

# Understanding the Marriage Preferences in the Pakistani Urban Middle-Class and its Sociological Implications<sup>1</sup>

Shah Jamal Alam,  
Centre for Policy Modelling,  
Manchester Metropolitan University Business School  
shah@cfpm.org

## Research Aims:

1. To investigate family dynamics and marriage patterns of the Pakistani middle-class society.
2. To develop descriptive and evidence-driven and bottom-up simulation model and to contribute thereby to the analysis of dynamic evolving social networks

## Abstract:

Marriages and kinships have always remained the focus of social anthropologists [1]. Family dynamics and marriage rules in the Pakistani urban society faced several changes after the partition. Historically, marriages had been ‘conventionally arranged’ in the Indo-Pak society [2]. First cousin marriages, *watta-satta*, and consanguineous marriages had always been preferred when looking for a suitable marriage partner [3]. In recent years, a new middle-class has emerged in the bigger cities as more and better job opportunities are available for young professionals and university graduates. This changing Pakistani urban society opens many research questions. Studying the dynamics of modern marriage patterns as compared to those in previous generations can help to identify the new challenges being faced by the traditional kinship networks. Moreover, it would be worthwhile to investigate the changes in the marriages norms and how they have contributed towards shaping the new middle-class in the society.

Previously, Shaw and other researchers (c.f. [3, 4]) have conducted a detailed study on the marriage customs and spread of genetic disorders in the British Asian families of Pakistani/Kashmiri descent. They have shown how the strict endogamous marriage rules in these families have raised the threat of the spread of genetic disorder. However, these families had their roots from the conservative rural regions of Pakistan. In contrast, the urban middle class has now begun to look for marriage partners who are similar in terms of the upbringing and socio-cultural backgrounds and not just belonging to the same family. One of the objectives of this work would be to compare the findings by Shaw [3] with my research. This would help understand the similarities and difference between the rural and urban marriage customs in the Pakistani and British Pakistani families.

During this proposed research, a series of agent-based models will be developed addressing the phenomenon mentioned above. This modeling approach is suitable in simulating the social behavior of autonomous individuals and the interactions among them [5]. The use of agent-based modeling to understand the complexity of marriage systems and the dynamics of kinship networks has been noted in various social anthropological and simulation journals (c.f [7]). For instance, as White [7] observes, “identifying social units such as structurally endogamous blocks, matrimonial sides, or emergent groups in which certain patterns of marriage occur, the simulation methodology allows a better identification of the links among kinship, economics and politics on the one hand, and among positions in the kinship and marriage network, language categories, and verbal norms, on the other.” Although the prospects of modeling this social phenomena using agent-based approach has been argued, I believe there is clearly a niche in developing descriptive agent-based models of kinship networks.

---

<sup>1</sup> A very relevant empirical study is by Fischer [6], who reports on the consequences of changes in a Pakistani urban community on kinship ties and marriage preferences.

Artificial agents in the model would represent individuals and their socio-cultural backgrounds. The model would draw individual-based rules from the existing literature (c.f. [2, 3]) and other existing empirical studies. Further research collaborations will be setup with researchers working in this area. The model would be validated iteratively based on the feedback from the domain experts including those conducting matrimonial and matchmaking services. Formation of marriages and kinship ties will be modeled at the micro-level and its implications will be analyzed both at the micro and macro levels. One can anticipate that collective patterns of kinship ties may emerge, as observed in a variety of complex social networks.

The proposed research will contribute towards the modeling of dynamic social networks through agent-based simulation models. The simulations would be run for many generations and the output trajectories can be explored based on the experiment design. The birth and death processes in the population imply the evolution of dynamical networks of variable size. Currently, the stochastic dynamic social network models [6] assume that the network size remains fixed at all times. However, in the context of this research it would be important to question the validity of this assumption. Currently, I am also investigating how the network signatures change when a fixed-size population is not assumed. I hope that the experienced gained during my doctoral research will contribute towards my further research in the analysis of dynamic simulated networks.

### **References:**

- [1] Strauss, L. (1949), *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, (trans. 1969), Beacon Press
- [2] Ahmad, I. (1976) (ed.), *Family, Kinship and Marriage among Muslims in India*, New Delhi: J.N. Univ. Press
- [3] Shaw, A. (2000), *Kinship and Continuity: Pakistani Families in Britain*, Routledge
- [4] Shaw, A. (2001), Kinship, Cultural Preference and Immigration: Consanguineous Marriage Among British Pakistanis, *Journal of Royal Anthropological Society*, vol. 7, Royal Anthropological Institute, pp. 315-334
- [5] Epstein, J.M. and Axtell, R. (1996), *Growing Artificial Societies: Social Science From the Bottom*, MIT Press
- [6] Snijders, T.A.B, Steglich, C.E.G. and Schweinberger, M. (2007), Modeling the coevolution of networks and behavior, in van Montford et al. (eds.), *Longitudinal models in behavioral and related sciences*, pp. 41-71
- [7] White, D.R. (1999), Controlled Simulation of Marriage Systems, *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation*, vol. 2, no. 3 <<http://jasss.soc.surrey.ac.uk/2/3/5.html>>
- [8] Fischer, M. (2006), The ideation and instantiation of arranging marriage within an urban community in Pakistan, 1982-2000, *Contemporary South Asia*, 15:3, 325 - 339