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## Unhappy Husbands: Masculinity and Migration in Transnational Pakistani Marriages

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***Abstract:***

This article, based on fieldwork in the Pakistani Punjab and with predominantly Punjabi families in Bristol, is concerned with the common practice of British Pakistanis marrying Pakistani nationals. Informants stress the risks such marriages hold for women, but this research highlights the social, cultural and economic difficulties faced by migrant husbands, comparing their position to that of the *ghar damad* (house son-in-law). Whilst women are instructed from a young age on the adjustments the move to their husband's household will entail, male migrants are often unprepared for this situation. A lack of local kin support can combine with the culturally unusual proximity of the wife's family to restructure gendered household relations of power. Frustrations experienced by such men may help to explain instances where such marriages have ended in the husband's violence, desertion or taking a second wife, but the model of the unhappy *ghar damad* is also significant in understanding the experiences of many other migrant men and their British wives.

In the year 2000, over ten thousand Pakistani nationals obtained entry clearance to join spouses in the UK.<sup>1</sup> The British-born children and grandchildren of Pakistani migrants to Britain are increasingly marrying Pakistani nationals rather than others born and raised in Britain. These marriages are predominantly with first cousins or more distant kin (Shaw 2001).<sup>2</sup> Most weddings take place in Pakistan, after which the husband or wife usually applies for permission to come to Britain. Until 1997, the majority of these migrant spouses were women, in keeping with traditions of virilocal residence. Indeed, British immigration officials sometimes used the convention that a bride would move to her husband's home, rather than vice versa, to justify the refusal of visas to husbands from the Indian subcontinent, on the grounds that the 'primary purpose' of such marriages was to gain entry to Britain (Gardner & Shukur 1994: 156). The 'Primary Purpose Rule' required spouses to prove that immigration was not their principal motivation for entering into the marriage, with male marriage migrants under greater suspicion of having an economic/labour motivation for moving to Britain.<sup>3</sup> The regulation was abolished in 1997, having been criticised as being specifically tailored to discourage continued South Asian immigration through arranged marriages (Menski 1999). Since then, the numbers of husbands applying for visas, and the proportion being accepted for entry to Britain, has increased to the point where there have been almost equal numbers of male and female spousal migrants in recent years (Home Office 2002).<sup>4</sup> Spousal immigration to Britain on this kind of scale is a uniquely South Asian phenomenon, with substantial numbers also coming from Bangladesh and India, but by far the largest contribution is made by Pakistan (Home Office 2001).

Academic commentators have generally interpreted such marital choices as representing the fulfilment of obligations to kin, enhancing reputation by demonstrating kin group solidarity, and as the primary means to continue labour migration to the UK (Ballard 1987; Shaw 2000a, 2001).<sup>5</sup> My own research, carried out between 2000 and 2002 in the Pakistani Punjab and with people predominantly of Punjabi Muslim backgrounds in the English city of Bristol, uncovers additional motivations for these transnational marriages, chief among which are emotional aspects of kinship. The marriage of a child presents an opportunity to strengthen connections between much-missed kin separated by migration decades earlier. Parental exegeses also stress the need to protect daughters, conceptualised as vulnerable to mistreatment by in-laws. For some, the marriage of a daughter in Britain to a trusted relative who has been raised in an Islamic society is one response to this risk.

Bristol, a city in the South West of England, has a population of just over 380,000, of whom 4050 were recorded as Pakistani in the 2001 Census (the third largest non-White ethnic group after Black Caribbeans and Indians). This represents a slightly lower proportion than the average for England (1.1% against 1.4%). Bristolians tend to have a clear conceptual map of ethnic minority residential concentration in the city, with Easton, a neighbourhood east of the city centre, talked of as the main 'Asian' area. Although South Asian households are in fact found across the city, Easton has become a centre for Muslim and South Asian services, with food and cloth shops, mosques and community centres, and a large Pakistani population. Many Bristolians would, however, be surprised to learn that according to the last census Pakistanis make up only 5.53% of the residents of the ward, with Indians and Bangladeshis accounting for a further

2.7% and 1.49% respectively. To give a rough idea of the ethnic geography of the city, Easton can be thought of as the centre of a wedge of East Bristol in which Pakistanis are concentrated. Distance from the city centre corresponds to a certain extent with affluence, as larger properties and more leafy areas tend to be found in Eastville and Fishponds than in inner city St Pauls, Barton Hill or Easton. A second, smaller concentration is found in the south of the city in Totterdown and Windmill Hill. Again, this area has a mosque, but fewer Asian shops, and again some families are also living in generally more expensive properties a little further out in Knowle.

Unlike some other British cities where the Pakistani population is overwhelmingly from one particular region of Pakistan (see Shaw 2000a: 15-16), Bristol's Pakistani population consists largely of people from two areas: the Punjab or Mirpur in Azad Kashmir. Most of those I worked with are Punjabi, a small number are from Sindh (but all have family ties to the Punjab) and a few are from Mirpur. Hence the use of the term 'Pakistani' in this paper should be understood as referring largely, but not exclusively, to Punjabis. Ethnicity is of course more fluid than categories such as those employed by the Census suggest. My informants' use of the term 'community', or the Urdu/Punjabi phrases *ham log* / *apne log* / *hamare log* (we people / one's own people / our people), have a variety of meanings in different context. Sometimes they refer to Pakistanis as a whole, sometimes only to those from a particular region, the 'community' in Bristol or only that in Easton or Totterdown. There are pan-Asian voluntary organisations, occasions on which Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Somalis, White 'reverts' and others may come together as Muslims, and countless other 'multi-ethnic alliances' and interactions between Bristolians (cf. Bauman 1997).

Intermarriages are, however, far less frequent. In the context of the current discussion, I would argue that it makes sense to speak in terms of 'Pakistani' as delineating a group in Bristol which, despite some diversity of ethno-linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds, shares many commonalities in terms of the practice of transnational marriage (see Charsley 2003).

My social networks developed from connections in Pakistan, and with two voluntary organisations run and staffed primarily by Punjabis. For the same reasons, although my informants include many whose families are from villages in Pakistan, they are probably disproportionately from urban backgrounds in comparison to the British Pakistani population as a whole. Fieldwork included voluntary work, visiting, attending functions and other social occasions, informal interviewing, and thirty more formal semi-structured interviews with individuals and couples. My networks spread out from these initial contacts, so while some of my informants live in Easton, others live in areas further from the city centre. In general, although there are cases of terrible poverty, my impression is that Bristol's Pakistani population does not suffer from the extremes of deprivation reported from some other parts of Britain (e.g. on Oldham, Wazir 2002), and should not be treated as representative of the British Pakistani population as a whole. My informants represent a variety of lifestyles and socio-economic positions, although a common pattern is for the father to be in a routine occupation such as a machine operative (the Post Office is one popular employer in Bristol), or to run a small business, the mother either to have no paid employment or do shop or community work, and some but not all of their children to have pursued further studies. So Azra, for example, is a graduate in her twenties working in a community organisation. Her mother has never worked, and

her father retired after a career in which he been employed at different times as a machine operator, in a bakery, as a market trader, and running a grocery shop. More recent arrivals and older women, particularly those who do not work, may not speak fluent English, but British-born younger people tend to use English as a first language, although they may use Punjabi, Urdu, or a mixture (often also mixed with English) with parents and other older relatives. Households usually consist of parents and their unmarried children, sometimes with a married child and their spouse (see below). Where grandparents are alive and in the UK, they commonly live with one of their children, and a few households in Bristol comprise two or more brothers, their wives and elderly parents.

Transnational marriages between kin are common in most of my informants' families, in line with research suggesting that among Pakistanis in Britain, a greater proportion of unions conform to the 'preference' for consanguineous marriage than is the case in Pakistan, or indeed for the parental generation in Britain (Shaw 2001). Like Shaw (2001), I found no evidence of the preference for patrilineal marriages reported by some Pakistani ethnographies (Alavi 1972; Donnan 1988: 114-51). My informants do make a distinction between those who have married 'out' / *bahar se*, and those married within the *baradari* kin group. *Baradari* is commonly translated as 'patrilineage' (Alavi 1972; Shaw 1988: 102), but given repeated close kin marriage, many members of the *baradari* are related to both one's mother and one's father. As Veena Das points out, if a pair of brothers marry a pair of sisters, their children will be both patrilineal and matrilineal first cousins (1973:38). In other cases, the 'closest' link between husband and wife will be stressed, so the majority of marriages I

have encountered may be classified by those involved as *man ki taraf* (mother's side) or *bap ki taraf* (father's side).

In general, both spouses' families are from the same broad region of Pakistan, although this may not be the case where relatives are dispersed, so Jamilah's parents come from Lahore, whilst her husband (MMZDS), who works nightshifts sorting mail in the Post Office, comes from Karachi. In another example, a woman whose parents hail from Punjabi villages near the border with Azad Kashmir married a Kashmiri cousin (MFBS) from a nearby village. The spread of kinship and marital networks may also include other countries. So one migrant husband, the son of a teacher (his wife's father was a retired engineer), had first migrated to join an uncle in America, managing a fast food outlet, before marrying and moving to Bristol, where he works as a taxi driver. Marriage to non-relatives outside the region of origin or to non-Pakistani partners does occur but is not very common in most families.

The patterns and circumstances of transnational marriages vary between families, but one example will serve to illustrate some common principles (see Charsley 2003, for a more lengthy discussion). Bushra is a university-educated woman in her early forties, with five married siblings. Her two eldest sisters' husbands are their father's sister's sons, but Bushra's father had concerns about these relationships. When Bushra's mother migrated to Britain to join her husband, she had been separated from her beloved only sister, whose eldest son was a match in age for Bushra. The wedding was arranged, and Bushra's husband came to join her in Bristol where he, like Bushra's father before him, has at times run a shop or a market stall, and at others worked for the Post Office. Seeing the success of this union, Bushra's father arranged for his next two sons to marry their

maternal aunts' daughters.<sup>6</sup> Some years later, when the youngest son graduated in Law, he also followed his mother's wishes to marry into her sisters' family, wedding his brothers' wives' sister's daughter. Thanks to these continued linkages, which have encouraged transnational visiting and communication, more marriages between the two sides seem likely. Bushra's own son and daughter are engaged to her husband's sister's children in Pakistan (who are also Bushra's MZDS and MZDD), and her eldest sister's son will marry the sister of Bushra's youngest brother's new wife. Bushra remarks that although she had never expected that her children would marry such close relatives, marriages between first cousins seem to be more common in her family than in her grandparent's generation, many of whom were married to second cousins or more distant relatives. In this case, then, the marriage of siblings' children has not only reinforced family bonds across distance, but has produced further separated siblings whose children are now set to marry. This family is perhaps a little unusual in the number of close kin marriages, but similar principles can be found in other kin groups. Jamilah, for example, pointed out that whilst some of her male cousins have married 'out', the women tended to be married to kin – if not a *rishta-dar* (relative, with whom a clear kinship relation can be traced) then at least someone from the *biradari* (here implying a more distant relative with whom the precise relationship may be more difficult to specify). Her family, she said, do not take risks when it comes to the marriage of a girl, preferring the perceived security offered by kin marriage.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Gender and Migration***

My interest in this article is to trace the implications of the migration of husbands from Pakistan to Britain, as an experience common to increasing

numbers of men since the abolition of the 'Primary Purpose Rule'. The plight of unhappy South Asian brides far from their natal families, isolated and vulnerable to mistreatment from in-laws, has been documented in research both within the subcontinent (e.g. Jeffery & Jeffery 1996; Raheja & Gold 1994) and in the UK (e.g. Fenton & Sadiq 1993). The put-upon daughter-in-law is also a common stereotype in South Asia, and a familiar character for those with whom I worked, but little academic or media attention has been paid to the experiences of those men who find adjusting to life in Britain difficult.

The interactions of gender and migration are the subject of a growing literature, with a number of volumes dealing with migrant women (Anthias & Lazaridis 2000; Buijs 1993, Gamburd 2000). In Pakistan, researchers have studied the impact of male migration on the gendered experience of non-migrant women (Donnan 1997; Naveed-i-Rahat 1990; Rauf 1982; see also Gardner 1995 on Bangladesh). The interactions of migration and masculinity have, however, been somewhat neglected.<sup>8</sup> This examination of the encounter of male marriage migrants from Pakistan with their new lives in Bristol will show how the combination of the social and economic processes of migration interact with features of Pakistani kinship and masculinity to produce difficulties for some immigrant husbands. Not only does this approach contribute to the developing literature on South Asian masculinity but it provides a novel perspective on the problem of 'bogus' transnational marriages, to use the vocabulary of a recent governmental White Paper (Home Office 2002). These are marriages in which 'men from South Asia trick local Asian families into allowing them to marry their daughters, only to divorce them immediately they acquire British citizenship so that they can bring their real wives and children to Britain' (Werbner 2002).<sup>9</sup> The

issue of men fraudulently entering into marriages to secure immigration to Britain is also a concern for many Bristolian Pakistanis. I suggest that the model of the 'unhappy husband' presented here can be used to shed light on cases narrated by my informants as examples of husbands who were simply 'marrying a passport' (as one woman in Bristol put it), as well as more successful examples of transnational marriage.

***Migration and Downward Mobility: 'Starting from scratch again'***

Migration to the UK offers most Pakistani men the opportunity to earn far more than they could in Pakistan. Nevertheless, the conditions in which these financial gains are to be made can come as a shock to newly-arrived husbands. For most Pakistanis, the impression gained through the media of the wealthy West is reinforced by the smart new houses built in Pakistan with money remitted from overseas, and conspicuous consumption by Pakistanis from Europe or America on long saved-for visits 'back home'. Although their pre-migration socio-economic position may not have been as high as some other South Asian groups such as the East African Asians who fled to Britain from Idi Amin's Uganda in the early 1970s, the capital needed to finance migration meant that Pakistani migrants who came to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s to work in British factories were not drawn from the poorest sections of their home society. Remittances from previous migrants in the family have often helped boost the economic standing of those left in Pakistan still further. In Bristol as in many other British cities, however, although there are high levels of home-ownership, many Pakistanis live in small properties in deprived inner city areas (Census 2001; Modood *et al* 1997: 343), an environment that often comes as a disappointment to new arrivals.

Migration also commonly involves downward mobility. Qualifications and experience may not be recognised (one woman told me that once their marriage was arranged, she had advised her husband to quit his studies in Pakistan for this reason), high foreign student fees often prohibit further training, and lack of knowledge of the 'system' may be compounded by poor English, to create limited employment prospects for many. Although there has been some improvement in recent years, the Pakistani population in Britain is characterised by large numbers in semi-skilled manual work, and low levels of professionals, managers and employers (Modood *et al* 1997). In Bristol, the recent census shows Pakistanis remain under-represented in higher socio-economic categories, and over-represented in lower status occupations such as 'process, plant and machine operators' and 'sales and customer services' (Census 2001). High levels of self-employment have been interpreted as providing a 'culture of hope' in the face of lack of opportunity (Modood *et al* 1997: 348). Questions of racism in the job market aside, families in this position are unlikely to be able to offer access to better opportunities to the new arrival, so many are forced to take employment well below their status in Pakistan, and those who held good jobs or professional qualifications at home often find themselves doing repetitive manual labour. Even men who were not so well-off at home may find their situation fails to match their expectations of their new life. Because such work is poorly paid, such men tend to take the better paid night-shifts or lots of overtime, leaving them with little spare time to make new social networks to replace the friends and family lost through migration. The fact that others are also working long hours further limits social opportunities. Azra's husband's only social life, for example, is gathering at the mosque for prayer, so he was upset when another member of the congregation

told him that all husbands from Pakistan ended up, as he has done, working in the dry cleaning factory. ‘Why do they say that - rub it in?’ he complained to his wife.<sup>10</sup> Whilst early Asian community groups in Bristol were set up by men, the sector is now dominated by female-run groups serving Asian women, children and the elderly. I was not aware of any group providing equivalent social support for young men. In many respects, then, the experience of the migrant husband is, as one man put it, ‘starting from scratch again’.

But such men can also face other problems, related to conventional Pakistani models of marriage, migration and gender:

***The Ghar Damad: being an imported son-in-law***

I didn’t even cry on my wedding day. Everybody said, ‘Why didn’t you cry?’ I said I was going to come back to England. He should be crying – *he’s* leaving *his* house. (Asma, married to her first cousin Tahir [MZS])

As her husband was going to leave Pakistan and his natal home to join her in Bristol, whilst she would be returning to the bosom of her family, Tahir’s wife Asma saw no reason to follow convention and grieve at her *rukhsati* (the final ritual of the wedding day, when the bride leaves her parents to go to her husband’s house). Her statement makes the connection described frequently by women during the course of my research between marriage, migration, and emotional loss (cf. Jeffery & Jeffery 1996; Raheja & Gold 1994; Bradby 2000). Whilst this is conventionally the experience of the bride, Asma points out that in this case it is her husband who will suffer the losses of migration, although he would not be expected to publicise these ‘female’ emotions in a show of tears for the wedding guests. Interviewing Tahir revealed that his migration to Britain had indeed been

traumatic. A university graduate hoping for a professional career, he had held a series of arduous manual jobs before securing processing work that, while repetitive and low-status, was at least relatively comfortable. However, in addition to these work and status related challenges, Tahir also spoke of the difficulties that he had experienced adjusting to his wife's family.

Marriage entails new kinship relationships and statuses, not just for the bride and groom, but in the wider field of new affines. In both the academic literature and among those with whom I worked, it is the relations which marriage forges between women that are most commonly discussed, with strong stereotypes of the overbearing mother-in-law, jealous sister-in-law and the vulnerable new bride. The reason for this gendered discourse lies in conventional patri-virilocal residence patterns – as a bride goes to live in her husband's family home, the nature of her relationships with his relatives are of fundamental importance to the quality of her married life.

But the literature on South Asia also reveals the existence of uxorilocally-resident grooms, or *ghar jamai*, literally meaning 'house son-in-law'. In Bangladesh, Gardner reports that this situation can be the result of migration as fathers working overseas leave a son-in-law to look after their womenfolk, but commonly such men are landless and lacking an established household to which they could take their wife (1995: 167). Across North India, *ghar jamai* generally occur in relatively wealthy families without sons to farm and inherit their land, and care for the wife's parents in old age (cf. Hershman 1981: 77-9 on the Punjab; Lamb 2002: 58 on Hindu Bengal; Lambat 1976: 54-5 on Muslims in Gujarat). University students in Pakistan told me that this type of husband can also be

bought with promises of money if a wealthy father does not want to be parted from a cherished (and by implication, spoilt) daughter.

My informants in Pakistan and Bristol more commonly use the term *ghar damad* (*damad* also meaning son-in-law) than *ghar jamai*. Like the female characters in an affinal household described above, the *ghar jamai* / *ghar damad* is also the subject of stereotypes, generally considered to be an undesirable position with its connotations of being, like the conventional daughter-in-law, dependent on and subservient to the in-laws. Thanks to this stigma, the practice is not very common (Hershman 1981: 77-9; Jeffery & Jeffery 1996: 115). In North India, Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon report Hindu and Muslim men's views on the subject to be 'homogenous':

While granting the attractions of inheriting more land, none was prepared to concede that being a ghar-jamai had any other benefits. The ghar-jamai is virtually a mirror image of the normal bahu [daughter-in-law], precisely the grounds for men's objections. Being a ghar-jamai undermines a man's ability to retain control over his wife. She has constant protection from her natal kin.... But her husband lacks both his normal back-up from his kin and freedom from interference from his in-laws. He may have problems retaining his position as master of the house. Men talked about ceasing to be their own man, even on brief visits to their *susral* [in-laws' place] when they must abide by the eating and sleeping times of their in-laws and behave meekly in their father-in-law's presence. These difficulties may be exacerbated by a ghar-jamai's in-laws. Instead of respecting their 'guest'... they may jibe and insult him. He loses face for

scrounging and may become enmeshed in tussles with his wife's hostile cousins and uncles over possession of the house and land.

(1989: 37)

Most grooms imported from Pakistan to Bristol find themselves, at least initially, living in their wife's family home. Two British Pakistani women did tell me that they viewed the opportunity to stay with their parents as a reason for choosing a husband from Pakistan, but by and large this situation is not the intended result of the marriage, but a by-product of the economic implications of migration. It is highly unusual for unmarried Pakistani women in Bristol to live apart from the family, and a husband just arrived from Pakistan is unlikely, for the reasons outlined above, to be able to afford a place of his own. One woman I met in Bristol had managed to save up and buy a house before her husband's arrival, and some families do purchase properties for their children. However, given the often strained family economic circumstances following an expensive marriage, the cost of airfares, the addition of a new member to the household, and the economic constraints on new migrants, many will spend at least some time living with the wife's parents.

Nevertheless, imported husbands living with their in-laws are not spoken of as *ghar damad*. Of course, the derogatory connotations mean that people are unlikely to describe themselves or their husband as being in such a position. One young woman who told me I was wrong to use the term of immigrant husbands said that she had heard of the concept from Hindi movies, suggesting that it is not in everyday usage in Bristol. It may also be that stigma is avoided in migration. In the early years of 'pioneer' male migration to Britain, many cultural norms were relaxed. These were often restored once large numbers of women and children

started coming to join their husbands and migrants' idea of residence in Britain as merely a sojourn before an anticipated return to Pakistan was abandoned (Anwar 1979; Jeffery 1976; Shaw 1988), but it may be that contempt for the *ghar damad* has faded in a diasporic context where uxori-local grooms are a common feature and so no longer a curiosity. In addition, this often temporary residence against the virilocal norm dwindles in importance in the context of the issues of risk and migration that dominate people's concerns – the fact that the groom lives with his in-laws is simply not considered the defining feature of the marriage.

There are also significant differences between the position of the uxori-locally resident son-in-law described above and the position of these transnational migrant husbands. In the former case, the attraction of inheritance responsible for the stigma of being a 'scrounger' means that such men are likely to be from poorer backgrounds. In transnational marriage, the geography of status is more complex. Although some migrant husbands are from poor backgrounds in Pakistan, many of those I worked with are keen that a husband from Pakistan should be a good match (or indeed a good catch) in terms of financial background and education. Women often stressed that their Pakistani husbands had degrees or good jobs in Pakistan, and marriages may be delayed to allow spouses to complete their studies. This not only reflects a desire to secure status or financial security, but can be an attempt to increase the likelihood of the couple's compatibility. Many disapprovingly related stories of catastrophic mismatches – most often an uneducated 'boy' from the village married to an educated British 'girl'. As one woman told me – 'if one wheel is high and one wheel is low, the car can't go.' However, wealth, an urban background, and education are credited with being able to bridge the differences, particularly if the British spouse is not overly

‘Western’. Thus Bushra explained why she had faith in the match between her Bristolian children and her husband’s sister’s children in Pakistan:

I think it may have been different if they lived in a village and they weren’t so educated – I think they may have had different thoughts. But because they live in quite a modern environment, and they’re quite modern as well – as in dress and the way they are. They’re sort of pretty well-off as well and they’ve got mod cons... They’re quite similar to our children here because obviously our children, we keep them a little bit restricted because we’re living in a Western environment, Western culture. So I think they feel they’ve got a lot in common. They seem to get on very well.

Even the well-off may benefit from migration to Europe, so families of young women from Britain may receive some very attractive marriage offers, leading to cases of apparent hypergamy, such as the beautician daughter of a Post Office worker married to qualified doctor. However, the husbands’ socio-economic position may suffer a dramatic fall on migration to Britain, and global financial geographies and imaginaries of place (cf. Gardner 1993) complicate the status relationship between the two families. Inheritance is also not normally part of the equation, but the young man will initially be financially dependent on his wife and in-laws. Despite these differences, and with apologies to informants who resisted the use of the term *ghar damad*, I would nevertheless argue that in analytical terms, the concept is helpful in understanding elements of many Pakistani men’s experience of marriage migration to Bristol.

A husband’s migration disrupts the conventional configuration of kinship after marriage, resulting not only in the unusual absence of some relations, but

also the unusual presence, or at least proximity, of others. While the groom is in the abnormal position of being the in-comer without family support, and facing a new family's habits and way of life, his wife starts her married life with her parents and siblings close at hand. Even if the couple do not live in the wife's parents' home, the husband may still feel himself lacking support, and under scrutiny from the wife's relatives, as young couples' new residences are often very close to the existing family home.<sup>11</sup> This arrangement facilitates frequent visiting and even shared cooking, eroding the distinction between extended family households and couples who live separately. The concept of the *ghar damad* will here be extended to husbands who, although living separately, are in structurally similar positions to the traditional *ghar damad*. Thus, one young man living with his wife in a rented flat near his in-laws complained: 'You've got all your family and I have no one'.

The wife's strong ties within the household or neighbourhood in which the husband is an outsider can disrupt conventional power relationships, giving the woman more support in case of conflict. Equally, part of becoming a wife is being a daughter-in-law, and the lack of this position of subordination and training, combined with the husband's want of family support, may alter the dynamics of power between husband and wife. Thus Yasmin, for example, was able to turn to her parents and siblings for support when she and her husband argued, with the eventual result that he was sent back to Pakistan.

In their ethnography of Bijnor in North India, Jeffery and Jeffery report a Muslim woman's description of her husband without brothers as 'alone' and so vulnerable to mistreatment and exploitation (1996: 208). A *ghar damad* can be in a similarly weak position, unable to defend himself from criticism. In Bristol,

Azra told me that her husband's friend, recently arrived from India, was thinking of returning home and abandoning his marriage. Azra said that she could tell me straight away what the problem was – his wife must be listening to her parents. *Sas* and *sasur* (mother- and father-in-law), she said, are always critical, but the important thing is not to listen to them, but to be loyal to your husband. Her own parents, she said, complain about her husband's dependence on them and his difficulties in filling out job applications, but she knows that he works hard and she will not criticise him.

The situation can also lead to conflict if the young man tries to assert his authority, or dislikes the family in which he finds himself. In Yasmin's marriage, it was when her husband started to criticise her family that the real arguments started. He complained, she said:

'Your sister's a bad mother. Your mother's cooking's not that nice. Your dad's so forcive [sic – forceful] and he doesn't understand and he doesn't listen. Your brothers have got attitude problems. Your mother hasn't taught you much about marriage and being a wife'

This list of complaints is in itself significant, with each element worthy of individual consideration for what it can tell us about the experience of what I am calling the *ghar damad*.

*'Your sister's a bad mother... Your brothers have got attitude problems'*

Some husbands dislike the local cultural environment, but these accusations are also about child-rearing. So Asma's husband Tahir told me that he does not want his children to be raised with his British relatives, as he worries about the family's attitude to religion and discipline. But he is also eager to pass

on his own particular family 'culture'. With (patri-) virilocal residence, this type of small scale cultural reproduction is in effect patrilineal, so men are used to the idea that their family's lifestyle will be dominant in the raising of their children. As men do not take a prominent role in childcare, this system relies heavily on the inculcation of the husband's family's habits on the incoming bride, a training which is absent in the situation of male marriage migration. As transnational *ghar damad* they therefore risk the end of this micro-cultural lineage, producing sons who may carry on the family name, but behave as foreigners.

This issue of men's expectations of continuity in 'family culture' across their lifecourse is in marked contrast to those of young unmarried women, and is exemplified in the next comment:

*'Your mother's cooking's not that nice'*

A 'boy' who brings a wife into his family home will eat the same food before and after marriage, and his wife will be trained in her new household's style of cooking. Yasmin's husband's complaint can be seen as symptomatic of the broader adjustments he has to make to the family culture of his wife's household. Interestingly, these culinary complaints were echoed by Sonam's husband, who disliked both his wife's and his mother-in-law's cooking. When his mother visited from Pakistan, Sonam realised that she used far more chilli and green coriander in her recipes, something that she would have picked up immediately had she gone to live in her husband's home.

*'Your mother hadn't taught you much about marriage and being a wife'*

In Pakistan, girls are prepared from a young age for marriage. They are told not to get too attached to ways of life because once they arrive in their husband's home they will have to adjust and adopt their in-laws' patterns. Female children may be chided for being demanding, and told they won't be able to behave like that in their *susrat* (in-law's household). Alternatively, girls who are overly shy may be asked teasingly if they are already in their *susrat*. This preparation for the changes of marriage starts at a young age. In Bristol, I heard a girl of ten being corrected by her sisters while she talked of wanting to be a teacher – she wouldn't be Miss Maiden-name, she'd be whatever her husband's name will be.

Some, on the other hand, say that the need to prepare daughters tends to be neglected in Britain. For Jamilah and her husband, who debated the issue of whether the wife's parents had prepared her adequately for marriage, the question was one of differing interpretations of Islam. A common discourse among young Bristolian Pakistanis is the opposition between true religious practice, and customs that are merely 'culture' or 'tradition'. Elsewhere, I suggest that the increasingly common emphasis on a 'purified' Islamic identity can function as a response to transnational cultural demands, removing the need to 'code switch' (Ballard 1994) between the worlds of home and mixed ethnicity peer-groups (Charsley 2004), but Pakistani husbands may not share these religious views. In this case, Jamilah, who commonly teams a *hijab* with fashionable 'western' clothing, rejected her husband's accusation that Islamic teachings were being ignored. She said that she had read widely on the topic of marriage and Islam, and

although the Quran and other religious literature contained ‘general things like, “Respect your husband”. He [husband] puts that slightly higher than where I would put the level, if you know what I mean...’. Her parents, she said, had not taught her simply to adopt her husband and in-law’s ways, ‘because we never expected that to happen. We expected to lead an equal life.’

Differing opinions on men and women’s roles in marriage were sometimes cited as prime examples of what my informants call the ‘culture clash’ which can also cause difficulties in transnational marriages. Shaw (2000b) suggests that young women raised in Britain may have very different expectations of domestic relations of authority from those of their Pakistani husbands, being influenced by the model set by wives of pioneer migrants, who also found themselves living outside their mother-in-law’s household and so with greater levels of autonomy. During fieldwork both young people and their parents told me stories to illustrate the problem of ‘culture clash’ on several occasions. The typical plot, told as a real story or as an example of what can happen, is of a young man who comes over and sees his new wife talking to unrelated men with whom she has studied in school or college. They may call her by her first name, and seem to be overly familiar. The young man does not understand that this is normal behaviour in Britain, and becomes enraged, leading to arguments and perhaps the break-up of the marriage.

Affinity ‘is always a precarious balance between too much and too little closeness’ (Carsten 1997: 191). For Pakistanis, marriages between close kin are often in part an attempt to increase similarity, compatibility and understanding between the couple (Fischer & Lyon 2000), but some consider the differences between people raised in Britain and Pakistan to be too great for a successful

marriage. This mutual incomprehension is given as a reason by some young women, and some parents, for resisting transnational marriages. 'I mean, I like football, you know?' one young woman explained, using her enjoyment of a conventionally male pursuit to sum up why she didn't want to marry a man from Pakistan who, she assumes, would expect her to conform to Pakistani models of feminine behaviour.

Some men's parents do attempt to prepare them to enter a new household. One young woman engaged to a cousin in Pakistan told me about his visit to stay with them in Bristol, explicitly comparing the preparation for marriage given to daughters and the instruction given to her fiancé by his mother:

The mothers tell the girls, 'When you go to a household, you adjust totally with what they do, with their ways of living, with their friends, how they talk to their friends, their relatives. You just go along with what they do - no ifs, no buts, no questions. You just adjust without making any fuss.' Whereas the boys - I think it's because the girls go to the boy's house, that's why - but I think when the boys do come to the girl's house, I'm sure they're told by their mothers more. You know, 'When you go to their house be polite, don't be silly' sort of thing, 'Don't do anything stupid', because I think I remember Asif said, 'Mum told me so many things. Mum said, "Don't do this, don't do that. If you want some water, you get it yourself. If you want something, you do it yourself - get up."' And he said, 'My mum told me all these things before I came' and he was saying, 'Oh God, I felt like a two year old when she was telling me all these things!'

The (rare) opportunity to visit Britain also serves as a kind of preparation, and other men were warned by friends or relatives in Britain that they would have to work much harder in Bristol than in Pakistan. Nevertheless, it is clear that most men are not prepared, or culturally pre-disposed, to 'adjust' as girls are traditionally trained to do, in order to reduce conflict within the new household.

### ***Marriage, Migration and Masculinity***

One more of Yasmin's husband's criticisms remains to be examined, his complaints about his father-in-law:

*'Your dad's so forcive and he doesn't understand and he doesn't listen'*

This accusation speaks of the frustration of the *ghar damad's* weak position in the household structures of power. While his father-in-law is forceful in support of his daughter, there is no senior member of the household to whom the *ghar damad* can appeal for help with his complaints.

'Globalisation' writes Kimmel, 'disrupts and reconfigures traditional, neo-colonial, or other national, regional or local economic, political and cultural arrangements. In so doing, globalisation transforms local articulations of both domestic and public patriarchy' (2001: 24). In transnational Pakistani marriages, male migration creates new domestic power relationships. As has been seen, residing in his father-in-law's household can undermine the migrant husband's ability to act in accordance with Pakistani ideals of masculinity. These 'hegemonic masculinities'<sup>12</sup> 'define successful ways of "being a man"' and so consequently 'define other masculine styles as inadequate or inferior'. The *ghar damad* represents one of these other, 'subordinate variants' (Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994: 3) of Pakistani and North Indian masculinity, and as such may

be perceived as emasculating or infantilising by men aspiring to a hegemonic masculine role. So Asif, the visiting fiancé, describes being made to feel like a child when his mother gave him the kind of instruction usually given to young women to prepare them for life in their marital home.

For women far more than for men, the expectation is that marriage will be a central and transformative event in their lives. Likely changes are anticipated and reflected in the value placed on girls' adaptability. Although the *ghar jamai* has been described as the 'mirror image' of the daughter-in-law (Jeffery, Jeffery & Lyon 1989: 37), it is notable that Asif describes feeling like a child, rather than a bride. For migrant husbands, marriage is transformative in ways that differ from those of the married woman, and have the potential both to support and to undermine their masculinity. His new identity as a migrant may boost his status or expectations of his earning potential among those left at home, but other often unanticipated challenges may threaten disempowerment - so Asif, on the verge of marriage and international migration, simultaneously felt his adulthood was undermined.

As has oft been noted of women, men are not simply men, and masculinity is braided with other identities. Tahir's wish to control the way his children were raised, for example, was not simply a drive to assert his masculine authority in the matter, but a heartfelt concern over the future loss of Pakistani, Islamic, and his individual family's cultural identity. Although it has been suggested that South Asian men's positions vary less than those of women across their life course (Mines & Lamb 2002), ideals concerning manhood also change as a man ages and takes on different roles in relation to others. A son should respect his parents, and provide for them when they are older. As a husband and father, a man should both

provide for his family and be able to exert a certain level of control over his wife (or wives) and children.

Marriage migration can limit a man's ability to fulfil several of these roles. Rather than contributing to a household budget which sustains both his parents and his wife and children, after migration this becomes a 'double responsibility' to provide for his dependants in Britain, and to contribute to his family in Pakistan's household. This burden may be particularly onerous for the elder brother after his father has died, when he becomes responsible not only for the day-to-day expenses, but for the marriages of any unmarried siblings. In some low-income households in Bristol, the husband's desire to send money from an already stretched family budget to Pakistan can become a point of tension between husband and wife. Azra accepted a *rishta* (match, alliance, proposal) from a financially stable family in the hope that funds would not be drained by the need to support her husband's relatives. She says that her husband has only mentioned the matter of remittances once, and does not dare repeat the suggestion as he knows it will make her angry.

A Pakistani man's migration, whether to Britain or to the Gulf states, is often motivated at least in part by a desire to increase his ability to contribute to the family finances.<sup>13</sup> Although poverty makes the need more urgent, even the better-off are likely to share the general aspiration to fulfil this important part of a son's duties. There is some irony in the fact that in marrying into Britain, the effort to fulfil the masculine role of provider may impose on a migrant groom the emasculating experiences of the *ghar damad*. Moreover, in Azra's husband's case, his weak position in the household has denied the migrant husband the ability to remit money at all. Living in the father-in-law's home can also

undermine a man's authority over his wife and children. Yasmin, for example, was largely able to deny her husband sexual access to her, after he had been violent, by staying up late with her sisters or turning to her father for support. Yasmin's father's support for his daughter caused rifts within the kin group, and parents in this difficult position often urge daughters to reconcile with their husbands. In this case, however, the young man's ability to be a 'proper' husband was denied when it came into conflict with the more senior male in the household's exercise of his duties as a father to protect his daughter.

These pressures – economic, social and cultural - may help in understanding the more extreme actions of some imported Pakistani husbands. As Chopra *et al* astutely observe, men can appear '*especially fragile persons* who nonetheless insist *upon especially powerful personae*' (2004: 14). These sometimes aggressive attempts to assert control or authority may be read as efforts to shore up the fragile edifices of adult masculinity (as migrants, husbands and fathers) under conditions in which it is challenged. I have already argued that Yasmin's husband's anger can be understood by his position as a *ghar damad*. Sonam, whose husband liked more chilli and coriander in his food, said that small arguments like these built up gradually to his violence, and taking a second wife in Pakistan. While not excusing his actions, it is interesting to note that he was also under several of the other forms of pressure described in this chapter: having given up what he described as an 'executive job' with a foreign firm in Pakistan, he found himself doing long nightshifts of repetitive low status work; having married outside the family, he had a complete lack of kinship networks for support in Bristol; his wife, a highly religious young woman in the reformist sense

outlined above, is confident and assertive; and he feels he has suffered racism in his workplace.

It is not my intention, however, to suggest that all or even the majority of incoming Pakistani husbands are unhappy class casualties and *ghar damads*. As Cornwall and Lindisfarne make clear, ‘hegemonic forms [of masculinity] are never totally comprehensive, nor do they ever completely control subordinates. That is, there is always some space for subordinate versions of masculinity – as alternative gendered identities which validate self-worth and encourage resistance’ (1994: 5). It is possible for the *ghar damad* to find subtle ways of re-defining his position, as Ghalib, who came to Britain in the 1970s clearly demonstrates:

It was very difficult. But I remember one thing my father said to me, like they say to girls: ‘When you go from here, he is your father, and she is your mother, and you respect her’. They say to the girl, you know... ‘Your in-laws are your father and mother and you should respect them’. In my case, my father said a similar thing, he said, ‘We are your parents, but now you are going to live with them. They will be like your father and mother, do not disobey them’. That’s what my father given me – the last lesson, in airport. And believe you me, I’m not saying trying to blow my own trumpet, as they say in England, [but] if my father-in-law comes here and you ask him, ‘How do you find Ghalib here as [son-]in-law?’ he will say, ‘I personally think he’s not my in-law, he’s my son’. And that’s the way he treated me, all the way. He was there for me financially, physically - in every way and I admire him... He says to me, ‘Daytime is night’ I say, ‘Yes, it is

night', even [though] I knew it is daytime and I can say to him, 'It's wrong, it's daytime' - I never say to him. At that time, I agree, but then quietly, politely, I say to him, 'What do you think if we just go outside and see if it's day or night?' Then he say, 'Yeah, yeah'. So that's why I think we had a relationship between ourselves very successful. I'm never, never outspoken in front of them. That's the key for success I think.<sup>14</sup>

Instead of railing against the new structures of authority in which he found himself, Ghalib paints a picture of a young man fulfilling the role of a good son by obeying his father's instructions to regard his father-in-law as his father. His deference to his wife's father can then be understood at one level as fulfilling kinship obligations, but at another he makes clear that it was in fact he who, by his tactful cunning, had the upper hand in the relationship, allowing him to emerge from a potentially weak position with his masculine authority unscathed.<sup>15</sup>

For those with good relations with their in-laws the home environment can be welcoming and supportive for a new immigrant. Nevertheless, some aspects of the *ghar damad* model are useful in understanding Ghalib's experience of marriage migration, and this may be the case for the majority of husbands. Hamid, for example, is happy in his new life. Of course, a host of personal attributes may have contributed to his success: he is adaptable, well-liked, is eager to improve his already competent English, and as tall and fair-skinned as his British-born relatives, blending in un-remarked at social occasions. But his lack of conflict can also be partially understood in relation to the *ghar damad* model. First, he has a good relationship with both his wife and mother-in-law. One imported wife with in-law troubles told me that if the husband and wife's relationship is good then it

doesn't matter if the rest of the family are hostile, and the same may be true for imported husbands. Tahir told me that his wife Asma was 'the only friend I've managed to get', and described gratefully how she supported him while he found adjusting to her family's ways difficult. Far from being isolated and unsupported, Hamid also has several male relatives of his own age whom he had met in Pakistan and with whom he socialises regularly. He has been given a relatively interesting job in firm owned by a kinsman, and he has been able to send money back to his family in Pakistan. Finally, his wife's father sadly died before their marriage, and as her only adult brother lives outside the family home, Hamid did not come into conflict with established structures of male authority in the household. Just as I have suggested that the *ghar damad* model can be used to help explain some of the worst examples of failed transnational marriages between British woman and Pakistani men, in this sense, reference to the model can illuminate reasons for the success of this marriage, and the positive experience of this migrant husband.

Other unhappy husbands, however, may continue to argue with their wives, and resent the Britishness of their children. For Humera, the conflict which has been a feature of her marriage from the start, when her husband was shocked at his outspoken and outgoing British bride, emerged again recently as her eldest daughter approached marriageable age. After Humera's own experience of 'culture clash', she and her daughter want to find a husband of similar 'understanding' in Britain. When her mother-in-law declared pointedly that she knew where her granddaughter would be married, implying that the decision had been made, Humera asserted that, on the contrary, she would not be marrying anyone from her father's family. Humera's husband was furious both at his wife's

independent decision about the marriage, and that she had dared to argue with his mother, and serious arguments ensued.

I suspect, however, that most husbands eventually adjust to their changed circumstances. Migration, as Werbner has pointed out, is a process which extends well beyond the physical relocation (1990). As years go by and the couple perhaps move to their own home, the husband becomes head of his own household, develops more social networks, and may climb the employment ladder, the causes of friction may decrease. Those who, like Tahir, plan to take their family back to Pakistan to escape the indignities of life in Britain, may find that like an earlier generation, they give up on their plan to return as their lives become entwined in their new country through their children, homes, businesses and relationships. Eighteen, twenty or more years later, a new generations of fathers may be hoping to take the opportunity of their children's marriages to reaffirm and strengthen ties with the Pakistan to which they have only returned as visitors.

***Conclusion: Not just 'Marrying a passport'?***

This portrait of 'unhappy husbands', or transnational *ghar damad*, contributes to the literature on masculinity, a topic that has attracted much social scientific attention elsewhere, but has only recently begun to be explored to any great extent in work on South Asia.<sup>16</sup> In a recent volume, Chopra, Osella and Osella note that,

Compared to the multiplicities of femininity in South Asian studies, men emerge in a lesser and often two-dimensional range. Commonly they are householders; sometimes priests or renouncers; workers - be they landlord-farmers or landless labourers; patrons or clients; and always almost everywhere 'patriarchs'. Too often men become mere

ciphers... brothers-in-law who exchange women in order to maintain relationships whose affective or gendered content is rarely written about. (2004: 2-3)

In Bristolian Pakistani narratives of transnational marriages that have failed, men do at times appear as somewhat two-dimensional villains. One stereotype often presented to me was of the dastardly immigrant husband who is argumentative and even violent, or who ‘uses’ a British Pakistani girl simply for a visa before deserting her and bringing another wife from Pakistan. I do not intend to suggest that such premeditated cruelty does not occur. Indeed, although I have suggested that Yasmin’s husband’s anger and violence may have been precipitated by the pressures outlined here, Yasmin reports that he later admitted his intention to leave the marriage once his status in Britain was secure.<sup>17</sup> Nor do I wish to excuse such behaviour, which causes great suffering. But here, I hope, the picture is moderated by an understanding of the frustrations faced by some such men.

The approach I have taken here is to use these tales in combination with interview material from men, and other discourses on immigrant husbands, to start to build a more complicated picture of masculinity in the context of Pakistani transnational marriage. In this process, men portrayed as stereotypical villains are revealed as people with comprehensible emotional lives, who face a range of social, economic and cultural problems associated with their migration.

In order to carry out this investigation, however, it has been necessary to put aside the dominant images of marriage, migration, and gender presented not only by my informants, but also by the literature on South Asia.<sup>18</sup> For Pakistanis in Bristol, the archetype of the migrant bride facing isolation in her in-law’s house

has been joined by a variant of the wolf in sheep's clothing: the imported husband who seems genuine, but later mistreats and perhaps leaves his wife, to marry again with the benefits of his fraudulently obtained British citizenship. In time, and if the trend of large numbers of husbands coming to Britain from Pakistan continues, a new folk model of the unhappy transnational *ghar damad* may develop, as more and more families in Britain and Pakistan observe the difficulties encountered by some migrant husbands.

NOTES:

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<sup>1</sup> Figures since these dates are not available due to the disruption of consular services in Pakistan after the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the war in Afghanistan.

<sup>2</sup> For contrasts between Pakistani Muslim and Punjabi Sikh marriage patterns and migration to Britain see Ballard (1990).

<sup>3</sup> In addition to low levels of recorded economic activity, Pakistani women conventionally do not remit money to relatives as it is not considered proper for parents to take gifts from married daughters (cf. Jeffery *et al* 1989: 53; Raheja and Gold 1994: 74-92).

<sup>4</sup> In 2000, 4,720 husbands and fiancés, and 5,560 wives and fiancées in Pakistan were granted UK entry clearance (Home Office 2001).

<sup>5</sup> For strategic interpretations of marriage choice within the Pakistani Punjab see Donnan (1988) and Fischer (1991).

<sup>6</sup> Character is thought to run in families. For more on marriage between same-sex sibling's children see Fischer & Lyon (2000).

<sup>7</sup> Shaw suggests such discourses are 'rationalisations', masking more strategic motivations (2000a: 158). For a full argument supporting the incorporation of risk into understandings of Pakistani transnational marriage see Charsley (2003).

<sup>8</sup> Osella and Osella's (2000) study of the relationship of migration to styles of masculinity among return Gulf migrants in Kerala, and Gamburd's (2000) work on husbands left behind by Sri Lankan migrant maids are two notable exceptions. The present study, however, differs from these works in its focus on migrant men in the social context to which they have migrated.

<sup>9</sup> Menski (2002) disputes the prominence given to this problem, suggesting that it is used as an excuse for restrictive immigration policies, which themselves create hardship for 'immigration widows'. Although I encountered more cases of deserted wives than 'immigration widows' during fieldwork, both types of situation still occur, and I would not wish to diminish the suffering caused in either case by privileging one over the other.

<sup>10</sup> All names have been changed.

<sup>11</sup> Separate residence may, however, allow a greater degree of privacy from the wife's family.

<sup>12</sup> See Connell (1987: 183-88) for an early discussion of the concepts of hegemonic masculinity. For critiques of the concept in South Asian contexts see de Neve (2004) and Walle (2004). Here I follow Cornwall and Lindisfarne in their acknowledgement of the co-existence of multiple hegemonic masculinities (1994: 20).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Osella and Osella (2000) on migration, access to money, and masculinity.

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, this formulation is sometimes given as advice to women as to how wives can influence their husbands (P. Jeffery, pers. comm.).

<sup>15</sup> This type of negotiation echoes de Neve's (2004) attention to men's adoption of 'aspects' of masculinities. De Neve explores how men combine components of masculinities in different ways, in the context of the workplace and neighbourhood in Tamil Nadu. His stress on contextuality is also important – the masculinities presented here do not eclipse the possibility that these same men pursue other gender projects in other settings (cf. Walle 2004).

<sup>16</sup> For recent contributions to this field see, for example, Busby (2000), Gamburd (2000), and Alter (2002).

<sup>17</sup> This does not, however, undermine the analysis, but rather reaffirms the severity of the frustrations this migrant husband experienced, in that he was unable to keep up a pretence of acceptance for long enough to gain the right to remain in the country (at the time, the probationary period was one year, it has now been increased to two).

<sup>18</sup> In an interesting recent article, Osella and Osella (2003) undertake a related project, looking at the complexity of masculine experience belied by oppositional characterisations of 'householder' and 'renouncer'.

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