Our social norms and tradition do not allow you to marry someone outside your clan. Even among Pashtuns, women do not marry in every tribe because

there is a big difference between us and them on a cultural basis. Adjustment problems arise and the marriage ends on divorce.” (S. Zeb 2023)

On the other hand, Noor Zeb acknowledges the role of exposure and traveling in shaping perceptions and attitudes toward marriage. However, he still prioritizes the preservation of Pashtun cultural traditions.

According to Noor Zeb;

“If I apply this to myself, then I will not marry my daughter to a non-Pashtun because of differences in culture and traditions. And there is a lot of difference in ways of living and acting. Due to trust, we do not even marry within KP other Pashtuns and can’t trust anyone. Traveling and exposure role can’t be denied and mostly due to lack of exposure they can’t trust on others.” (N. Zeb 2022)

Sadiq takes a different perspective and emphasizes the importance of education and exposure in overcoming misconceptions and stereotypes. He suggests that a lack of education and exposure may contribute to misconceptions about marrying outside of one's culture and that education and exposure can help promote understanding and acceptance of different cultures.

According to Sadiq;

“I would say, lack of education and traveling are not the ultimate reasons, but are among the reasons for these misconceptions.” (Sadiq 2023)

My one respondent believes in the role of traveling and exposure to different cultures and it greatly has an impact on people. He lived in Islamabad and said according to the changes he observed.

Sami states that;

“Exactly this has a culturally great role. Those who have no exposure and no traveling are very much restricted to their caste only. And this is the main problem in Pashtun society that they marry their daughters only within families. This thing is not good. If we take Islamic culture from a broader perspective or a scientific view, close marriages are not good and genetic problems arises in such kind of marriages. In Pathan culture outside marriages are rare due to exposure and relation with different cultures are very limited. And you will see probably those who come out from villages cases of inter culture can be seen. This question is limited and traveling and exposure is must and if these things increase a lot of negative things will go out of our mind. In Bannu culture, all these things are very restricted. And the basic reason is education level to see their exposure and how much it is limited and extended. But now society change and most men marry outside. It all things depends on your education and exposure. And the limitation is due to limited interaction. The caste system is strong in Bannu but now should be avoided.” (Ullah 2022)

In summary, there are different views on the role of cultural traditions, exposure, and education in Pashtun women's choices in marriage. While some prioritize the preservation of cultural traditions, others emphasize the importance of exposure and education in promoting understanding and acceptance of different cultures. Ultimately, the debate highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of cultural traditions and the challenges of balancing tradition and modernity in contemporary societies.

Nilo highlights a very important aspect of Bannuchis male rigidity while not granting choices to women and highlighting the settled area politics. As S.S Thorburn also mentioned this thing in his book.

According to Nilo;

“Yes, this is the main reason. Now those who migrated from tribal areas done a lot of marriages from out of tribe and also marry Punjabis. Compared to Wazir Bannuchis are much restricted in marriage matter and they do not marry to non-Pashtuns because of a lack of traveling and settled areas. Wazir adopted easily everything as compared to Bannuchis. Adoption is easy and for Bannuchis it is very rigid. We marry our sister to the Khattak tribe and our Bhabi is also from other tribes.” (Nilofar 2023)

Munawar shares similar thoughts with Nilo;

Munawar states that;

“Yes. They settle in one area and their whole mind is set there; they are limited to their area. They don’t come from their domain. They want to pace with the modern world but they consider it against their dignity.” (Munawar 2023)

My one respondent disagrees with Nilo and Munawar. She negates the role of exposure.

According to Uzma;

“Pashtun are in love with their traditions, language of their region. Would you ever like it for your family that you get her married in Chitral or Punjab? Didn’t

we laugh at them? We prefer marriages between Pashtuns only. The traveling and education have no role at all in this.” (Uzma 2023)

Analyzing these perspectives, it is clear that there are diverse views among Pashtuns regarding the importance of exposure, migration, and cultural preservation in marriage choices. While some individuals like Nilo and Munawar see the benefits of openness and adaptation, others like Uzma prioritize the preservation of cultural identity and traditions.

The complexity of this debate highlights the ongoing tension between maintaining cultural heritage and embracing societal changes. It also underscores the significance of individual perspectives and personal values in shaping marriage choices within the Pashtun community. The responses provided by the different respondents suggest that the Pashtun culture is deeply rooted in tradition and social norms, and the choices of Pashtun women in the institution of marriage are greatly influenced by these cultural factors. The idea of exploration and personal choice in marriage matters is not encouraged in Pashtun society. In summary, the responses suggest that Pashtun women's choices in marriage are influenced by a complex intersection of cultural, traditional, and social factors. While some Pashtuns have adopted modern attitudes and are more open to inter-tribal marriages, others maintain a strong adherence to traditional cultural norms and prefer to marry within their tribe.

In the context of internalized oppression, the rigid adherence to intra-tribal marriages could be seen as a form of internalized oppression where Pashtuns are limiting their choices based on cultural and traditional norms that may not necessarily be beneficial for their personal growth and development.

3.3.3. Women's Status in Decision-making of Marriage

Women's status means a women's positionality in the family, whether she is married or unmarried, mashra or kashra. And to see who is the head of the marriage institution. According to most respondents, Pashtun's decision-making authority is influenced by their age, patriarchy, pyghur.

To begin our exploration, let us first examine how Ghalib defines patriarchy and its consequences for women.

According to Ghalib;

“Patriarchy is a concept which conceives women recessive and subordinate. The patriarchal structure is based on such kinds of stereotypes which suppress women's indenting and their social being. Women are always kept to the male of their family. Society measures the honor of the man from the status of the women of him, if they had been kept suppressed, then he is the man of honor. But if his female has a certain freedom, that man is then looked at with suspicion and low prestige. That is why women are deprived of their decision-making power.” (Ghalib 2023)

In addition to Ghalib, Dr. Sami highlighted the cultural barriers in the decision-making process of Pashtun women and he is looking in favor of women's agency;

“In my view, this is wrong totally wrong that we can't ask females' choices. Culturally mother and father are two important parts of the structure. Due to cultural restriction father can't directly ask his daughter's views in marriage that I want to marry you in this particular place. Mother should play the role of mediator. If we

exclude daughter from the decision-making process so there is no difference between past and present. Direct interaction is rare.” (Ullah 2022)

Shahzeb's observations about the exclusion of unmarried females from marriage decision-making and he also expresses fear of societal backlash and suggests that women should be willing to compromise and sacrifice for the benefit of society raise important questions about the role of culture in shaping individual choices.

–By the way, the testimony of a woman is also difficult to believe in Islam. It is the culture and social rules of each tribe that determine how they live. The Pashtuns also value this work highly. Yes, women should be involved in decision-making, but not to the extent that they dominate the process, primarily due to our moral values and our fear of Pyghurs. Fear of society prevents us from including them in decision-making. And in the Pashtun society where women are given a significant position in decision-making, people taunt and look down on that man. Therefore, to avoid taunts, women are prohibited from participating in the decision-making of marriage. In the long run, life is based on compromise and sacrificing our happiness for society's benefit. If a woman is willing to compromise and sacrifice, then there is a strong possibility that she will succeed.” (S. Zeb 2023)

Two of my respondents highlight the age factor in the decision-making of marriage institutions. The point raised by Noor Zeb and Fazal Rahim about the influence of age on the decision-making process in Pashtun society is an important one. It highlights the role of traditional gender roles and the hierarchy of authority within the family unit.

“According to Noor Zeb and Fazal Rahim, in the overall process, different women have different roles in decision-making. Mother and married sister influence the whole process mostly. In Pashtun society, the experiences of age are highly valued, with older women being the decision-makers and younger are not involved. Elder women can play the role of men. Pashtun men prevent women from decision-making on the grounds of inferiority complex.” (N. Zeb 2022)

The lack of maturity is cited by 12 out of 15 female respondents. Due to this, in the decision-making process of marriage, our male members did not include women;

“According to Miss. Shahnaz, Pashtuns are afraid of payghur. That society will taunt us that you give a dominant role or involve females in marriage decisions. I am a working woman but they don’t involve me in decision-making because of fear that lest our position be overrun.” (Shahnaz 2023)

The views expressed by Munawar are a reflection of the patriarchal mindset prevalent in many societies, including those in South Asia especially in Bannu. Unfortunately, women are not given the autonomy to make important decisions such as marriage, especially in cases where they are economically independent.

“According to Miss. Munawar, our elders make all the decisions; therefore, they prevent women from making decisions. Men see this as a problem of their pride and ego. In front of the decision of men, we are helpless. Marriage is wholly solely a big decision, if a woman decides to marry according to her choice, then no one stands before her. Because of this, women are afraid to decide their marriage and leave it to men. Women also think that I am neither economically strong nor socially strong. If the women marry of their own choice the family members end up gham-shuddi with

them. She faces social, economic, and cultural issues. Women are very afraid of all these things and that's why they consider themselves fragile. For this reason, men have taken this decision into their own hands. Due to fears, they have a lot of misapprehensions." (Munawar 2023)

Nilo shows the concerns of Pashtun society regarding women;

"In reality marriages in our community are done very early. They don't mature their daughters and marry them at the age of 14 and 15. Male considers them immature and not include them in marriage decisions." (Nilofar 2023)

The issue of patriarchy and its impact on women is a topic of ongoing debate in many societies. In my opinion, patriarchy is a harmful and unjust system that perpetuates inequality and restricts the rights and freedoms of women. While it may be difficult to change deeply ingrained social structures, it is essential to work towards greater gender equality and to ensure that women have the same opportunities and rights as men. The role of culture in the decision-making process for Pashtun women is a contentious issue that raises questions about the balance between tradition and individual rights. In my opinion, while it is important to respect cultural traditions, it is also essential to prioritize individual rights and freedoms. Women should have the right to participate in the decision-making process regarding their own lives, including the decision to get married.

It is essential to recognize and prioritize the agency and autonomy of individuals, regardless of their age or gender. Preventing women from decision-making on the grounds of an inferiority complex is problematic. It highlights the deeply ingrained

patriarchal attitudes and beliefs that continue to shape gender relations in Pashtun society.

3.3.4. Negotiating Agency

Negotiating agency in marriage refers to the process by which individuals in a marital relationship work to establish and maintain their individual autonomy and decision-making power, while also recognizing and respecting the needs and perspectives of their partner.

Negotiating agency in marriage is important because marriage can often involve power dynamics and expectations that can limit an individual's ability to make decisions or pursue their own goals. For example, traditional gender roles may place more responsibility on women for household and caregiving tasks, which can limit their ability to pursue careers or personal interests.

Sami an Assistant professor at Quaid-e-Azam Uni, claims boldly about agency limitations in Bannu society;

“This is a very hard question in Bannu society. In Bannu society, female access is very limited. Only she is allowed to relative houses and educational institutions. Selection opportunities for women are very limited. I agree that females have no choice or agency. Agency limitation exists.” (Ullah 2022)

The viewpoint of Fazal Rahim brings up an interesting perspective on agency in decision-making for women in Bannu society. However, this raises the question of why the agency is restricted to only a specific group of older women and not extended to younger girls or unmarried women. Here also age factor plays a dominant role.

“Women have agency as well because they have a greater role in gham-suddi and provide all information to husbands, so the husband makes decisions accordingly. Now women have control over decision-making. But this control is under some specific women especially Ami, Dadi, etc. After marriage, we are in favor of giving them full agency but not in favor before marriage.”

Shahzeb, a senior learned Pashtun says that women should leave marriage affairs to Allah because of tradition;

“In our society, women have no agency, no authority; it is all with their parents. I am totally against these things. Women are living beings and they have desires too, so they should be given their agency. Simply, Women should leave the matters of marriage to their Lord and accept the decision of parents because parents’ decisions always succeed.” (S. Zeb 2023)

Noor Zeb is also not in favor to give women agency in matters of marriage because of immaturity;

“We don’t give them authority and agency because of the fear that they might make a wrong decision. A girl can’t know all the habits of a boy properly at this age. Keeping these things in mind, the agency should not be given. Before marriage, they have no power and agency and when they become mothers, then it gets powers.” (N. Zeb 2022)

While people say that working women have more agency in the marriage process. To probe this, I interviewed married and unmarried working for this purpose.

My working unmarried respondent Ayesha statement on agency;

“According to Ayesha, in Pashtun society, arranged marriages take place. But these arranged marriage has so much pressure on a girl that her agency is crushed. Women are in the middle of this agency cycle, neither are they without agency nor do they have full agency. I as working can’t use my agency.”

Uzma, statistics lecturer, Shahnaz, and Munawar are associate professors of English and are married and they agree with Ayesha’s comments on agency;

“They all say that women have zero agencies in their family in selecting a life partner. Whether she is educated or uneducated, working or non-working, she has no agency. We were very highly educated and Associate professors but still we didn’t give any agency nor else were we heard. Women have less than five percent agency in the selection of life partner”. (Uzma 2023)

The condition of non-working is also the same. My 5 respondents say that we have no agency in marriage matters.

Sara (pseudonym), whose agency was crushed by their elder uncle at the age of 18 and is now a first-year student;

“We have no agency in selecting a partner. If we show desires then our elders blame, torture us mentally and physically and tie our knot with cousins forcefully. I am the only daughter of my parents and have no sister to use as a buffer. So, I can’t discuss anything and have used no agency in any shape. We have a restricted agency. These all things made me a mental patient at this age and go to the doctor twice a month”. (Sara 2023)

Only one respondent used her agency in marriage;

“According to Hina, my marriage is a love marriage and I used agency because of the environment, living in Peshawar, and coeducation institution. But not directly used the agency, indirectly through my mother. But it is not easy for every Bannuchi girl who is living in the traditional Bannu society.” (Hina 2023)

The issue of agency limitation in Bannu society is a complex and deeply rooted problem. It is crucial to recognize that women's lack of agency is not only a result of individual attitudes but is also shaped by broader societal and cultural norms. The restriction of female access to public spaces and the limited selection opportunities are contributing factors to this problem. This perpetuates the idea that women are not capable of making important decisions and reinforces patriarchal norms.

Limiting agency to specific older women and restricting it before marriage perpetuates patriarchal norms and reinforces gender stereotypes. In conclusion, denying women agency in the decision-making process of marriage is a regressive practice that perpetuates gender inequality and patriarchal norms. It is important to recognize that agency is not just a matter of giving women the power to make decisions but also creating a supportive environment where they can exercise their agency without fear of retribution. It is also important to note that the lack of agency for women in selecting their life partners can lead to unhappy and unhealthy marriages such as the marriage with Sara. By denying women their agency, we are perpetuating a cycle of unhappy marriages and unfulfilled lives. The fact that educated and highly accomplished women like Shahnaz and Munawar are still not given any agency in selecting their life partners is a sad reality. It shows that the problem is not just limited to uneducated women or women from rural areas, but it is deeply rooted in our patriarchal society.

3.3.5. Experience choices

Nilo says that I as working and have an educated family, showed only choices when my parents asked my choice at the last stage;

“Now educated Pashtun have not much rigidity in marriage practices. But in rural areas, a lot of choices are not given to women. In our society, there is male dominancy and females have subordinate positions and feel fear to disclose choices in front of elders due to traditional honor issues.” (Nilofar 2023)

Tahira is talking about the future complications of using choices and favor arranged marriage due to society;

“In my view arrange marriage is best because at this stage girls are not too much mature. Much complication comes later in a marriage of choice. Lack of family support is a major problem for Pashtun girls. I as a lecturer haven't expressed my choice because of the fear of honor and lack of support after marriage complications.” (Tahira 2023)

Kohinoor, a BS student of age 21, Kohinoor's statement highlights the issue of internalized oppression, which refers to how marginalized individuals and groups come to accept and internalize the oppression they face, resulting in the perpetuation of harmful social norms and practices. In this case, the women in Kohinoor's family and community have without the ability to gain independence and autonomy, women in Bannu are forced to rely on the decisions and choices made by their male family members.

“Family does everything on the choice of brides meaning dresses, jewelry, etc. but no choices have given in marriages. All the females are happy with the male decision. Never girls in our family talk about marriage matters. We don't know about choices in marriage. I knew about my engagement after two years. At that time, I was in grade 8th.”

Uzma is totally against the choices of women as the males are against, Uzma's comments are a clear example of internalized oppression, where an individual from an oppressed group begins to believe and perpetuate the oppressive beliefs and practices of the dominant group. In this case, Uzma has internalized the patriarchal beliefs and practices of the Bannu society that limit the agency of women in selecting their life partners. In conclusion, internalized oppression is a serious issue that affects individuals' ability to make choices and decisions regarding their own lives.

“Women should never be given the right to choose their husbands. The thinking of women is very small and limited. One should marry according to the choice of elders. Because of the small intellect of women, their choices should not be looked at all. I prefer an arranged marriage.” (Uzma 2023)

Ayesha also shows fears about choice;

“I think should exercise. But it should be done keeping your elders in mind and not cross the boundaries. Choices should be exercised within boundaries. People who marry of choice have a dangerous future. And this person has to suffer the consequences of it.” (Ayesha 2023)

Muqadas's statement highlights the prevalence of societal expectations and pressure that limit women's agency, even when given the illusion of choice. This issue

is particularly relevant for divorced women who face stigma and discrimination in our society.

—In our society, I think the choice is just an illusion that you are given because, in the end, you have to bend before the expectations of society. If I was given an actual, real choice then I wouldn't want to get married, at least for the time being as my priority was and is my education and career.” (Muqadas 2023)

Palwasha raises a very important point about the changing dynamics of society and how it is affecting the choices of women in marriage. And the other important question is that we are living in a society where we are stuck between two identities.

“Of course, women should be given choices. The world is too much digitalizing right now and that time has gone now. The only man that a woman has seen in her life was her husband or brother or father. She would survive that marriage till the end... now exposure to education is, women are now interacting with more than one man. And they look for the best choice considering their priorities, they might have a priority that a person should have a good look and be wealthy and educated. So, there should be a choice to exercise. Not giving them choices is hard for them in the marriage. Now women have started to exercise their choices.

I prefer marriage by choice. We are living in Islamabad for more than 25 years. I have a deep answer to that. I noticed that we are stuck between two identities. We were not given to Punjabis but I identified myself. I am confused as to whom I should marry. But it's hard to trust a person you don't know. Everyone wants to speak to a partner before marriage. Considering such a situation, it's hard for us in this urban life. Arranging a marriage is big to know.” (Palwasha 2023)

From the above discussion, it is said that We must work towards creating a society that values individual autonomy and supports individuals in exercising their agency without any fear of consequences or judgment. The idea that choice is an illusion is a manifestation of internalized oppression. Society imposes expectations and norms on individuals, and these expectations become so ingrained that people start to believe that they have no real choice in the matter. This can be particularly oppressive for women who are often expected to conform to gender roles and expectations. Despite progress in women's rights, divorced women are still viewed with skepticism and are often blamed for the failure of their marriage. However, I do understand the dilemma that Palwasha is facing about identity and choosing a partner. It can be challenging to find someone who shares similar values and beliefs, especially in a society where cultural and religious differences can be significant.

3.4. Male opinion on choices

This theme examines the influence of male opinions and perspectives on Pashtun women's choices in marriage. It considers how the opinions of fathers, brothers, and other male figures in their lives impact their decision-making process.

3.4.1.Support

Sami says, parental involvement can certainly be helpful and necessary, but it should not be used as a means to control or restrict someone's choices.

According to Sami;

“Should be exercise choices and parent involvement is also a must. Showing choices is not considered good in Pashtun society but here two things play an

important role. One is culture and culturally we consider this thing bad due to a lack of education and exposure. Choices are acceptable in educated and exposure base families.” (Ullah 2022)

Ghalib raises an important point about the lack of personal identity and agency that women have in Pashtun societies.

Ghalib claimed that;

“For the sake of humanity and under the authority of Islam, women should be given authority to choose their life partner. For a prosperous marital life, women should be given this right. This is because women in Pashtun societies have no personal identity. They are always in relation with the male of the family either in the shape of sister, mother, wife, or daughter. So, their existence is in the hand of males, and thus all their social matters are decided by them. Therefore, Pashtun does not give their daughters the right to choose their life partner. Daughters and sisters are the assets of honor for their family, thus deviating from its decision is the dot on the honor for their brother or father.” (Ghalib 2023)

Haris Khan shares his opinion stated;

“Absolutely yes, I believe not only women but men too should be given absolute choice to decide upon their partner. It is that man and that woman who is going to live the whole of their life together. It is there and I believe only their choice to choose their life partners. Not only a choice but is a fundamental human right. First of all, Pakistani society as a whole is a Patriarchal society and the intensity of this certain nature of society becomes even more magnified in the rural areas, particularly in the Pashtun areas. Also, the basic code of life of the Pashtun people

called Pashtunwali suppresses women's rights and freedom. So basically, there is a fault in the society and also in the Pashtuns' constitution.” (Haris 2023)

From the participant's discussion, the notion that showing choices is not considered good in Pashtun society highlights the prevalence of internalized oppression in our culture. It is crucial to break free from such oppressive norms and allow individuals, especially women, to exercise their agency and make their own decisions. While I understand that honor is an important aspect of Pashtun culture, it should not come at the cost of denying women their agency. Furthermore, the idea that women have a limited intellect and cannot make decisions for themselves is a harmful stereotype that needs to be debunked. Women are just as capable as men and should be allowed to exercise their agency.

3.4.2. Oppose

Shahzeb negated the exercise of Pashtun choices;

–No women should not exercise choices in marriages. Women are not mature at this age. A woman becomes mature when she brings children into this world and takes care of household affairs responsibly. to maintain their traditions, Pashtun men will never allow women to marry at will or by their own choice. Pashtun men are afraid to tease pyghur in the society that our society and people will taunt. And because of this pyghur, there is a lot of killing. Pashtuns do not compromise on social life at all. I am not in favor of this and this thing should end in society. One should not be so free-minded and should not be so sick and conservative mind. In everything balance is important. Pashtuns male feel fear of the free choices of females because of traditions. Females decide emotionally and that "swhy parents" involvement is a must.

I am in between. In arranged marriages, parents support their daughter after divorce but in love marriages, they do not and give them punishment. Females can't arrange any proper idea about something in life.” (S. Zeb 2023)

In the cultural context of Pashtun society, the practice of arranged marriages holds significant importance. Fazal Rahim explores the dynamics of this tradition and sheds light on the reasons why parents often discourage their children from making independent choices when it comes to marriage.

Fazal Rahim believed that;

“The reason is that parents do not allow children to use their own choice because the marriage of choice fails and is not successful in our society. Young people are very emotional which makes them not take good decisions. In Pashtun society arranged marriage is a culture. Ritual and culture plays an important role in making arranged marriage a success. If someone gets married by her choice, the people of the society mock and taunt the elder man of her family. In our society, son and daughter gave marriage authority to parents.” (F. R. Khan 2023)

Noor Zeb stated that;

“Society considers only those women mature and considers their choice valid when responsibilities of home and children fall on. In our society love marriages is not successful.” (N. Zeb 2022)

Fazal Rahim's belief that parents should have the final say in their children's marriages because young people are too emotional and may make bad decisions is a classic example of internalized oppression. This belief perpetuates the idea that

individuals do not have agency over their own lives and that they need to be controlled by others, particularly their elders.

Furthermore, Fazal Rahim's argument that arranged marriages are successful because of cultural rituals and norms is an example of cultural relativism. While it is important to respect and honor cultural traditions, we should not use them to justify harmful practices or deny individuals their basic human rights.

Noor Zeb's statement is a classic example of internalized oppression, perpetuating the idea that women's value is only recognized when they take on traditional gender roles such as caring for the home and children. This view not only limits women's agency but also reinforces gender inequality and harmful patriarchal norms.

Additionally, Noor Zeb's assertion that love marriages are not successful in their society is an example of cultural relativism, suggesting that arranged marriages are the only viable option. While arranged marriages may be successful in some cultures, it is important to recognize that individuals have the right to make their own choices in life, including whom they marry.

In my view, cultural relativism should not be used as an excuse to justify practices that are harmful or discriminatory towards certain groups of people.

Furthermore, it is important to challenge the harmful gender norms that limit women's agency and reinforce gender inequality.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The discussion section will further analyze the study findings, confirm or contradict an existing theory and explore the significance of my work.

4. Discussion

This study examined Bannu Pashtun women's agency in marriage institutions within the private sphere to determine the cultural interplay with economic independence and to see the impacts of modernization on women's choices in marriages and agency. Further to see whether economic independence and modernization are enough to give Pashtun women free choices in marriage or still culture is playing its dominant role in deciding women fates. The following discussion will present the findings of the study and address the research questions.

4.1. Cultural Interplay with Economic Independence

Economic independence can certainly provide individuals with greater choices and agency in their personal lives, while in Pashtun areas, the reality is often more complex. While in Bannu, even when women can earn their income, social norms, and expectations may still limit their ability to make independent decisions about their personal lives, including their choice of marriage partner. Women still face social pressure to abide by traditional gender roles and expectations. This theme examines the extent to which Pashtun women's financial autonomy affects their decision-making power in choosing a spouse and the dynamics within the institution of marriage.

My conversation with male and female respondents showed different perspectives. Three of my senior male respondents expressed a contrasting view, suggesting that economic independence has a limited impact on women's choices. My younger married and unmarried respondents' responses only show desire, that economically independent women have more choices in partner selection. My working respondent Shah Naz, Munawar, and others negates the aspiration of economically dependent women as they say that we are working but married without choice. In the theoretical insights, Anoosh emphasizes that economically independent women are bold and they can decide for themselves. Economic independence gives women more choices in marriages and but consent in marriage is not an option for any woman. Due to cultural disposition lovers will remain separated. Some ideological apparatus like family, religion, and culture restrains Pashtun female agency while other ideological apparatus like education and media act as agentive tools that raise female consciousness (Khan A. W., 2012). But the empirical data from Bannu contradict her work. This cultural clash can create tension between older and younger generations, with younger individuals often facing pressure to conform to traditional expectations while also seeking to assert their autonomy and make their own choices.

In the cultural and religious belief system as an influencer, the study findings reveal that Pashtun culture is deeply patriarchal and reinforces gender roles that limit the agency of women in marriage-related matters. Cultural norms prioritize traditional practices, such as parents making decisions for their daughters in marriage, which restricts women's autonomy and choices. Religious beliefs are often overshadowed by cultural norms, further reinforcing gender inequalities in marriage decisions. The

prevalence of child marriage and the societal perception of female purity and honor are influenced by cultural and religious factors.

However, I would like to add that Pashtun culture is deeply patriarchal and reinforces gender roles that limit the agency of women. The idea that parents decide everything for their daughters in marriage is one such manifestation of this patriarchal culture. This not only robs women of their autonomy but also perpetuates harmful practices such as child marriage. Furthermore, the statement implies that women in Pashtun society do not have the freedom to choose their life partners. This is a concerning issue and goes against the basic human rights and Islamic principles of consent in marriage. The fact that religion is often sidelined in favor of cultural norms only reinforces this inequality. The majority of female respondents stated that cultural traditions often take precedence over religious considerations among Pashtun people. In Pashtun culture, marriage is viewed as a central aspect of social and familial life. In the theoretical insights, the work of Humaira Iqtidar is best suited to my case. She says that religion gives agency to women and even veil girls have agency and the Jamati women can arrange their marriage as she gives the example of one woman.

The study confirms that cultural and religious beliefs exert a dominant influence on Pashtun women's choices in marriage. These cultural norms and gendered expectations perpetuate a lack of agency for women in the private sphere, undermining their ability to make independent decisions about their marital futures.

4.2. Role of Modernization in Marriage Choices

Despite the influences of education, modernization, globalization, and digitalization in Pashtun society, the study reveals that these factors do not necessarily lead to an increase in women's agency and choices in the institution of marriage.

While economic independence through education may provide some women with aspirations for more choices, social norms, and patriarchal attitudes continue to limit women's decision-making power in choosing a spouse. Mobile phones and media are seen as both facilitating and threatening changes to traditional gender roles, with concerns about potential challenges to cultural values and practices.

The majority of my female respondents are showing concerns about the role of mobile phones in marriage choices and are declaring it a threat, it may indicate that they feel that mobile phones are facilitating changes that undermine traditional gender roles and expectations.

But my majority of male respondents too are not accepting the modernization role in Pashtun society. They say, in Pashtun society, it has negative impacts. A lot of deaths occur due to mobile. Girls who expressed their desire for autonomous decision-making in marriage often faced societal resistance and non-acceptance. For example, that may be concerned that mobile phones are making it easier for young women to connect with men outside of their immediate community and family, which could be seen as threatening to traditional ideas about female purity and honor. They may also be worried that the increased access to information and communication that mobile phones provide could lead to greater cultural and ideological differences between partners, which could pose challenges to the stability of the marriage. As Noreen Nasir noted, Tribal women are not safe even in the urban area where the rule of law exists. Educated and economically independent tribal women living in the settled areas of Pakistan are passive victims of the *Riwaj* too. Marriage is strictly based on men's permission. She has no choice or consent, but to follow the tribal tradition that is to respect the decision taken by the elders/males of the family (Naseer 2019)

One of the major challenges that arise due to modernity in the Pashtun society is the widening gap between the older generation, who adhere to traditional norms and values, and the younger generation, who are influenced by modernity. This gap often results in frustration and a lack of understanding between parents and children, which ultimately creates a lot of hurdles in the decision-making process, especially in matters related to marriage. Additionally, the influence of traditional gender roles and expectations may also limit the impacts of education on practices related to marriage. Even when women are educated and empowered to make informed choices about their marriages, social pressure, and expectations may still lead them to conform to traditional practices and expectations. It is evident that in Bannu society, higher education does not necessarily guarantee agency for women in marriage decisions. Despite being educated, women are still bound by cultural and traditional norms that prioritize men's decisions. However, it is important to also acknowledge the impact of internalized oppression in shaping women's attitudes towards their agency and autonomy. See the Anoosh claim, that Pashtun women are not given the right to choose a life partner. Men imposed subject positions on women. Yet, there are also ideological apparatuses, such as education and media, that can act as agentive tools for these women, allowing them to raise their voices and challenge the status quo. But now due to technology love marriages are also happening, but society considered it still a bad thing. Due to media and education, Pashtun women now acquire some level of agency and can select clothes and they are not restricted to the private sphere or household. She says that through education they achieve some sort of socio-culture agency. Education, in particular, can open up new possibilities for women and present them with more opportunities for self-determination. Through education, Pashtun women can gain knowledge and skills, as well as a sense of empowerment that can

have a lasting impact on their lives and the lives of those around them. But this empirical data is not matching with her claims as the majority of respondents criticize the role of technology and education to have a passive role in granting agency in marriage.

The study concludes that while education and modernization have brought changes to Pashtun society, they have not significantly altered the deeply ingrained cultural practices and gender norms that govern marriage decisions. The tension between traditional expectations and the desire for autonomy among the younger generation highlights the complexity of the interplay between these factors.

4.3. Agency in the private sphere

Scholars and intellectuals all are of the view that Pashtun women have a lesser amount of agency in marriage-related matters. Some writers claim that Pashtun women are treated as cattle like S.S. Thorburn, and Noreen Nasir as through females Pashtun society resolves disputes while on the other side, Akbar S. Ahmad claims that Pashtun women are treated well practically but they are represented incorrectly in theory. However, according to the data, the decision-making authority of Pashtun women in marriage institutions depends on Family Background, Role of traveling and Exposure in Choices, Women's status in the Decision-making of Marriage, Choices, and Agency.

In terms of family background, it relies upon whether the family is living in rural or urban areas. If a family lives in the rural area of Bannu the females will face more cultural constraints in marriage as compared to urban. As the majority of respondents highlight their concern regarding the area. However, one of my female respondents expressed the view that geographical location is not the primary

determinant, but rather a mindset and cultural barriers play a significant role. As she was an educated urbanized woman but marry without choice due to cultural barriers. It is important to recognize that the limitations placed on women's choices and agency are not just limited to geographical areas or communities, but are a result of deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes and beliefs. Shahzeb claims that rural women are not facing cultural restraints in marriage choices.

As he points out, we are living in a time of rapid modernization and digitalization. By modernizing our cultural institutions, we can ensure that our traditional values and beliefs are preserved and our culture remains strong. Urban and rural areas often have different ways of thinking, but it is important to be mindful of traditional Pashtun culture and keep it alive.

But in the context of Bannu, Culture triumph over the area. Area has no great role in marriage institutions and no respondents especially women got agency due to area despite one urbanized woman. But she used agency through her mother.

The research data suggested that apart from family background, women's position or status in decision-making greatly matters. As a whole male decides everything regarding women's marriage but some females too have the dominant role in the whole process like Mashry (aged women) as Amina Ahmad claims that aged women are the source of cultural transformation. But my respondent's views contradict her work and think that they are the source of the promotion of patriarchy. So, women's status in the decision-making of marriage in the private sphere is very weak and they don't marry on their own choice.

Apart from the family background and women's status in decision-making in marriage, the role of traveling and exposure indicate whether women would have choices in marriage due to this. It explores how Pashtun women's exposure to different cultures, ideas, and experiences through travel impacts their preferences and decision-making process related to marriage. To see the work of Anoosh, who claims that Pashtun men have more exposure to the outside world than women. Due to their limited exposure and lack of education, men greatly impact women. As an ideological state apparatus, culture is the most prominent. Rather than fighting against cultural structures, Pashtun women practice agency within them. This is one of the reasons why Pashtuns do not marry non-Pashtuns. Women in Pashtun communities have limited agency, according to her. Travel and exposure do not play a significant role in Pashtun women's choices due to the importance placed on preserving cultural values and practices.

After assessing the above data, it can be concluded that women can't exercise choices in the private sphere in the institution of marriage due to the strong cultural hold and presence of a patriarchal structure.

Based on my respondents' views about women's agency in marriage, Afiya Zia's work on secular autonomy is match with respondent's replies. which she says that women's fate is always decided by the structured mean male figure of society. In this study, women can't get agency in marriages in the presence of a strong structure. She gave the example of Faqir of Api of Pashtun society. But my case discusses more than one area of women's choices the work of Saba Mahmood is quite different from my case. The agency that she is talking about is somewhat different.

4.4. Male Opinion on Choices

Male opinions hold considerable power in Pashtun society, and they can either empower or limit the choices available to women in the private sphere, particularly in the context of marriage decisions. The study shows that while some men are open to granting women more agency, many others adhere to traditional norms and social pressures, discouraging women from making independent choices. Women's responses to male opinions vary, with some conforming to societal expectations, while others strive to assert their agency within the confines of cultural boundaries.

Among twenty of my research respondents, 10 were men. When asked, what are their opinion about women's choices in marriage? Only three respondents were in favor of giving them choices in marriage and seven were against choices. They are of the view that society will taunt us and will give us pyghur. During the participants' discussions, the prevalent notion that allowing women choices is not viewed favorably in Pashtun society sheds light on the presence of internalized oppression within our cultural context. It is crucial to break free from such oppressive norms and allow individuals, especially women, to exercise their agency and make their own decisions.

The study emphasizes that male opinions and societal pressures play a pivotal role in shaping women's choices and agency in marriage decisions. The contrasting viewpoints among men further highlight the complexity of this issue, with potential implications for women's autonomy and decision-making processes in the private sphere.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this research reveals that the majority of women in Bannu are married without having any choice or agency in the matter. The institution of marriage is male-dominated, leaving women unaware of their own preferences and agency within it. Society as a whole does not accept the involvement of females in traditionally male domains. The concept of marrying based on personal choice or agency is problematic and not recognized in Bannu society. Interestingly, during my fieldwork, the idea of forced marriage was denied, rather marriage without choice was viewed as a normal part of their life, indicating an internalization of this phenomenon.

Both the existing literature and the empirical evidence support the notion that women lack decision-making power in the private sphere, specifically in marriage matters. My empirical work demonstrates that economic independence, within the framework of traditional cultural norms, does not grant women agency in the institution of marriage. Even in this digitally advanced and modern era, women's voices continue to be silenced in marital affairs due to the stronghold of cultural norms.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader feminist discourse by examining the theoretical perspectives of scholars such as Saba Mahmood, Afiya, Amina Ahmad, and Anoosh. While their works suggest that women possess significant agency in the private sphere and decision-making, my data and respondents' viewpoints contradict this notion. The critique of Amina Ahmad's work by my respondents highlights the age factor as a significant restriction on young females' agency within the institution of marriage. This aspect deserves further attention as many feminist writers remain silent on this issue. The elder women along

with elder men playing significant role in marriage institution and restricted not only young female agency but young males too. So, in the agency cycle both young males and females face equal inequalities. Complexities still exist in the concept of patriarchy in Pashtun society.

My respondent without exception, has internalized the fact that marriage without choice is the norm. None of the respondents expressed resistance to marriage without choice. Most respondents agreed with Grimma's work, acknowledging that life for Pashtun women is not easy, and their emotions are often sacrificed in the name of honor, and marriage is marked with the begging of gham for Pashtun women.

In light of the structure-agency debate, this study suggests that Pashtun women in Bannu face complex challenges in making choices related to marriage. Cultural norms and societal expectations restrict their agency, while economic factors, due to the strong cultural influence, also fail to play a significant role in shaping their decisions.

The concept of internalized oppression is pertinent here. It refers to the process by which individuals from an oppressed group come to believe and perpetuate the oppressive beliefs and practices of the dominant group. In the case of Pashtun women in District Bannu, internalized oppression manifests as a belief that they are incapable of making their own decisions or challenging traditional gender roles. This belief stems from their socialization in a patriarchal society, where male superiority and female subservience are deeply ingrained. Consequently, Pashtun women may feel powerless and unable to challenge oppressive structures, leading to limitations in their sense of self-worth and agency. One respondent even shared her experience of mental stress after marriage, highlighting the serious consequences of internalized

oppression on individuals' ability to make choices and decisions regarding their own lives.

It is essential to recognize that internalized oppression is a complex and nuanced concept, and individuals may not always be aware that they are perpetuating harmful beliefs or practices. In the context of Bannu society, some women accept traditional gender roles and defer to male family members in matters related to marriage. This is an example of internalized oppression, as these women internalize patriarchal beliefs about women's roles in society. During my fieldwork, I observed that none of my respondents rejected traditional gender roles or actively worked toward challenging oppressive structures. They were unable to recognize the harmful effects of internalized oppression and did not strive to empower themselves. Most young married respondents, who are currently pursuing their studies, expressed concerns about their education being affected by marriage. However, when asked why they didn't assert their choices, they stated that going against their parents' decisions is not successful in Bannu society, as there is no public support available in case of divorce or other related issues. One other thing which I noted during my field work is that I have not experienced any case of Walwar. But this practice is the norm of many tribal Pashtun areas but I not found in my case. As Noreen Nasir also mentioned in her work that women are treated like a commodity because of Walwar. *“The Riwaj is very explicit about the bride money and amount paid to the owner (father, brother, uncle, former husband) of the virgin, widowed, divorcee, high class, working class and the eloped woman. The fate of the tribal woman belonging to the upper class and working class is not different, but the difference is of the bride prices.”* This practice existed but not dominant in my case but still young women have less choices.

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APPENDIX**Research Title: Pashtun Women's Choices in the Institution of Marriage (A Case Study of District Bannu)****Interviewee Information:**

Name: _____ Education: _____

Job/Profession: _____ Marriage Status: _____

Number of Children: _____ Nature of Family: _____ (Joint/Nuclear Family)

Background: _____ (Rural/Urban) Ethnicity: _____ (Pashtun, non-Pashtun, Quom)

Introduction:**Dear Respondent,**

I invite you to participate in a research study titled "Pashtun Women's Choices in the Institution of Marriage in Bannu." I am currently enrolled in the M.Phil. program at the National Institute of Pakistan Studies (NIPS), Quaid-I-Azam University Islamabad and in the process of completing research. The purpose of this study is to understand choices of women. Data from this research will be kept confidential. If you agree, please answer the questions as best as you can. Thank you for your assistance in this important endeavor.

Interview Questions:

1. What kind of marriages take place in your family, and does the bride have a say in it? In your opinion, what is marriage? What are your expectations from marriage?
2. What part do men play in your family's marital institution?
3. What kind of marriage do you personally prefer?
 - a) A marriage of choice
 - b) Marriage arranged by parents

- c) Forced or forcibly imposed marriage
4. Can you tell me about the cultural traditions and social norms that shape marriage practices and decisions in your community?
 5. Why do rural women face more cultural restrains in marriage as compared to urban women?
 6. Do Pashtun men give choices to their daughters and sisters in selecting a partner for marriage? If yes, what are the reasons?
 7. Why does the Pashtun patriarchal structure prevent women from decision-making, especially in marriage?
 8. Do you consider that the lack of education, exposure, and traveling are the reasons Pashtun do not marry non-Pashtun and other tribes in KP?
 9. How do you see women's involvement in different stages of marriage decision-making in your family?
 10. How much agency (power, authority) do females in your family have in selecting a life partner?
 11. In your perspective, should women exercise choices in marriage?
 12. What role does education play in empowering women to make choices about the institution of marriage?
 13. In your view, how does economic independence (for women who have jobs, etc.) influence women's marriage choices?
 14. How is modernization (digitalization, mobile phones, etc.) impacting women's marriage choices in your area?
 15. Does religion play any role in impeding the agency of women in making free choices of marriage?

16. Is there anything else you would like to share about Pashtun women's choices in the institution of marriage in your community that you think would be helpful for me to understand?