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**Vulnerable Brides and Transnational Ghar Damad: Gender,
Risk and 'Adjustment' among Pakistani Marriage Migrants to
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**Vulnerable Brides and Transnational Ghar Damad: Gender,
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Britain**

Dr Katharine Charsley

Abstract

Based on research in Pakistan and the English city of Bristol, this article examines the increasingly common practice of transnational marriages between British-born Pakistanis and Pakistani nationals, in which the latter normally migrates to join their spouse in the UK. Informants and the literature stress the risks faced by women in marriage, and these may be heightened by the increased distance between migrant brides' natal and marital homes in transnational marriages. The challenges faced by migrant husbands in the culturally unusual position of moving to join their wife have, however, received far less attention. These are examined in terms of cultural models of marriage and migration, asymmetry in expectations of marital 'adjustment' and compromise, masculinity and the position of the uxori locally-resident son-in-law (ghar damad). It is suggested that this approach, which recognises the relational character of gender, has much to contribute to the understanding of the dynamics transnational marriages, including insights on marriages which have ended with the husband's violence or desertion.

According to the 2001 Census, Britain is now home to 747,285 people who describe their ethnic group as 'Pakistani'. A large proportion of these are the British-born children and grandchildren of labour migrants from Pakistan, who responded to the need for industrial workers to rebuild the British economy in the years following the Second World War. After the immigration reforms of 1962 restricted the right of Commonwealth citizens to move to Britain, family reunification became the primary means for continued immigration from Pakistan, encouraging men to bring their wives and children to join them in Britain. As the years passed and children were born and brought up in Britain, it was suggested that families 'may tend to select a spouse [for their British-born children] from among kin in Britain rather than in Pakistan, on the basis of economic interests, equality of status and the compatibility of spouses', and might for the same reasons increasingly marry non-relatives in Britain (Shaw 1988: 107). Contrary to this expectation, rates of transnational marriage have increased, and the majority of British Pakistanis now probably marry transnationally in this way, with over ten thousand Pakistani nationals granted entry clearance to join spouses in the UK in the year 2000.¹

Until recent changes in British immigration regulations,² the majority of these migrant spouses were women, conforming to Pakistani traditions of virilocal residence. Since 1997, however, both the numbers of Pakistani husbands applying, and the proportion being accepted, for entry to Britain has increased. In recent years, there have been almost equal numbers of male and female spousal migrants in recent years.³ This new phenomenon of large-scale male marriage migration has implications for our understandings of the gendered nature of Pakistani marriage migration. It

highlights both indigenous models of the relationship between gender, marriage and migration, and the potential for new permutations of these constituent parts to throw up novel challenges. Based on eighteen months of fieldwork in the Pakistani Punjab and with largely Punjabi Pakistanis in the English city of Bristol, this article explores the highly gendered character of risks to migrant spouses in transnational marriages.

Potential difficulties facing South Asian brides have been documented both within the subcontinent (e.g. Jeffery & Jeffery 1996) and in the UK (e.g. Fenton & Sadiq 1993). Both my informants and the literature stress the risks faced by women in marriage. Brides conventionally move to their husband's home – for Punjabis 'womanhood implies travel' (Bradby 2000) – and so are thought vulnerable to mistreatment. Transnational marriage dramatically increases the distance between a woman's natal and marital home, heightening the dangers that stem from this distance. Little attention, however, has been paid to the experiences of the increasing number of Pakistani male marriage migrants, some of whom find adjusting to life in Britain difficult.⁴ In part, this reflects a paucity of studies of South Asian masculinities in general. As Chopra, Osella and Osella note in a recent volume:

In comparison 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)

Gender is, as has long been noted, a relational concept. Masculinity and femininity ‘have meaning in relation to each other, as a social demarcation and a cultural opposition’ (Connell 1995: 44). Not only are ideas of feminine or masculine at least partly defined with reference to the other, but men play important roles in women’s lives, and vice versa. A gendered approach to marriage migration must therefore include both men and women. After outlining reasons for the popularity of transnational marriage among my informants in Britain, and gendered models of marriage and migration, the article will examine the dangers facing some migrant brides in Britain, before turning to explore masculine experiences of marriage migration. For some immigrant men, social and economic processes of migration combine with features of Pakistani kinship and masculinity to produce frustrations which can lead to tensions within the marriage, and indeed the wider family. Although they have not themselves migrated, British Pakistani women with transnational marriages are shown to be multiply influenced by migration, as both wives, and daughters or sometimes granddaughters of migrants.

Close kin marriage and the diaspora

The majority of these transnational marriages are between kin, often first or second cousins. A recent survey of Pakistanis in the English city of Oxford, found 59% of marriages were with first cousins, and 87% within the *barādarī/zāt*.⁵ These figures are substantially higher than those reported either for Pakistan, or for the parental generation in Britain. Moreover, 71% of the marriages surveyed were to spouses from Pakistan, and 90% of the first cousin marriages were transnational in this way (Shaw 2001: 323-7). These data suggest a marked increase over time in the numbers of consanguinious and, in particular, first cousin marriage amongst British Pakistanis

(see Shaw 2000). Significantly, however, this increase has only been in transnational marriages – less than half of the marriages to spouses in the UK were to relatives. It seems, then, that transnational close kin marriage has become particularly prevalent among diasporic Pakistanis in Britain.

This observation lends support to Donnan's argument that marriage rules or preferences alone are not sufficient explanation for marital choices, which also entail purposive strategies (1988, see also Bourdieu 1977). While requests from close kin may be hard to ignore, decisions are made by weighing the social implications of neglecting these expectations against other priorities including strengthening kin ties, making new connections, or a having wealthy or beautiful spouse (Donnan 1988: 119-97). With the addition of considerations stemming from international migration, this strategic perspective has been a pervasive one in the study of British Pakistani marriages. For Alison Shaw (2001), socio-economic interests in Britain are balanced against opportunities for financial connections in Pakistan, the public demonstration of *barādarī* solidarity, obligations to kin and the opportunity to facilitate a relative's migration to Britain. Roger Ballard writes that parents who reject these obligations '...are likely to be charged with having become so anglicised that they have forgotten their most fundamental duties towards their kin' (Ballard 1987: 27).

One of the stock answers an ethnographer receives in Pakistan when enquiring about the reasons for close kin marriages is that they are arranged in order to prevent fragmentation of family assets, and the opportunity of migration can be viewed as one such asset. However, for parents in Britain often separated from siblings by their own migration decades earlier, the ability of kin marriage to strengthen bonds between relatives may present itself at least as much as an

opportunity as an obligation. As I have argued at greater length elsewhere, strategic considerations alone are not sufficient to explain the popularity of transnational close kin marriages among British Pakistanis (Charsley 2003).

In addition to a heartfelt desire to maintain bonds with close relatives in Pakistan, an important set of considerations stem from parents' concerns to ensure their children's future happiness. Arranging a marriage is an emotionally risky business, and the wedding of a daughter is considered particularly difficult. Marriage to a close relative is held to reduce the risks marriage poses to women in a number of ways. Parents hope that mutual kin will provide reliable referees in assessing the character and background of a potential match. Characteristics are also thought to run in families, so marriage to a close relative should increase the similarities and therefore compatibility between the couple (Fischer & Lyon 2002).^{6 7} Moreover, if there are problems in a marriage, a network of shared kin is thought to act to prevent marital breakdown both by supporting couple, and exerting pressure against divorce.⁸

The perceived security and trust inherent in close kin marriage are particularly valued in the context of transnational marriage, where the incentive of migration may lead to worries that the Pakistani 'side' are entering into the arrangement simply for economic gain, and where distance may help conceal problems until after the marriage (issues considered in greater detail below).⁹ Moreover, Pakistanis in Bristol are often wary of matches with other British Pakistanis, for fear that they will have been contaminated by what they view as the amoral climate of the West. A spouse from Pakistan may be thought to be more religious, or more traditional, in ways that will benefit the marriage and prevent the loss of such traits in the next generation through two similarly 'modern' or religiously

lax British-raised parents. This situation, in which either a husband or wife brought up in Pakistan may be viewed as a primary repository of religious or cultural identity in the diasporic context provides an interesting contrast to the more usual accounts of women as bearers of community (e.g. Jeffery & Basu 1998, also Gell this volume). For many British Pakistani men there is a conceptual opposition between the archetypal British Pakistani girl who wants to go out all the time, may be loud and argumentative, 'does fashion' and might have indulged in immoral activities, and a quiet, co-operative, sheltered, religious Pakistani girl who will make a good mother. Equally, however, women may speak of local Pakistani men's short-comings in religious commitment, moral standards or work ethic – 'not marriage material' as one woman put it - and may hope to find a better prospect in Pakistan. Some contest the authenticity of subcontinental versions of Islam (see the couple debating women's role in marriage, below), or argue that transnational couples will have too many cultural dissimilarities for a successful marriage, but it seems that for most, these concerns are outweighed by the perceived benefits such marriages can bring. In this, transnationalism and close kin marriage may be mutually reinforcing. The hazards involved in transnational marriage, and the danger that British-raised young people may have developed unacceptable behaviour, intensify the need for security, leading many to cling to what is perceived to be the security provided by close kin marriage.

Risks for migrant brides

Issues of trust and risk also feature in intra-national arrangements. Jeffery and Jeffery, writing of North India, for example, report a case in which the young woman who arrived as the bride was not the same as the one who had been originally 'viewed' (1996: 98-9). Even the reliability of mutual kin as referees may be undermined by

fears of being held responsible for problems arising from revealing defects.

Transnational marriage introduces an additional distance, and therefore additional risk. Even between close kin, for example, the distance between the two countries may increase the chances of concealing pre-marital relationships, or other undesirable behaviour or traits potentially damaging to reputation and marriage prospects. When marriages span continents, the ability of families even to visit potential matches is curtailed. This section will examine instances where the families of young women from Pakistan were misled about the character, and in one case the physical health, of husbands based in Britain. Some of these deceptions may be carried out in hope - parents may believe the marriage will redeem their son's defects and be successful - but the failure of this optimism to be realised can leave migrant wives in very difficult situations.

Pakistani families are intensely concerned about the fate of daughters after marriage. Their fears can be increased when the daughter is marrying overseas into an environment, which, although perceived to offer a 'better life' in material terms, most believe to be morally decadent and corrupt. Not only are American films increasingly available through the proliferation of new media, and Western pornographic sites frequently visited by the predominantly male clients of the internet cafes which have sprung up in every town,¹⁰ but Pakistan is party to the pervasive rhetoric found across the Muslim World in which 'the West' is held to be opposite in every way to decent Islamic values. So when Nabila's mother's sister's son in Bristol proposed marriage, she and her mother were very worried about the prospect of her coming to live in this mahaul (environment). It's not that they don't trust the 'British-born', she said, but they know they are independent - 'they don't want to stay in'. Not having seen the

young man since he was in Pakistan ten years before, her mother worried that he might have a girlfriend in the ‘free environment’ she had seen in films.

Nabila is now evidently very happy with her husband, but a few women do indeed arrive in Britain to find that their new husbands have other relationships, or even pre-existing families. When I first met Tasneem for example, she invited me to the sparsely furnished terraced home where she lived with her toddler son, while her husband lived with his White English partner and their children. She told me that all she did was cry. Several years later she claims still to have hope that her husband might return to her. She insists that he liked her when they married, pointing to the existence of her son as evidence that he had been pleased with the match. In any case, her local kin – her husband’s family – are against the idea of a divorce.

My suspicion is that some of these cases are concealed forms of male forced marriage in which a young man whose behaviour, such as having a girlfriend or using drugs, is worrying his parents. They are taken to marry a Pakistani woman in the hope that this will bring them back to the desired path. The corrective power of marriage to someone from a less ‘corrupt’ society is certainly given as a normal justification for forcing young women to marry (cf. Samad & Eades 2002). Anecdotal information supports the suggestion of similar motivations for male and female forced marriage (see Samad & Eades 2002: 56). I was told of one family who got their son married in Pakistan in an unsuccessful attempt to put an end to his drug-taking life-style. Another man said his brother was forced to marry a cousin in Pakistan, but left home as soon as his wife came to the UK. The option to resist such compulsion by refusing to consummate the union is probably more readily available to men than to women (e.g. Das 1974: 34), but it may be that many decide that the easiest path is to go along with

the wedding and immigration application, in the knowledge that, unlike most women in forced marriages, they may be able to carry on with their chosen lifestyle after their spouse has come to Britain.

Other men who turn out to be very different from the image portrayed of them may have been very much in favour of the marriage. Hafza, for example, told me how her cousin (FFBSS) from England had visited Pakistan. He had liked her and told his family that he wanted to marry her. After arriving in Britain, however, she found him very different from the impression she has gained. He and his friends drank heavily, moving on to using drugs in the house while she sat frightened upstairs. He abused her verbally and physically, and said that if she told anyone she would be sent back to her parents in Pakistan. She hoped that things would improve once they had children, but the beatings became worse after her son was born. Unaware of her legal rights, she withdrew several statements to the police for fear that she would be deported and lose her children. In perhaps the most extreme case of concealment I came across, one family from Pakistan did not find out until the day after their daughter's wedding that the man settled in England whom she had married was physically handicapped, unable to work and requiring constant attention. This marriage was *bāhar se* (outside the kin group), however, and it is unlikely that such a severe problem could have been hidden from family members.¹¹

These examples of course represent a minority of marriages, but such women are in an extremely difficult position. Some migrant wives with marital problems had not told their parents of their situation, despite distress and loneliness often compounded by lack of language skill and local support networks. Women may wish to protect their parents from worry (cf. Jeffery 2001), and Hafza did not tell anyone

about the abuse she was suffering for several years for fear of being sent back to her parents in Pakistan, a blow to their honour. In cases of marital breakdown, suspicion of blame often falls on the woman, and remarriage is generally harder for women than for men (ibid). Moreover, as the nature of close kin is held to be similar, the failure of a woman's marriage may cast doubts on the character of other siblings, potentially damaging any unmarried sisters' chances of securing a good match. Hafza eventually did tell her parents about what she had been through, and in time they agreed to a divorce, but she is resigned to a life alone with her children in Britain. Even if remarriage was possible, she said she would not want to take the risk again. Life for divorced women may, however, at least be easier in financial terms in Britain than in Pakistan thanks to the provision of state benefits.

The crucial role of marriage in shaping women's lives is reflected in the value placed on women's ability to 'adjust', to maximise the chance of their marriage's success. In her study of Indian working women, Promilla Kapur defines 'marital adjustment' as 'that state of accommodation in marital relationships... characterised by a tendency in spouses to resolve or solve conflicts and by an overall feeling of happiness and satisfaction with marriage and with one another' (1970: 21). My informants in Pakistan, however, use 'adjustment' in the former processual sense of adjusting, rather than to mean the state of contented matrimony. Moreover, the concept is highly gendered as women, conventionally the ones to enter a new situation after marriage and with more to lose through marital breakdown, are expected to be the most adaptable: 'to adjust, tolerate, and sacrifice her personal interests for the happiness of the family' (Kapur 1970: 293, see also Singh & Uberoi 1994). Hence, Pakistani girls are prepared from a young age for marriage. In Bristol, I heard a girl of

ten corrected by an older sister when play-acting the role of teacher – she wouldn't be Miss Maiden-name, she would have whatever her husband's name might be. Girls are taught 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. As one engaged 19-year-old woman in Bristol put it, girls are told, '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.'

Migrant Husbands: uncharted risks

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, a British Pakistani woman married to a Pakistani cousin [MZS])

For Pakistani migrant brides the risks of marriage are charted by a strong cultural model linking womanhood, marriage, migration and risk. Parents of girls are described as *majbūr* (helpless; oppressed; in need) in the matter of arranging marriage, with the knowledge that if it goes wrong, their daughter is likely to come off worse. Transnational marriage for the most part simply acts to amplify some risks by increasing the distance that is understood to make brides vulnerable. For men on the other hand, marriage does not traditionally entail migration, as a bride normally goes to live in her husband's household. Hence, although marriage is an important life event that may help confirm a man's adult status, it is not generally held to be such a central, life-changing event for men. In almost half of contemporary transnational

marriages between Pakistan and Britain, however, it is the husband who migrates to join the wife, an experience whose challenges are not charted by the dominant models of masculinity.

Tahir's marriage to his cousin Asma in Bristol was arranged by his parents when he was twenty. Their initial meetings dispelled his fears that a girl brought up in Britain could have had previous relationships, or be too independent.¹² Nevertheless, he has found adjusting to life in Bristol difficult. In the following sections, excerpts from an interview with Tahir will illustrate several of the challenges that can face migrant husbands. Here he describes his arrival, and desire to return to Pakistan:

... when I came off the plane [I thought]: 'All right. New place... All right, nice place, motorway's nice' ... [Then after a] couple of days, a week - getting more and more annoyed. Because I'd left everything - friends, family... A lot of different things I had to adjust on in life over here. I tried to get control, but it took some time before I could. Because I used to get those day nightmares: 'Where am I? What? Can I go home? Let's go!' ... In the first year I [kept thinking]... 'Isn't there any way out? Isn't there any way to go back?' That's sort of a little more, it has cooled down a bit. I think [that's because of] different factors like my children, my wife - we've grown quite close together... So I think it's all right - a little bit all right. But I would love to go, we'd all like to live with our parents all together. My father he said, 'All right - I'll grow your children up for you'. I said, 'That's very nice'. Different things we cherish, we can cherish all together [with the family], we do miss over here. I would like those things to be all together, but sometimes I have sort of grown sort of immune to it now. I try to keep those a little back now and see the new world...

Migration and Downward Mobility

Tahir had almost finished his medical training before he left Pakistan. At first hoped to find work in this field in Britain, but eventually joined a general employment agency:

... they were terrible jobs. I had to work in the rain holding things.... manual jobs. So for the time being it was all right – shook out the rust out of me... Later on I managed to get another job. It was same type of job, manual job, but a little better... I worked there for four months. It was a refrigerator - I had to work inside it! But then I found [his current processing job]... It's nice and comfortable, just sitting around. Just have to spend the time... It's all the same, so it just becomes like a robot or something. So keep on doing it, keep on talking.... In the beginning it was very hard, because I had never thought in my life that I would have done anything like this. Maybe I didn't know what it was like over here, but over there you know most of the students they are leeches on their family, basically. They don't work much. They do some tuition or something sometimes, but work like this - no. So it was quite an extraordinary experience, but later on I realised I had to do it. Got a family to manage. Maybe later on in life when good times come...

I would say if I'd come over for holiday over here it would have been wonderful, but coming into the circle of a new life, it's difficult to adjust to it... I think I'm getting used to it now, but life over here is quite stressful. Like jobs, to run about [paying] the bills - mentally you're crowded all the time [thinking]: 'Got to do this, that'. Maybe the job that I'm doing, maybe that's why I have to

give more hours. Sometimes, most of the months, I'm working seven days a week. Maybe it's that that I can't really find time for myself to think, sit down... Because if I just work plain [without overtime] I can just manage, maybe hardly manage the life I'm living with my wife over here. Sometimes I do send money over - every three, four months maybe one hundred, two hundred pounds. That isn't that much, but to manage all that we are affording at the moment, I have to work that much. Because it isn't a very, very well paid job.

Many Pakistani men working in Britain are able to afford to send money to relatives in Pakistan. These remittances, and the smart new houses built in Pakistan with money from overseas, reinforce the image many Pakistanis gain through the media of the wealthy West. British Pakistanis on visits 'back home' also often spend lavishly on gifting and items to bring back. This may only be possible thanks to years of hard saving, and bulk-buying clothes in Pakistan may cut costs in the long run, but such conspicuous consumption also serves to bolster the impression of Britain as a place where financial gains may be made.¹³ Migration to the UK does offer most Pakistani men the opportunity to earn far more than they could in Pakistan, but often under conditions that come as a shock to newly-arrived husbands like Tahir. Given the costs of migration, pioneer migrants to Britain were normally of middling socio-economic status (Ballard 1987), and remittances from previous migrants in the family have often helped boost the economic standing of those left in Pakistan still further. In Britain, on the other hand, although many own their own home, Pakistanis tend to live in small properties in deprived inner city areas (Modood et al 1997: 343). Ghalib, married into Britain in 1976, voiced these disappointments:

When I came here I had dreams... A big myth that is in the Third World... about Europe and England – they think that everything is rosy, the grass is greener on the other side, people live luxuriously. Because they watch the films, the TV and they see all these big houses, cars... When you come here and reality hits you, it's all shattered, it's all different.

Migration also commonly involves downward mobility. Qualifications and work experience may not be recognised, high fees for foreign students deter further training, and lack of local knowledge may be compounded by poor English and discrimination to limit employment prospects. Although there has been some improvement in recent years, the Pakistani population in Britain suffers from high levels of unemployment, large numbers in semi-skilled manual work, and low levels of professionals, managers and employers (Modood et al 1997). Families are thus unlikely to be able to offer access to better opportunities to new arrivals, who often have no choice but to take jobs well below their status in Pakistan, let alone their expectations for their new life. Well qualified men like Tahir, or those who held good jobs at home often find themselves doing repetitive manual labour, or looking to what has been called the 'culture of hope' (ibid: 348) provided by self-employment, often as taxi-drivers. Moreover, immigration regulations requiring demonstrable sources of income to support spousal migrants mean that most women importing husbands from Pakistan are in employment, and may at least initially hold better paid or higher status jobs than the husband can immediately hope to obtain.¹⁴

In an effort to increase their earnings, many commit to long and anti-social working hours, which can leave such men with little spare time to make new networks to replace the friends and family lost through migration. The fact that others are also

working long hours further limits social opportunities. Moreover, many social spaces in Britain where they might make new non-Pakistani acquaintances, such as the local pub, are not considered respectable venues due to the serving of alcohol. In many respects, then, the experience of the migrant husband is, as one young man put it, 'starting from scratch again'.

The transnational ghar damad

Marriage also brings new kinship relationships and statuses. For a virilocally-resident bride, the nature of her relationships with her in-laws are of fundamental importance to the quality of her married life, as evinced by the common stereotypes of the overbearing mother-in-law, jealous sister-in-law and the vulnerable new bride. But the literature on South Asia also documents the existence of uxorilocally-resident grooms, or ghar jamai (house son-in-law). In North India and among Muslims in Gujerat (Lambatt 1976: 54-5), they occur largely in relatively wealthy families without sons to farm their land. In Hindu Bengal, ghar jamai allow parents without sons to keep their married daughters living with them, providing someone to inherit their property and care for them in old age (Lamb 2002: 58). 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. In Bangladesh, Gardner reports that such men are normally landless and lacking an established household to which they could take their wife. But they can also be the result of migration as fathers working overseas leave a son-in-law to look after their womenfolk (1995: 167). My informants more commonly use the equivalent term ghar damad than ghar jamai. Like the female characters in affinal households above, the ghar jamai / ghar damad is the subject of stereotypes, and is generally

considered to be an undesirable position (Jeffery & Jeffery 1996) with its connotations of being, like the conventional daughter-in-law, dependent on and subservient to the in-laws.

Most grooms migrating from Pakistan to Bristol live for at least an initial period in their wife's family home. Two women informants did say that the opportunity to stay with their parents influenced their choosing a husband from Pakistan, but this situation generally a by-product of the economic implications of migration. Unmarried Pakistani women in Bristol rarely live apart from the family, and a husband newly arrived from Pakistan is unlikely, for the reasons outlined above, to be able to afford a place of their own. One woman in Bristol had saved for and bought a house before her husband's arrival, and some families do purchase properties for their children. However, families' financial circumstances are often strained following an expensive marriage, the cost of airfares and the economic constraints on new migrants, so many couples spend at least some time living with the wife's parents. The concept of the *ghar damad* may thus be 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, producing both the unusual absence of some relations and the unusual presence, or at least proximity, of others. While the groom is in the abnormal position of being the lone in-comer, facing a new family's habits and way of life, his wife starts 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, as young couples' new residences are often very close to the existing family home.¹⁵ Hence, the concept of the *ghar damad* is here 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, but here this position of subordination and training is absent. This situation can alter the dynamics of power between husband and wife. In North India and Pakistan, a man without brothers may be considered 'alone' and so vulnerable to victimisation (Jeffery & Jeffery 1996: 208). A transnational ghar damad can be in a similarly weak position, unable to defend himself from criticism. Some informants blamed interference and criticism of the husband from the wife's family for causing problems in this type of marriage. Azra, for example, said that her parents complained about her recently-arrived husbands' dependency on the family for help with filling out forms and finding work, but that she was careful to take his side. She contrasted this to another couple she knew in which the husband felt so criticised that he wanted to leave his wife and return home.

At heart here is also the expectation that brides will 'adjust' to their husband's and in-law's ways, and support their interests. Like Azra, Tahir's wife Asma has been supportive of her husband:

She always used to listen to me, stay close to me, whatever the adjustments were. There are differences in families - the way of thinking, everything, but she always stuck over to my side, more like she was grown up in my family!

However, some argue that the preparation of daughters tends to be neglected in Britain. For one couple 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. The British wife rejected her husband's accusation that Islamic teachings were being ignored by saying 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.'¹⁶ Shaw (2000) suggests that expectations of domestic relations of authority among young women raised in Britain may be very different from those of their Pakistani husbands, being influenced by the model set by wives of pioneer migrants who were also outside their mother-in-law's household, and experienced greater levels of autonomy. This is one aspect of what my informants often call the 'culture clash' between transnational spouses; a conflict which interacts with the powerlessness of the *ghar damad* position. A typical story commonly told to illustrate the problem is of a young man who comes over and sees his wife talking to an unrelated man, perhaps a former class-mate. He may call her by her first name, and seem to be overly familiar. Not understanding that this is normal behaviour in Britain, the husband becomes enraged, leading to arguments and perhaps the break-up of the marriage.

One young woman engaged to a cousin in Pakistan told me about the instructions given to her fiancé by his mother before his departure for a visit to England, explicitly comparing it to the preparation for marriage given to daughters.¹⁷

Other men were warned by friends or relatives in Britain that they would have to work much harder in Bristol than in Pakistan. Nonetheless, 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.

Tahir spoke of the frustrations he had encountered in adjusting to his wife's family, which eased somewhat when the couple moved to a separate house nearby:

It's been the opposite way round - usually girls make adjustments... Some things I can't change like certain habits of mine. I've changed most of them - I don't smoke inside, I smoke always outside now... I think it's more comfortable [since we have moved out of the extended family home]. We have our own privacy. Secondly, the lifestyle we want to develop for our own selves, we can. That's most important to me - I can grow my children the way I want to. Teach them the things I want. Otherwise if I lived in joint family, somebody comes around [and says to his child]: 'What are you doing?' - gives my child a slap [and shouts]: 'Go over there!' It's not right...'

Nevertheless, he is keen to return to Pakistan to raise his children:

Before they are ten years old, I would like them to go back. Even if I'm here or I'm over there, I would like them to be brought up over there... Everybody has their own characteristics but, like Asma's family for example, it's very nice, they're nice to their parents and everybody. But if... my parents had children like Asma's family, there were a lot of things that they couldn't have tolerated. Like if we talk rude to our parents, even in early ages, maybe in later life we can still get beaten!... And second thing is religion. [That's the] most important

thing. Over here they do religion, but to learn something, and to see something, is two different things. Like, it can be in your mind, but if you don't see, if religion isn't around you, you'll certainly say, 'What is this? This is something bookish, or something related to books'.

Tahir evidently worries about the impact of the local cultural environment and his wife's family on his sons – indeed he is scathing of the behaviour of young men raised in Britain. Marriage and childbearing centrally concern cultural reproduction, and in addition to the wider issues of religion and discipline that worry Tahir about British Pakistani culture, he is also eager to pass on his own particular family 'culture'. With virilocal residence, this type of small scale cultural reproduction is in effect patrilineal, and men are habituated to the idea that their family's ways will be dominant in the raising of their children, so Tahir hopes to relocate the family to Pakistan, where his father has offered to 'grow' his son's children. As men do not take a prominent role in childcare, this system relies on the inculcation of the husband's family's habits on the incoming bride, a training absent in 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.

Marriage, Masculinity and Migration

It has been suggested that South Asian men's positions vary less than those of women across their life course (Mines & Lamb 2002), but 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.¹⁸ As the material presented above suggests, the position of ghar damad may undermine this control. Moreover, although migration to the economic opportunities of Britain is often undertaken partly in order to fulfil the masculine ideal of provider, it seems that in a cruel irony, marriage migration can undermine man's ability to fulfil several aspects of these masculine roles.

Rather than contributing to a household budget sustaining both his parents and his wife and children, after migration this becomes a 'double responsibility' to provide for his dependants in Britain, and send money to his family in Pakistan (cf. Gallo, this volume). Although his in-laws were supportive, Ghalib remembered the strain that helping his own elderly father finance the marriage of his five siblings had put on his marriage. 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. Having accepted a proposal from a financially stable family in the hope that funds would not be drained by the need to support her husband's relatives, Azra says 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.

As this husband's timidity suggests, male marriage migration can create new household relations of power. Crucially, living in the father-in-law's home can 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. In this, 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. Such 'hegemonic masculinities' '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 after the mother of the visiting fiancé gave him the kind of instruction usually given to young women to prepare them for life in their marital home, he complained: 'I felt like a two year old when she was telling me all these things!' In these cases it is the man who is the in-comer, and who therefore might be expected to make adjustments to fit in with his new environment. However, as Singh and Uberoi point out, asymmetrical models of 'adjustment' in which wives are expected to carry the burden of self-sacrifice and compromise are not merely a practical response to virilocal residence, but also function as 'an affirmation of male dominance in the family, as in society' (1994: 115). Small wonder, then, that 'adjustment' does not come easily to many of these men.

Marital outcomes

It is not, however, my intention 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. Ghalib, for example, remembered the instruction his father had given him before he left Pakistan, to respect and obey his parents-in-law as his parents. Accordingly, he said, if his father-in-law told him that day was night:

I say, 'Yes, it is night', even [though] I knew it is daytime... 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.¹⁹

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. His deference can then be understood as fulfilling kinship obligations, but at another level, 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.²⁰

For new immigrants with good relationships with their in-laws the home environment can be welcoming and supportive. Nevertheless, some aspects of this model of the unhappy husband remain useful in understanding even these positive experiences. Hamid, for example, is content in his new life partly because of a lack of the features of the model presented here: he was given a relatively interesting job by a kinsman and has been able to remit money. He has several local cousins to socialise with, and as his wife's father sadly died and her only adult brother lives elsewhere, he

did not come into conflict with established structures of male authority in the household.

For others, these difficulties may just be a phase. The process of migration, as Werbner has pointed out, extends well beyond the physical relocation (1990). In one case I came across in Bristol, tensions between husband and wife re-emerged years later over the husband's desire to marry his daughter to one of his relatives in Pakistan. But for many the causes of friction may decrease over the years as they perhaps establish their own household, develop more social networks, and climb the employment ladder. Tahir plans to take his family back to Pakistan, but men in this position 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 (cf. Anwar 1979). Eighteen, twenty or more years later, a new generation of fathers may hope to take the opportunity of their children's marriages to reaffirm bonds with the homeland to which they have only returned as visitors.

In some cases, however, marriages between British Pakistani women and migrant husbands from Pakistan have ended in conflict and divorce. In Yasmin's short-lived and abusive marriage, it was when her husband expressed his frustrations about her family that the real arguments started. He complained:

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.

These accusations speak to many of the issues addressed above: local cultural differences, issues of parenting, expectations of how a wife should behave and ‘adjust’, and the ghar damad’s weak position in the household structures of power. Interestingly, Yasmin’s husband’s culinary complaint was echoed by another migrant husband. Sonam’s husband disliked both his wife’s and his mother-in-law’s cooking. A man bringing a wife into his family home will eat the same food before and after marriage, as his wife will be trained in her new household’s style of cooking. When Sonam’s mother-in-law 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. This apparently trivial matter can thus be seen as symptomatic both of expectations of continuity in ‘family culture’ across their life-course, and of the broader adjustments a migrant husband has to make to the family culture of his wife’s household, and indeed to his new social and cultural setting.

Both these marriages ended in divorce. After he had been violent, Yasmin’s husband was sent back to Pakistan before the end of the one year probationary period needed for a spouse to gain permanent right to remain in Britain.²¹ In what is probably a more typical story, Sonam’s husband’s marriage lasted long enough for his immigration status to become secure. Sonam said that small arguments like the issue of food gradually escalated to his violence, and taking a second wife in Pakistan. I do not wish to excuse his actions, but it is interesting to note that this husband was also under several of the other forms of pressure described above. He had given up an ‘executive job’ with a foreign firm in Pakistan, to find himself doing long nightshifts of repetitive low status work. Married outside the family, he had a complete lack of

kinship networks for support in Bristol. His wife, although highly religious, is confident and assertive, and he felt he has suffered racism in his workplace.

Conclusion: re-gendering the risks of transnational marriage

Stories of migrant husbands who are argumentative or even violent, or who abandon their marriages once their immigration status is secure, perhaps bringing another wife from Pakistan, create anxiety for British Pakistani women and their parents. Issues of risk and trust are central to Pakistani transnational close kin marriage, and this fear adds a new variation to the repertoire of risks facing British Pakistani women and their parents. I do not want to suggest that such premeditated cruelty does not occur, and such behaviour undoubtedly causes great suffering. However, focussing only on the hazards this consequence of migration presents for women masks the fuller picture. The account presented here of the pressures and frustrations faced by many male marriage migrants may aid in understanding the more extreme actions of some imported Pakistani husbands, helping transform them from two dimensional ciphers (Chopra et al 2004: 2-3) to people with comprehensible emotional lives. Much recent research has explored male violence against women as a resource in the construction of masculinity by men in subordinate positions (cf. Gadd 2002, Messerschmidt 2000, Totten 2003), and certainly, by understanding some of the problems for immigrant husbands, their wives and families, it is possible that solutions might be imagined to prevent the worst cases of conflict. Nevertheless, these cases of marital breakdown represent a minority of transnational marriages. All husbands' and wives' expectations and experiences are, however, influenced by gendered models of marriage and migration. As Connell notes, 'an active process of grappling with a situation, and constructing ways of living in it, is central to the

making of gender' (1995: 114). Whilst a bride's relationship to marriage is at least partially constructed in terms of risk, husbands here have also been shown grappling with the gendered challenges of their new positions as transnational ghar damad. The recognition of these less charted risks presents an opportunity for greater insights into the dynamics of such transnational marriages.

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¹ Home Office figure 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.

² This refers to the 1997 abolition of the Primary Purpose Rule requiring spouses to prove that their main reason for entering into the marriage was not to gain entry to Britain. Some commentators viewed the PPR as a discriminatory law targeting South Asian migrants (Menski 1999)

³ In 2000, 4,720 husbands and fiancés, and 5,560 wives and fiancées in Pakistan were granted UK entry clearance (Home Office 2001).

⁴ The topic of gender and migration is 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 (Naveed-i-Rahat 1990; Rauf 1982; see also Gardner 1995 on Bangladesh). The interactions of migration and masculinity have, however, been somewhat neglected, although see Gamburd (2000) for an examination of husbands left behind by migrant Sri Lankan housemaids.

⁵ *Barādarī* is often translated as kin group, and *zat* as caste, but in practice these terms may be used interchangeably. See Alavi (1972) for a description of the ‘sliding semantic scale’ inherent in the concept of *barādarī*. *Barādarī* has also been translated as ‘patrilineage’, but given repeated close kin marriage many members of a *barādarī* may be related to both one’s mother and one’s father (e.g. Das 1973: 28), and neither my informants or those in the Oxford survey demonstrate a preference for patrilineal marriage (Shaw 2001).

⁶ Fischer and Lyon suggest that Pakistani understandings of similarity between kin helps account for the statistical preference they found in Lahore for marriage between the children of same-sex siblings. Brothers ‘are more like each other than they are like their sisters, and vice versa’. Similarity travels down the generations, so same-sex siblings’ children are likely to be the most alike from available first cousins (2002: 305).

⁷ Cf. Das 1973 on the depiction of disastrous marriages between non-kin in Pakistani fiction

⁸ These hopes are not always fulfilled, however, and close kin marriage also generates its own risks in the potential to create conflict within the kin group (Charsley 2003).

⁹ Rayner (1992) suggests that people deal with risk not as the standard calculation of ‘probability x consequences’, but are concerned with ‘fairness’, rooted in considerations of ‘trust’, ‘liability’ and ‘consent’. Kin links provide the basis for all three – trust based on moral obligations and similarity between kin, group sanctions to hold a transgressing spouse to account, and kinship provides networks along which marriages can be negotiated.

¹⁰ At the launch of the Pak Watan (Pak Homeland) website in Islamabad, a Pakistani official proclaimed the government’s intention to ensure that Pakistan would rapidly develop more comprehensive internet access than India. If we can’t beat them at cricket, he joked, we’ll beat them at IT!

¹¹ However, it is sometimes seen as a duty for family to provide spouses for disabled or otherwise unmarriageable children, and the benefits of migration may be weighed against the disability.

¹² The traditional prohibition on engaged couples meeting is not adhered to in all families. In any case, curious couples may find ways of communicating surreptitiously through intermediaries, letters, telephone calls or email.

¹³ Giving the impression of being a well-off and generous family also does no harm if a good match is being sought for a son or daughter of marriageable age.

¹⁴ Some South Asian commentators have suggested that a wife’s higher status or wages can be problematic for a successful marriage (Kapur 1970; Singh & Uberoi 1994: 112).

¹⁵ This arrangement facilitates frequent visiting and even shared cooking, eroding the distinction between extended family households and couples who live separately.

Nevertheless becoming ‘separate’ in this way can help ease some husbands’
discomfort.

¹⁶ See Akram (2002) for an interesting discussion of the variety of interpretations of
Islam in the context of immigration.

¹⁷ The opportunity to visit Britain in advance of the marriage is rare.

¹⁸ See Charsley (2003) for a review of the literature on izzat (honour) and control.

¹⁹ Interestingly, this formulation is sometimes given as advice to women as to how
wives can influence their husbands (P. Jeffery, pers. comm.).

²⁰ Such examples recall Chopra et al’s acute observation that men can appear as,
‘especially fragile persons who insist on especially powerful personae’ (2004: 14).

²¹ This period has since been extended to two years.