MODERN MARRIAGE

Bharat Edition



How young India and their families navigate the journey of marriage in Tier-2 and Tier 3 India

lokal | The India Notes

November 2026

Modern Marriage: Bharat Edition

For a long time in Bollywood, romance was an ultimatum: you either gave up on love to honour your family values or packed a bag and fled.

By contrast, traditional arranged marriages ran on obedience and patriarchal pride. The family chose the bride or groom, and saying no could feel like rejecting the family itself.
Choosing your own partner meant going against the family and paying a heavy price for it.

From movies like *Bobby* to *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*, lovers who challenged family values got a fatal melodrama. Then came Aditya Chopra's cult classic 1995 film *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*.

Everyone remembers that the protagonists Raj and Simran fell in love. But that is not the hinge. The hinge is what Raj does when Simran's mother offers jewellery and begs them to run before the father finds out.

He says no.

He does not steal Simran but walks into the household and awaits her father's blessing in front of the family.

And 30 years after he stood on that railway platform, the country seems to have taken the lesson more seriously than the songs. The interesting change is that India has quietly borrowed parts of love and arranged marriage.

Arranged marriage increasingly wants the language of love. Couples meet alone, talk for weeks or months, inspect each other's Instagram, negotiate careers and compatibility, take pre-wedding photographs and eventually tell the world they have found "the one." A match introduced by two families is expected to produce something that feels deeply personal.

Love marriage in Bharat has not turned into an individualist revolt. It is rarely "my way or the highway." The rebellion has not disappeared, but elopement is no longer the only proof of commitment. Couples recruit sisters, cousins and aunts to disclose their relationship. They think carefully about how to tell the mother, who can convince the father, and what will make the relationship easier for the family to defend. The couple may choose the person, but they also want their families to stick around and accept the marriage.

India's real marriage story sits somewhere between QSQT and DDLJ. Arranged marriage starts with an acceptable match and asks whether intimacy can grow inside it; love marriage starts with an intimate choice and asks whether a family can grow around it. But underneath, both journeys are trying to answer the same question:

How do you make a deeply personal choice belong to more people than the two who made it?

About Lokal

Lokal builds consumer products for India's native-language internet users, designed around their aspirations, everyday needs and local context. Our mission is to unlock their economic and social potential through products that understand their world and serve their everyday needs.

Founded in 2018 by Jani Pasha and Vipul Chaudhary, Lokal began with hyperlocal updates and information. Today, Lokal builds products that help people find work, learn new skills, seek guidance and find a life partner. Understanding their aspirations, language and local context is central to how we build.

2018

Founded by Jani Pasha & Vipul Chaudhary

100+

Apps across jobs, matrimony and everyday life in Bharat

10+

languages available across different apps

lokalapps.com →

About 1990 Research Labs

1990 Research Labs is a consumer intelligence lab in Bengaluru, founded by Dharmesh Ba. 1990RL empowers organisations to uncover deeper human motivations around why Indian customers do what they do through ethnographic and market research. They also publish The India Notes, a popular newsletter on Indian consumer insights. This report is published under The India Notes.

1990labs.com →

Why we built this study

Building for Bharat starts with understanding people's lives. At Lokal, we travel to small towns and remote communities across India, meet users, and conduct phone interviews and surveys to understand their aspirations and everyday challenges.

This research takes time and significant investment, making it expensive for every team to undertake independently. We realised that what we learn could help others build better products and services for the same people.

That's why we're collaborating with 1990 Research Labs to investigate important questions about people's lives and publish these insights. The Modern Marriage Report is one such effort, exploring how people choose life partners while navigating personal aspirations and family expectations.

Lokal's vision is to make the internet more accessible, relevant, and meaningful for millions of Bharat users. We believe these users deserve better products and services built around their needs. By sharing our research, we hope to help more teams understand Bharat deeply and build products that genuinely improve people's lives.

Acknowledgements

Modern Marriage: Bharat Edition is a joint study by Lokal and 1990 Research Labs. It looks at how marriage is negotiated in India's smaller cities, and at the conversations between a couple, their parents and their wider circle.

Our first thanks go to the 45 people who sat with us for in-depth interviews. They told us about hopes, compromises and arguments that are rarely said aloud. Names and identifying details have been changed to protect their privacy.

We are equally grateful to the 692 people who answered our survey: 287 Lokal users currently searching for a match, and 405 married respondents (263 in love marriages, 142 in arranged marriages).

At Lokal, Jani Pasha backed this report from the first conversation and gave it room to follow the evidence. Sambhram Changavi shaped the screener and survey. Akhila Lakkoju translated the survey into Telugu and brought it to Lokal's users. Vipul Chaudhary and the wider Lokal team reviewed drafts with care.

At 1990 Research Labs, the study was led by Dharmesh Ba and Vyshnavi Bodicherla with Arokiya Raj P and Sarguna Rakshana ran research operations, recruitment and survey data cleaning.

Lokal

Jani Pasha
Co-Founder & CEO

Vipul Chaudhary
Co-Founder

Sambhram Changavi
Head of UX Research

Akhila Lakkoju
Senior UX Researcher

1990 Research Labs

Dharmesh Ba
Founder & CEO, Principal Investigator

Vyshnavi Bodicherla
Research Lead

Ayushi Agrawal
Early fieldwork

Arokiya Raj P
Head of Operations

Design & website integration

Abhishek Das · Raghav Nikhil · Swathi S · Avinash Barua

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Research methodology

45
in-depth interviews
prospects and parents

692
survey respondents
arranged and love

21
interview cities
Tier-2 and Tier-3

8
states
north, central and south

What we set out to answer

01 Search channels
How do families move between apps, caste networks and offline brokers?

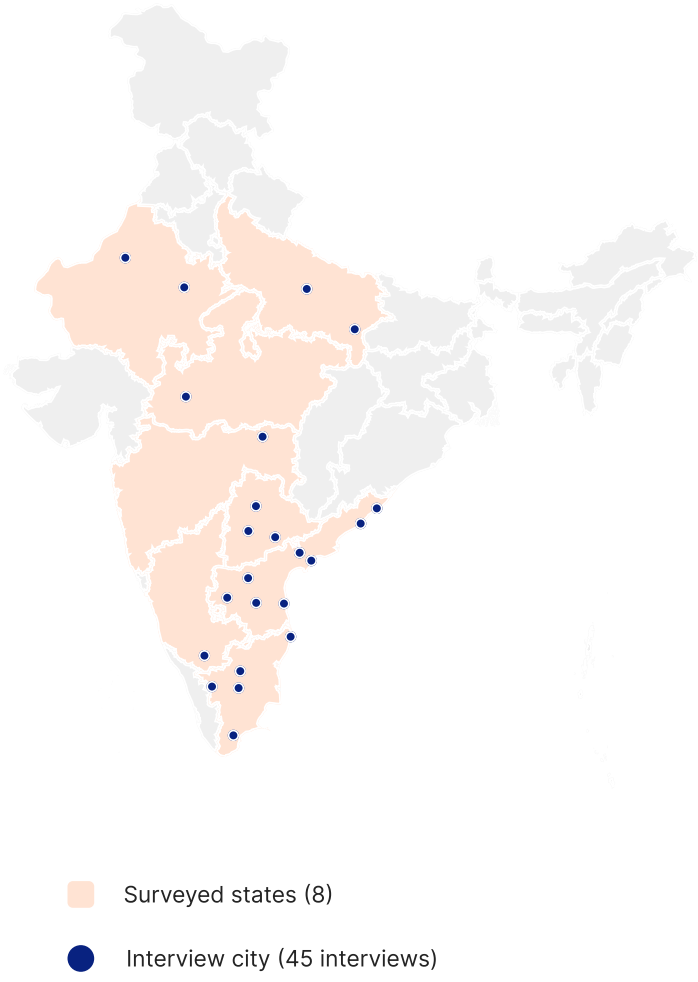
02 Approval
Whose "yes" is needed for a marriage to go ahead?

03 Criteria
Where do personal non-negotiables clash with parents' expectations?

04 Trust and checks
How do families verify claims and manage risk across towns?

05 Love to family approval
What turns a self-chosen relationship into an accepted marriage?

06 Where it breaks
Where do searches stall, and what support is missing?



Note: All participant names in this report have been pseudonymised to ensure confidentiality. Specific mentions of digital matchmaking platforms in qualitative anecdotes have been replaced with generic descriptions to maintain research neutrality.

Some participants moved from hometowns such as Vijayawada, Mysore, Coimbatore and Tiruvannamalai for work or study. We included them to see how city life reshapes expectations, while their marriage decisions and family approvals stay rooted in those hometowns.

Who we spoke to, and how

In-depth interviews · 45 people · 60–90 minutes each

Arranged marriage track — 24



Prospect Parent

18 prospects, 9 of them from Lokal's own database, and 6 parents

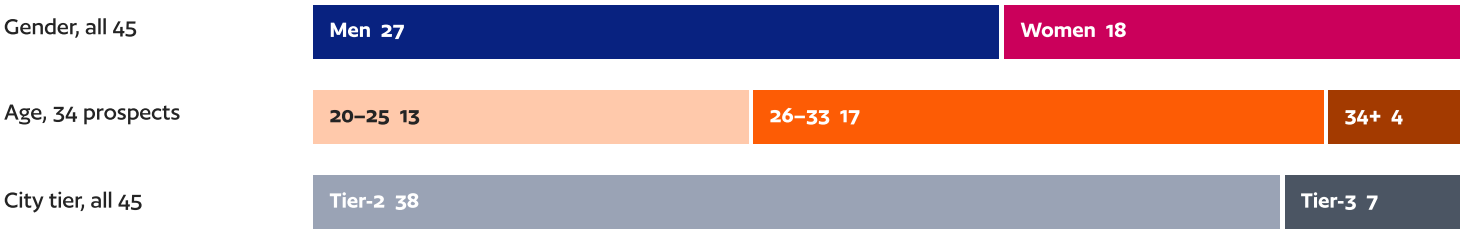
Love marriage track — 21



Prospect Parent

16 prospects (11 married, 3 not yet, 2 not recorded) and 5 parents

Who they were



Parents' ages, where recorded (7 of 11), were mostly 40 or older.

Survey · 692 people · across 8 states

To test the interview findings at scale.



Arranged, still searching on the Lokal app

Arranged, married through an agency

Love, married through an agency

Arranged respondents are 83% men (355 of 429); love respondents are split evenly (133 men, 130 women).

Three games inside every interview

Card exercises that show what people do, not just what they say.

01

Search channel journey

Put the channels they used in order, first to latest. Shows how fatigue builds across apps, brokers and caste groups.

02

What actually mattered

Sorted 14 criteria cards (caste, education, sense of humour…) into mattered a lot, a little, or not at all.

03

Verification checklist

Picked the checks they ran before saying yes: social media, mutual contacts, property, even detectives.

THE ARRANGED MARRIAGE JOURNEY

Arranged marriage is family-led: parents filter for suitability first, then hand over to the couple for compatibility.

TRIGGER

What age/time is ideal for marriage?

FAMILY SETTING CRITERIA



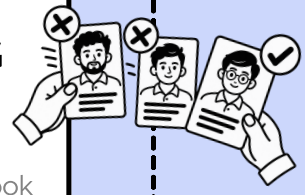
What does the family look for in a match?

LOOKING OUT



How does the family start looking for a match?

BIODATA FILTERING



What does one look for in a match?

MISMATCH & RESETTING THE SEARCH

Why do matches fall through?

REFUSAL LOOP

VERIFICATION LOOP

THE LOVE MARRIAGE JOURNEY

Love marriage is couple-led: partners build compatibility first, then bring in parents for family approval.

TRIGGER

What pushed dating into deciding to marry?

CONCEALMENT

How long was the relationship kept hidden?



THROUGH A CHANNEL

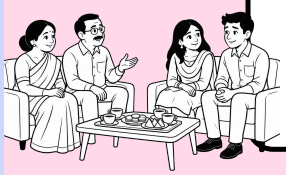
Who was trusted with the secret first?

FAMILY CURIOSITY

How did parents react when they found out?



FAMILY MEETING THE PARTNER



What questions were asked to the partner?

VERIFICATION LOOP

GETTING TO KNOW

Do the two people actually connect?



MEETING THE PROSPECT

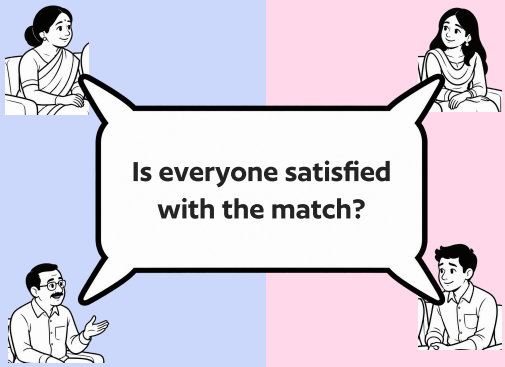
How do the two families evaluate each other?

VERIFICATION

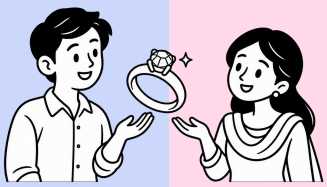
What all was verified before finalising the match?



FAMILY NEGOTIATION



AGREEMENT



THE ARRANGED MARRIAGE JOURNEY

CONVINCING

How did the couple convince parents?

VERIFICATION

What all was checked before finalising?



FAMILIES MEETING

What did the families discuss?

FAMILY NEGOTIATION

AGREEMENT

THE LOVE MARRIAGE JOURNEY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1

About the partners 2

Acknowledgements 3

Research Methodology 4

The Master Coordinate: The Marriage Journey Map 6

Executive Summary 8

CHAPTER 1: 11
Arranged marriage starts with credibility.
Love marriage starts with intimacy.

CHAPTER 2: 18
Love stays hidden until it can face the family

CHAPTER 3: 23
Location, caste, horoscope and money are
how families navigate marriage risk.

CHAPTER 4: 42
Family confidence and personal confidence
are built differently

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 5:
Repeated failures make some filters flexible and others stricter. 50

CHAPTER 6:
The family may accept your love interest and still shape your marriage. 57

CHAPTER 7:
The prospect may stop looking and yet the family might continue the search. 62

Conclusion 70

Addendum 71

Executive Summary

Every generation grows up with a picture of what a good life should look like. Long before we understand what marriage means, we are taught to imagine it. We see our parents, relatives, neighbours and the families around us. We borrow fragments of their lives and begin assembling our own dreams. Finding the right partner becomes one of life's most consequential decisions.

What has changed in the last decade is not the desire for a good life, but the number of lives we can now compare ours against.

For earlier generations, the reference points were relatively limited: family, neighbours, cinema, novels and the occasional glimpse into someone else's world.

Today, those windows have multiplied.
A cousin's honeymoon in Europe. A friend's anniversary dinner. An Instagram influencer couple building their dream home.

The good life is no longer something we imagine from a distance. We watch other people living versions of it every day.

And marriage sits at the centre of many of these aspirations.

People are no longer choosing only whom to marry. They are also choosing the life they believe that marriage will make possible.

The younger generation has acquired new expectations without entirely escaping the expectations of the previous generation.

Parents still worry about stability, reputation, community, financial security and whether two families can live with the consequences of a marriage. Young adults may want companionship and autonomy, but they are not necessarily willing to lose family belonging to secure them.

In an arranged marriage, families approve the match first, but finding and vetting a trusted stranger remains the primary bottleneck, cited by **63%** of arranged respondents as their greatest hurdle. In a love marriage, two people choose each other first, but **73%** still require mandatory parental approval, and **over 6 in 10** are forced to disclose under external pressure rather than on their own schedule.

A marriage is rarely one decision made by two people. It is a series of agreements reached by people who do not always want the same things.

Our research across Tier-2 and Tier-3 India explores these agreements through in-depth qualitative conversations, interactive exercises and a multi-state survey.

We examine how families choose where to search, how they establish trust in strangers, why caste and horoscopes continue to matter, how private relationships become family conversations, how repeated disappointments change expectations, and what finally makes a match acceptable. Across these journeys, we see that some older rules are becoming negotiable while new expectations are becoming harder to satisfy.

7 core themes

1 **Intimacy and legitimacy are opposite starting assets**: Arranged matches start with social legitimacy and must build interpersonal intimacy. Love matches start with intimacy and must fight for family legitimacy.

2 **Love stays hidden until forced:** Couples conceal relationships until something forces disclosure, most often being caught or a leaked photo or message (39%), less often a family match search (14%).

3 **Love enters the family through trusted allies:** Siblings, cousins and relatives often learn about the relationship first. They help convince parents and build family acceptance.

4 **Search fatigue loosens paper gates, hardens trust:** As searches drag on, families broaden acceptable age and income filters, but become significantly stricter on behavioural background checks.

5 **The parallel investigation track:** In arranged searches, families verify status and property while candidates secretly build a private evidence stream to check emotional compatibility.

6 **Caste & kundli as negotiating equipment:** Rather than absolute rules, horoscopes and community norms are frequently repurposed as diplomatic tools to delay, block, or bless matches.

7 **The two clocks of marriage:** Arranged setups operate on compressed, high-velocity timelines driven by parents, while self-chosen relationships run on extended, uncertain timelines.

63%

Stall on finding & verifying matches

Discovery and background verification are the single largest points of friction in arranged search.

62%

Forced into disclosure

Respondents in love marriages only told their families because an external event forced it (e.g. they were caught or a photo or message got out, 39%, or a family match search began, 14%).

34%

Searches over 1 year

Over a third of arranged respondents spend more than 12 months in the search loop.

7 in 10

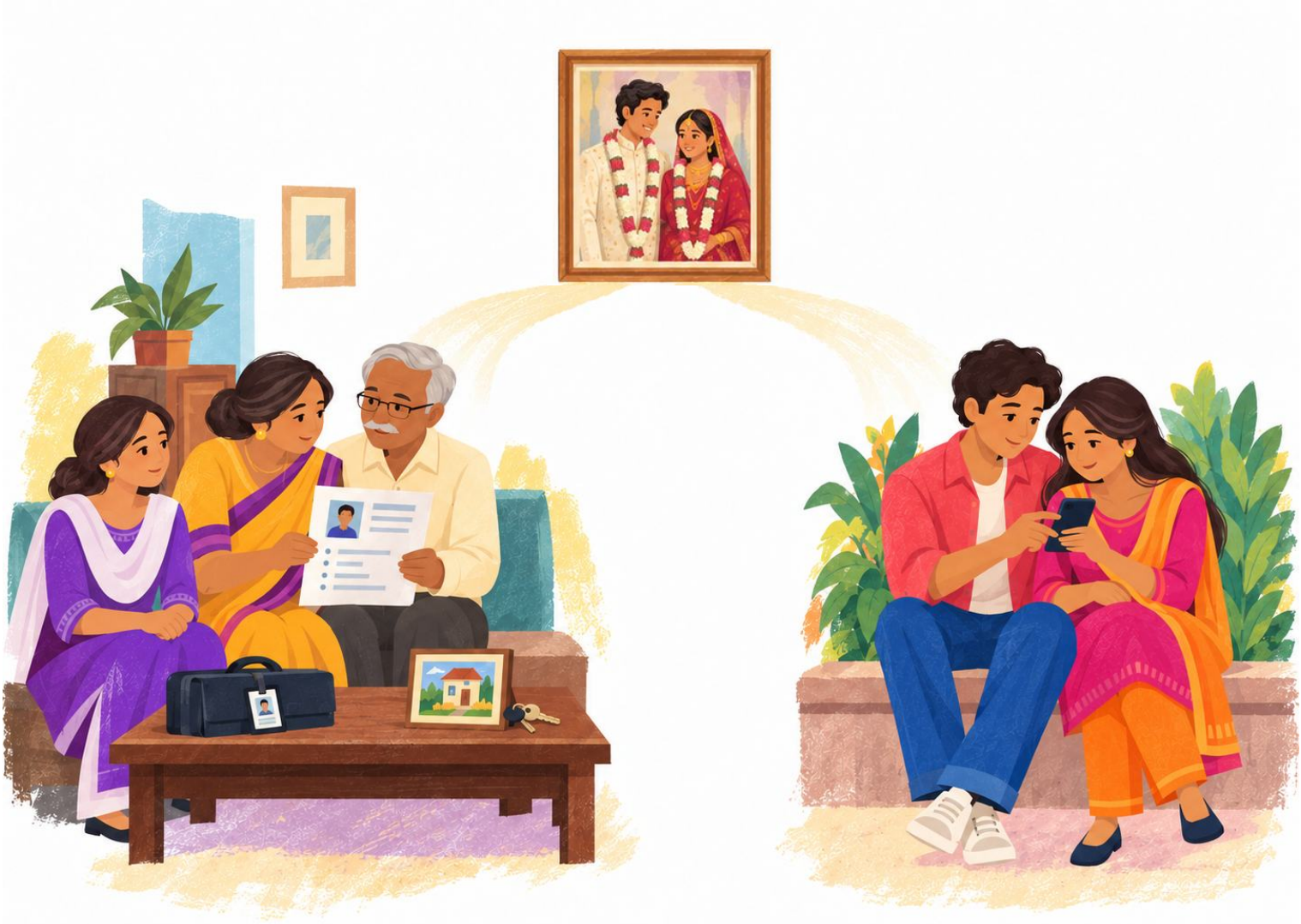
Kept love hidden initially

69% confided in siblings, cousins or friends before telling their parents.

48%

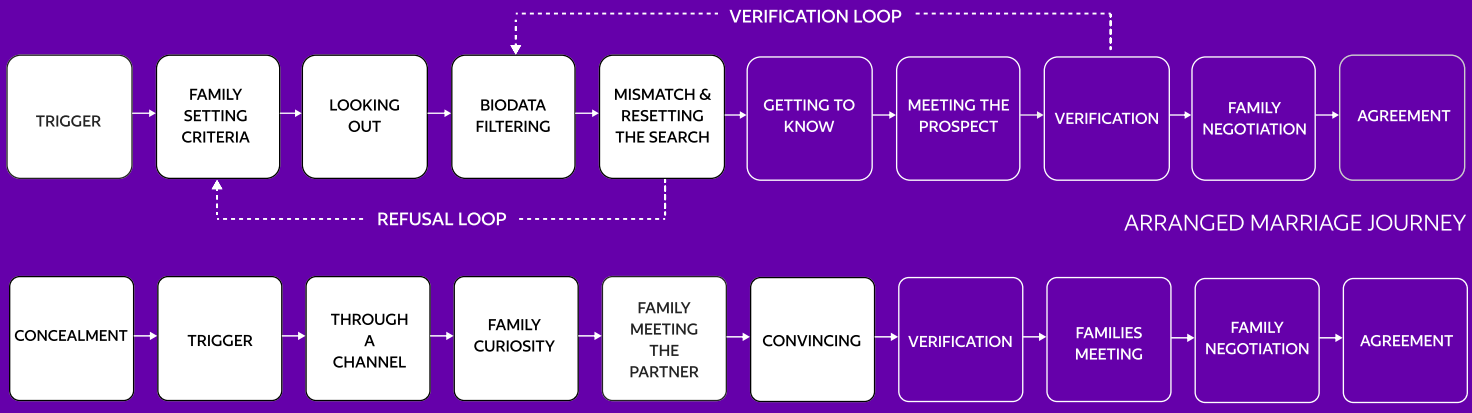
Still call caste non-negotiable

Even among couples who chose their own partner, 48% still stated that caste was a non-negotiable criterion. Many young adults subconsciously date within their own caste or community so that the subsequent battle for parental approval is actually winnable.



01

Arranged marriage starts with *credibility*. Love marriage starts with *intimacy*.



White boxes indicate stages where this theme appears in the journey.

An arranged match turns a socially approved stranger into a known person. A love match turns a known person into a socially approved match.

Every marriage in Bharat needs personal connection and family acceptance. What changes is where it begins.

Arranged marriage starts with an acceptable match and builds personal connection. Love marriage starts with a relationship and works towards family acceptance.

The two journeys below show what happens when one exists without the other.

The Arranged Path

K. Deepthi is 25 and teaches at a DAV school in Visakhapatnam. She has been looking for a prospect for a couple of years. Her elder brother put her on two online matrimonial platforms. Aunts and a broker feed her father's WhatsApp with boys' biodata. Dad's brief was plain: same caste, good family, decent work – private sector or railway is fine if the work is good. While profiles arrived with social approval, K. Deepthi was free to make the final decision for herself.

> "Dad told me only to choose... Whatever profile comes, they send it on WhatsApp and say take a look, talk, whatever feels right then tell us."

She used her prerogative and said no to two people, one of whom was a match approved by her father. The family looked good on paper; however, she felt like she did not ***know*** the person.

> "Dad saw that [the] family background [was] good. But what I like[d], I don't know, but I felt like no, I don't want to do it right now with him... When he asked for a reason, there wasn't really a reason like that for me to say something."

She then went on to explain her rationale.



> "That boy didn't really talk to me ever. So just his parents talked, so I didn't feel like yeah let's move forward... because he didn't talk, right, whatever was there was only from his parents' side. So in the end[, what] if he says no[?] So that's why I didn't do it."

The boy's parents visited K. Deepthi's home a few times but he never accompanied them. K. Deepthi's uncle did not find this unusual. He sought to justify this, saying, "Maybe the boy was not interested. Maybe his parents were checking first."

K. Deepthi neither asked why he was absent nor did she demand to speak to him. She was certain about saying no without knowing enough about him.

The Love Path

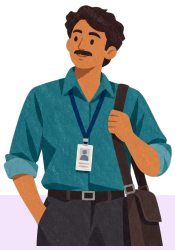
Phani Satya was 22, a front-end developer from Vijayawada. His wife was an accountant who had grown up three houses away from him in the same city.

They had known each other since Class 10. They went to the same college, fell in love after intermediate and began dating during his first year of B.Tech.

For years the relationship was confidential. Her sister knew early. His brother in Australia knew and helped him financially. Parents were told later.

Phani Satya was eager to tell his parents early, believing his parents would readily accept a familiar neighbour. She urged him to wait until his career was secure, protecting the relationship until it was strong enough to face the families.

For the couple, years together were evidence. For her family, his future still needed proof.



> “They [her parents] were concerned that... at that time I [didn't] have [a] job... So they were a bit concerned like how we will manage if we get married right now. So they [didn't accept] at that time... For the sake of marriage only, I was very desperate and got the job.”

He finished B.Tech in 2021, got a job in two months, and married within three months of the job. The hurdle was not community fit, but financial stability.

K. Deepthi had family approval, but did not know the person. Phani Satya knew the person, but still needed family approval.

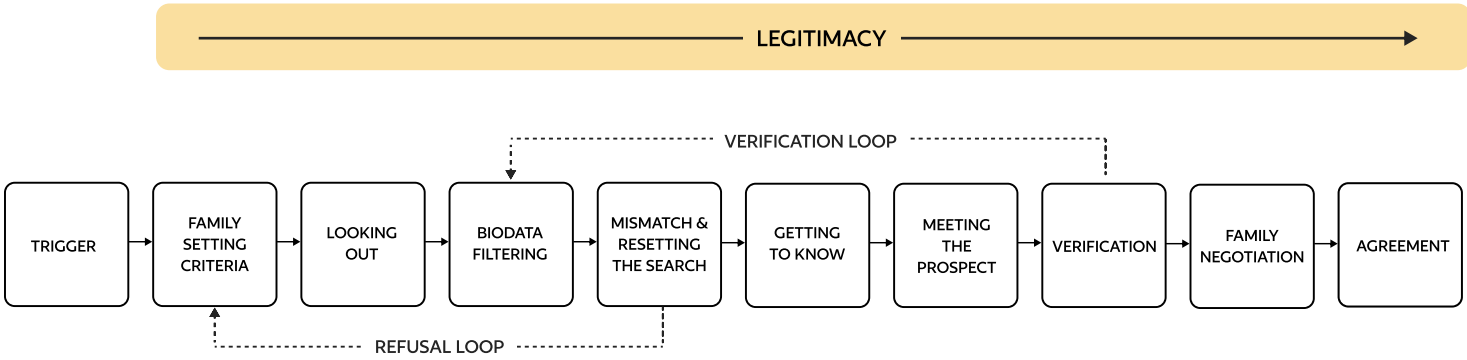
One had legitimacy without intimacy. The other had intimacy without legitimacy.

Same marriage problem. Opposite starting points.

Each journey begins with one form of confidence and must build the other before agreement.

THE ARRANGED MARRIAGE JOURNEY

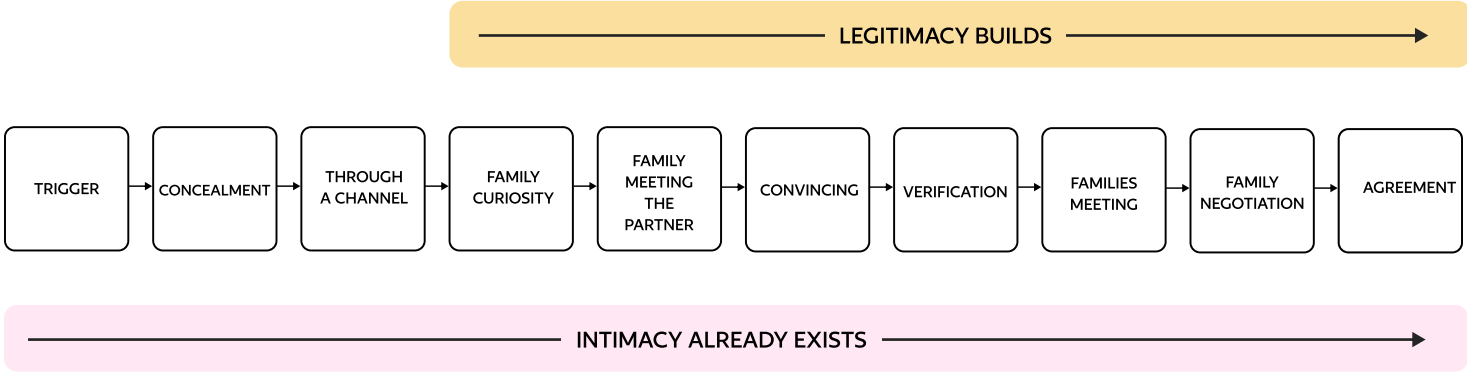
This is when the family defines what makes someone an acceptable match. Here, legitimacy begins to be actively evaluated.



The approved profile begins to become a known person. 'Getting to Know' is where intimacy starts being built through direct conversation and interaction.

THE LOVE MARRIAGE JOURNEY

Here, the private relationship enters the family system. 'Family Curiosity' is where legitimacy begins to be actively evaluated.



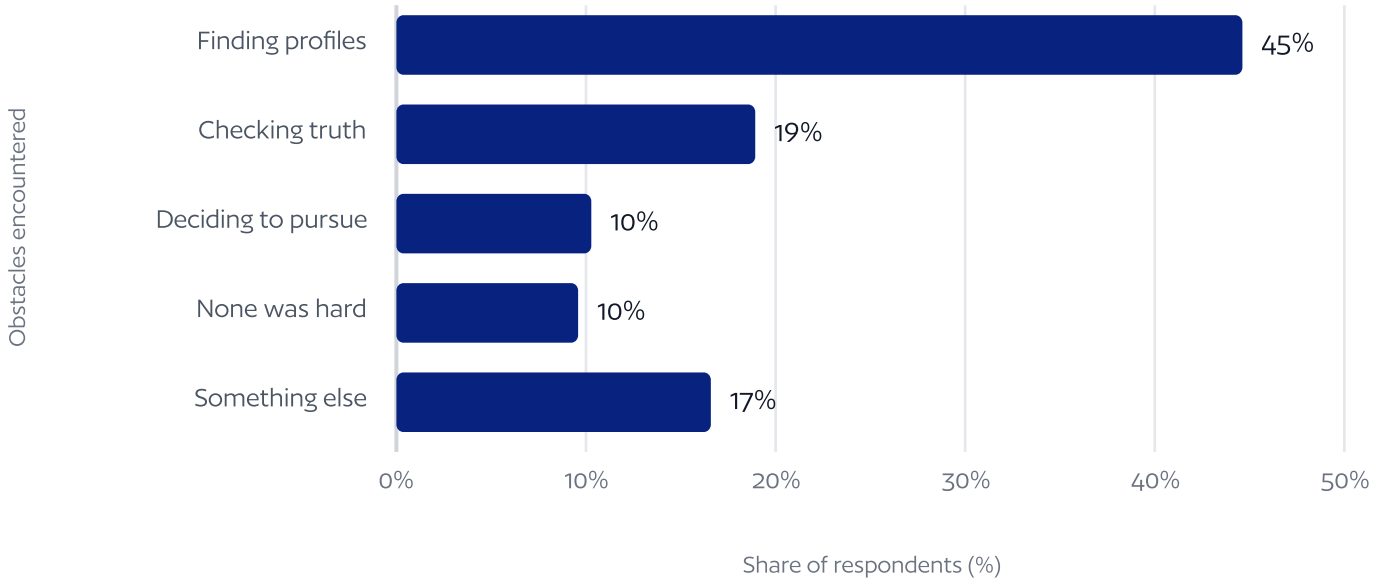
Intimacy already exists before the relationship enters the family system. 'Concealment' protects a bond the couple has built through knowing each other privately.

Figure 1: What are the primary challenges in arranged vs love marriage?

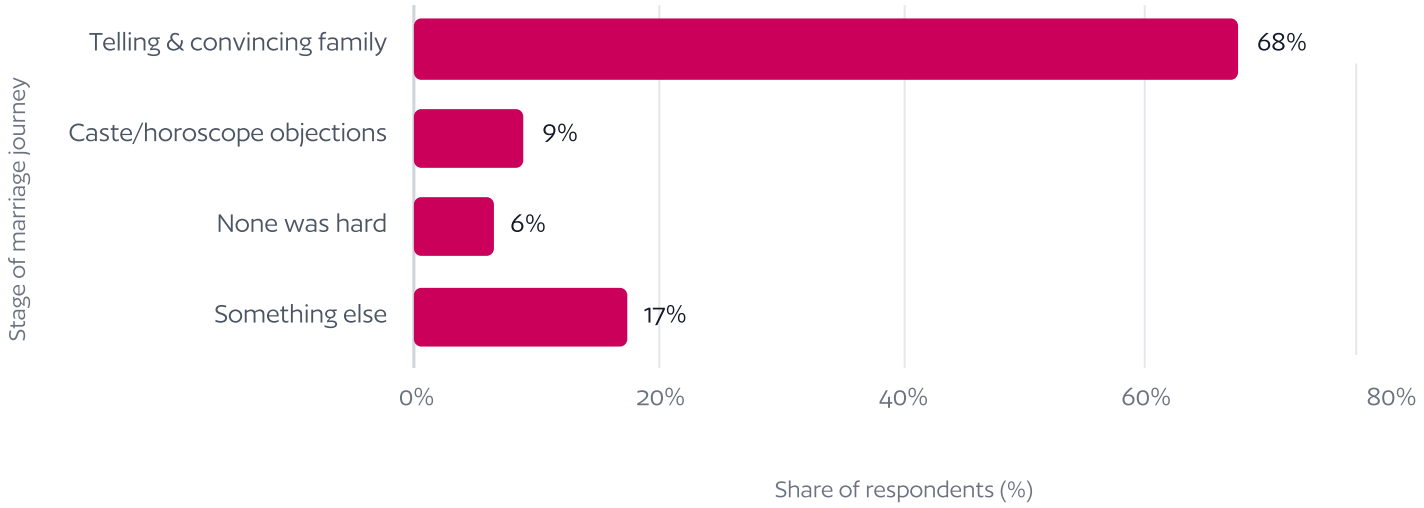
63% of the arranged group say finding profiles or checking truth was the hardest.

68% of the love group say disclosing to or convincing family was the hardest.

Primary challenges in arranged marriage (n=429)



Primary challenges in love marriage (n=263)



Kaveri Agrawal, 30, woman, Indore

Her match was initiated through a community WhatsApp group for Agrawals in Indore, a same-caste channel preferred by her father over commercial matrimony apps.

While the biodata had full social approval, practical compatibility nearly collapsed the match. In their early meetings, Kaveri discovered they were lifestyle opposites: she was fitness-conscious while he was a foodie with a thyroid condition, and she was terrified of the ritual restrictions of his joint family.

It took four family meetings, his promise to join a gym, and personal reassurance from her mother-in-law regarding daily clothing before she agreed.

Intimacy in arranged marriage is not absent; it is negotiated only after family legitimacy is secure.



Bhavna Sharma, 28, woman, Jaipur

What started as a college friendship for a few years blossomed into a relationship with marriage as the end goal.

“We know each other so well, vibes were also matching.”

Same caste, same gotra – the gotra problem became the legitimacy fight. Papa objected; grandfather eventually convinced him.

The husband's family worried less about gotra than about the fact that he was marrying a girl of his own choosing. The couple kept drawing on their intimacy stock to argue their case: we already know each other; we will convince them.

The relationship was already strong. The question was whether the family would accept it as a marriage.

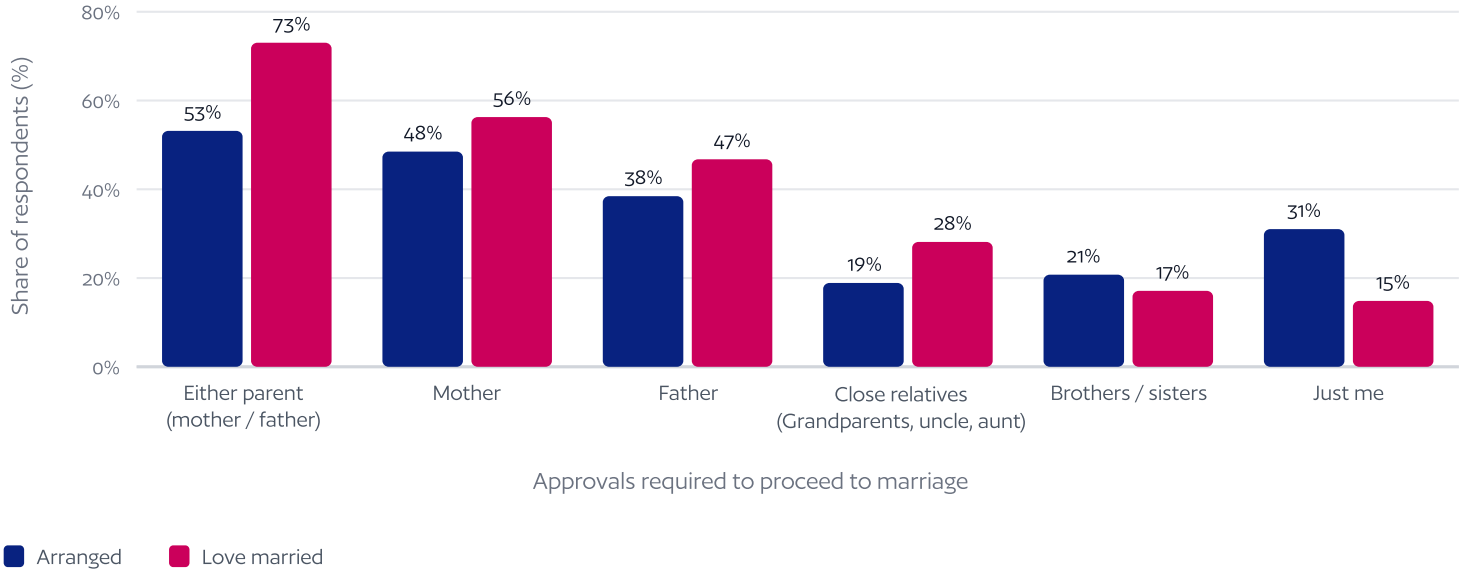


Figure 2: Whose approval is needed to proceed with the marriage?

Share of respondents requiring explicit consent from family tiers. N=692 (287 currently searching; 142 married); Love n=263 (all married).

73% of love marriages still needed parents' approval, led by mothers (56%) over fathers (47%).

31% of arranged respondents needed only their own yes, double the love group (15%). It peaks among those still searching at 34+ (44%), against 20% of those already married. When the search runs long, families step back.



Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities

Almost every voice above is from a Tier-2 city resident, namely Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, Indore and Jaipur. Across smaller cities, both personal connection and family acceptance still matter. What changes is which one comes first.

In smaller cities, this happens through familiar networks: relatives, WhatsApp groups, brokers, matrimony apps, neighbours and community connections. These networks can make family acceptance especially important because the marriage is rarely evaluated by the couple alone.

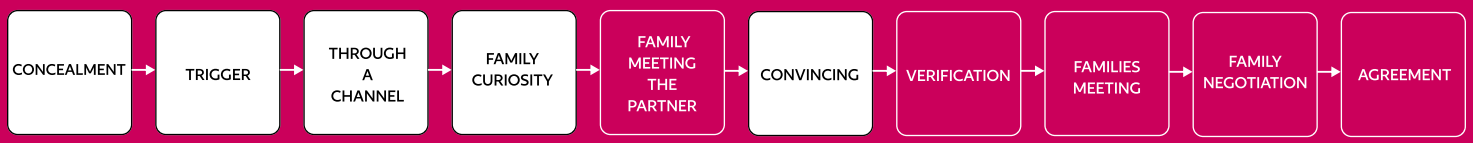
So love and arranged marriage are not opposites here. They start with different advantages and then work to build what is missing.

Arranged marriage has to turn an acceptable match into a known person. Love marriage has to turn a known person into an acceptable match.



02

Love stays hidden until it can face the family



White boxes indicate stages where this theme appears in the journey.

LOVE MARRIAGE JOURNEY

Love stays hidden until the couple believes the relationship can survive family scrutiny.

In love marriages, being in love and being ready to marry are not the same thing.

Love is the slow work of knowing someone before marriage becomes the question – weekends spent together, preferences debated, small disagreements weathered, career worries shared, and the growing sense that life with this person feels possible. But marriage is a different machine, and it brings a different set of questions.

So love often stays off the family table on purpose. Not only because of fear. Because disclosing early turns a nascent relationship into a biodata evaluation before the couple has decided the prospect is marriage material.

Friends get to know the love – sometimes a sibling or a cousin – because they can share the relationship banter.

When they finally decide to disclose to the family, it needs someone the house already listens to: a married sister, or a cousin brother who will vouch for the prospect. That person's credibility is on the line. Friends are usually not that person.

And there is no rulebook for when to disclose. Some couples tell when both houses start "looking", forced into disclosure as prospective biodatas and proposals start arriving on the family's WhatsApp.

Sunil Yadav, 27, man, Indore

Sunil Yadav, aged 27, is a sports teacher in Indore. His partner, also from Indore, is the same age and works in a BPO. They met in college around 2019. Lockdown talks deepened their bond. Their friends knew about the relationship but their parents did not.

> "About the relationship, like mostly it happens that friends are more involved, they are the first ones to find out."

They were on the same page about marriage being the end goal, but decided to wait for the right time. Earlier, career stability was a priority. After they felt a little settled, the idea of marriage started taking shape.

> "No, the decision to tell the family happened such that when the family members themselves started pressuring that okay let's get married now, when for me too family members started saying that no there are relatives, need to see a girl, and her family also started saying that no let's look at boys, now age is getting along so need to get married... So then slowly [I] told."



Sunil Yadav's mother had already brought up the subject of marriage, which made him open up to her about his relationship. Initially, she did not agree to it. This back-and-forth went on for many days. Mom brought his elder sister into the conversation, and she ended up scolding him. Dad found out but did not talk to him about it. The ultimate work was convincing Mom.

At Sunil Yadav's place, his sister is the person with authority.



> "I mostly convinced my sister, because at my home it happens that family members listen to my sister more. So mom — had to convince mom of course — but had to convince sister more. If once sister was convinced, then sister herself could convince mom. And it happened just like that."

His father worried about what relatives would think. Sunil Yadav's response was simple: "If the marriage struggles, those relatives will not be the ones living with the consequences or helping anyway."

Parents worry about love marriage because relatives step away. When a match is arranged, the community helps fix problems if the marriage struggles. In love marriage, the family carries every failure on their own.

What this means

Love ≠ marriage readiness.
A couple can be sure about each other long before they are ready to tell the family.

Privacy buys time.
Couples use it to build confidence, careers and stability before turning love into a family decision.

Different people matter at different stages.
Friends help protect the relationship; siblings, cousins and elders can help legitimise it.

Being caught, more than the search, forces disclosure. 39% were caught or had a photo or message get out; 14% were pushed by a family match search.

There is no perfect time to tell.
Some disclose early; others wait for jobs, stability or incoming proposals to force the conversation.

Two families run on different clocks.
One side may be ready while the other needs months or years.

Love can be equally shared but the work of bringing it home rarely is.

Figure 3: In love marriage, who gets to hear the love first?

Share of love marriage respondents (%) by first confidant informed outside the couple. N=263 (Love marriages)

69% of respondents in love marriages told someone other than their parents first.

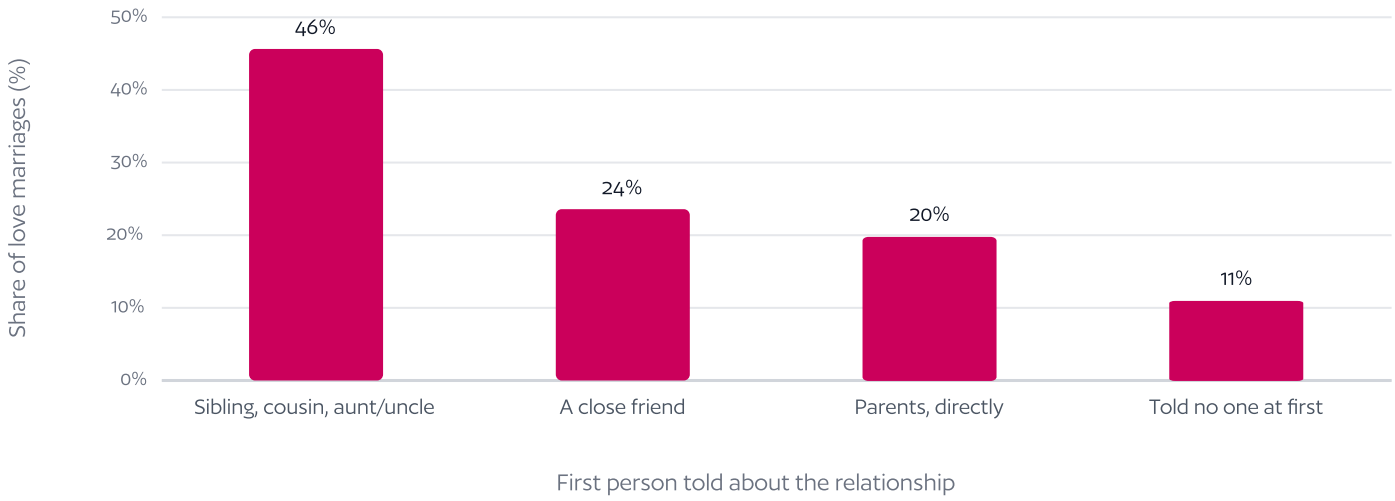
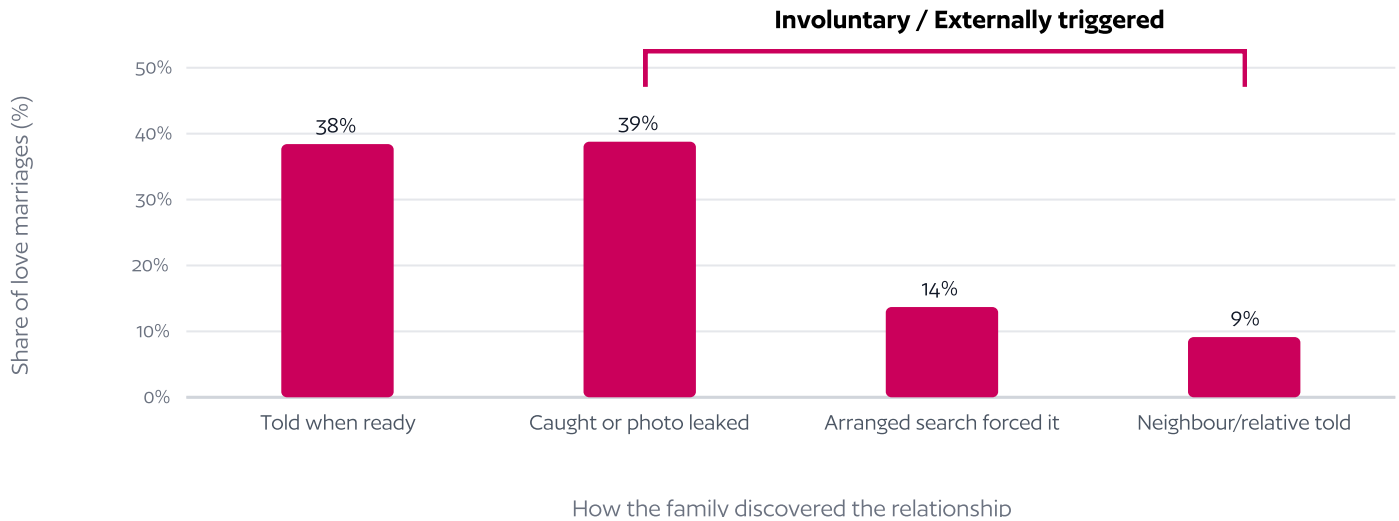


Figure 4: What drives love couples to tell their families?

Share of love marriage respondents (%) by mode of disclosure (voluntary vs caught/leaked vs forced search). N=263 (Love marriages)



62% were forced into disclosure by external events (caught 39%, arranged search 14%, relative told 9%) – only 38% told on their own schedule.



Simran, 26, woman, Indore

While she was in a relationship, her parents were already receiving profiles. Earlier, she chose to keep her relationship private. However, as things soured, her mother noticed her anxiety and that led her to open up.

The last step was the disclosure: “I am ready to tell my parents. Are you ready to tell yours?”
He was not Sikh, but he was from roughly the same caste. He hesitated, saying “nahi, main ghar pe kaise bolun?” He would not talk to his parents or hers.

For her parents, that was the dealbreaker, and the relationship ended there. In their view, both partners must be strong enough to take a stand in front of their family. If one partner refuses to face their parents, a hidden relationship cannot become a marriage; it only ends up collapsing back into an arranged search.



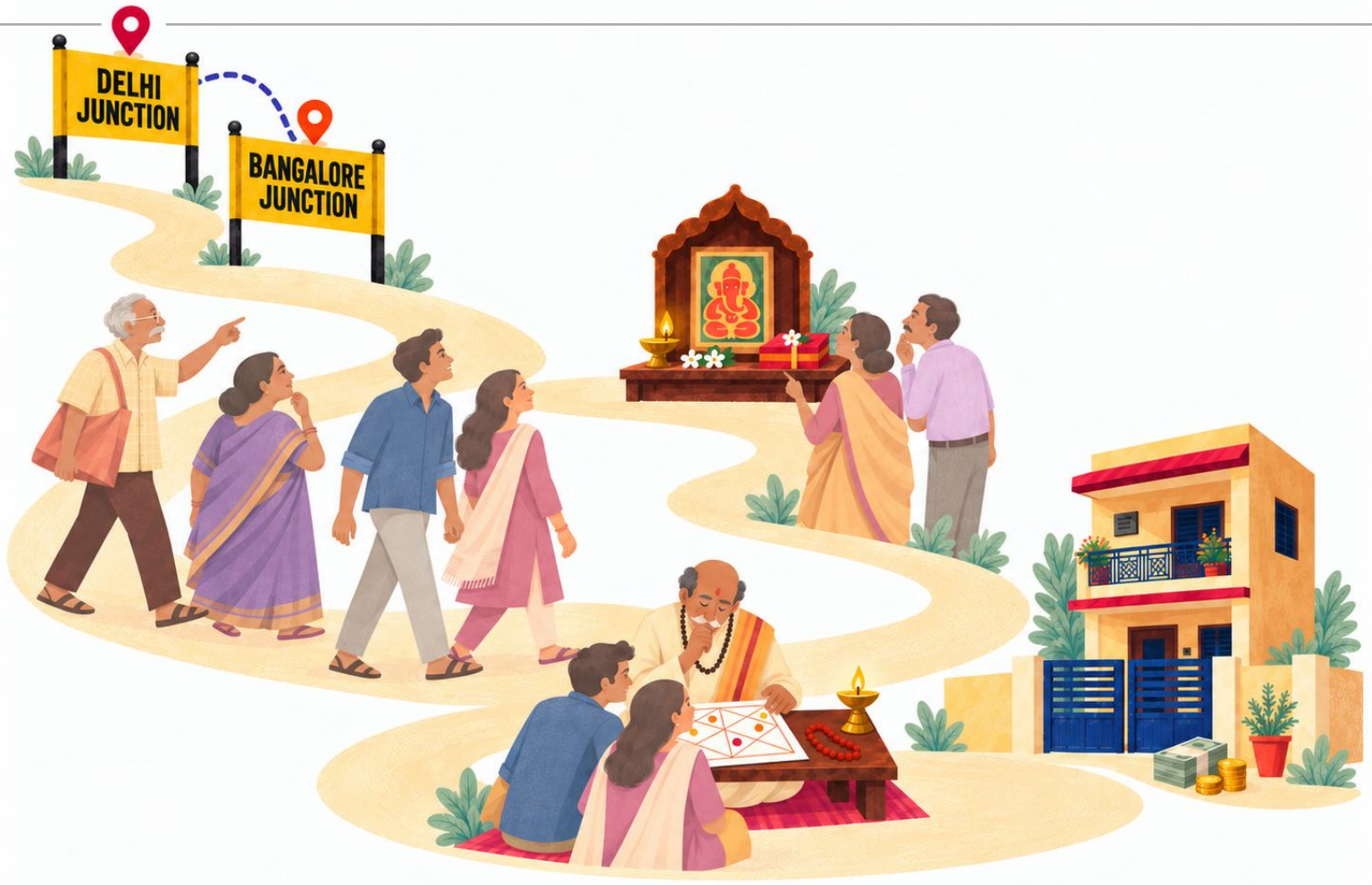
Anbalagan Palani, 26, man, Thiruvannamalai

Anbalagan Palani’s relationship did not stay hidden like many others. His salary was good, and from his partner’s family’s perspective there was little obvious reason to reject him.

However, his family was different. His parents were farmers from a modest background, and their influence weakened as he became financially independent. As he put it, “Once I crossed a six-digit salary, my parents didn’t interfere.”

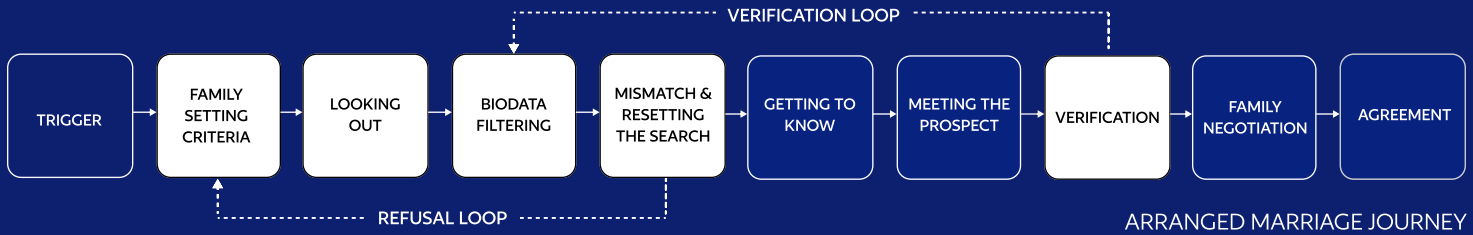
Money changed who had the confidence to make the decision. Once he could support himself, having a partner of his choice became harder for his parents to contest.

Love came first. Stability made it easier to bring love home.

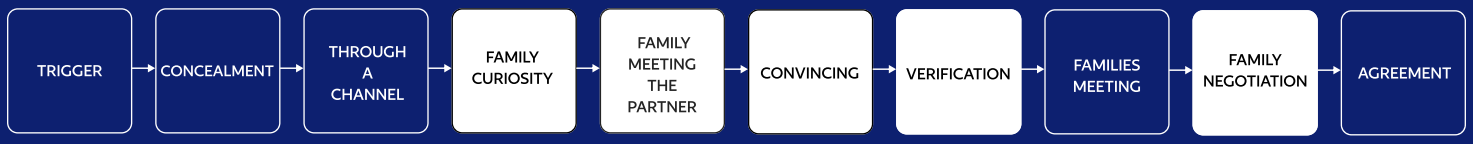


03

Location, caste, horoscope and money are how families navigate marriage risk.



ARRANGED MARRIAGE JOURNEY



White boxes indicate stages where this theme appears in the journey.

LOVE MARRIAGE JOURNEY

Criteria in biodata look like filters for a person but they are often filters for the life a family wants to build.

Every person we spoke to had some criteria around caste, location, salary, and horoscope. These filters are parameters for reducing the risk of bringing the wrong person into the family.

A caste criterion is a negotiation with social acceptance. A horoscope criterion is a negotiation with fate. And a salary criterion is a negotiation with security and stability.

Families are often trying to avoid specific problems:
Who will care for ageing parents?
Will food and rituals create conflict?
Can a horoscope problem be worked around?
Will the couple be financially independent?

These filters don't go away in a love marriage. They come back the moment families step in.



Ishita, 29, woman, Lucknow (love marriage)
Ishita is a Punjabi woman from the Sikh community in Lucknow. The man she married is a Brahmin. Individually, both sets of parents liked the other person. But when the conversations turned towards marriage, liking alone was not enough.

His family was worried that she would not fit into a Brahmin household. Her side worried about the same. In her words, Punjabis are "more broad-minded" and "full of life." His household felt rigid in comparison. This would be the first love marriage in his family, that too with someone from a different caste. His side of the family reiterated that she would not be able to adjust.

When they use the word "adjust", she explains, they mean rituals and ceremonies that are different. Punjabis do not keep a lot of fasts except Karwa Chauth, which is also optional. A typical Brahmin house keeps "all sorts of fasts", celebrates Janmashtami and festivals with the full ritual load, and holds that things have to be a certain way.

Then came the line that truly defined what it meant to adjust: "Being a daughter-in-law, these things are expected from you."

She faced a collision of lifestyles: different dietary habits, adjusting to a 14-person joint household versus the nuclear house she came from, and expectations of a "typical Brahmin daughter-in-law."

The family wanted to know whether she would adjust to their household routines and expectations as a daughter-in-law, or whether it would lead to conflicts and criticism from relatives.

Post-marriage, she could be sitting in a normal night suit without a mangalsutra, sindoor, or bindi, while a sister-in-law performs the full typical markers. Her husband's support became non-negotiable in preserving her freedom.

Her parents still faced aunts who asked:
Why not Punjabi?
Why a love marriage?
Why a different caste?
Even after her immediate family had accepted the relationship, those questions did not disappear.

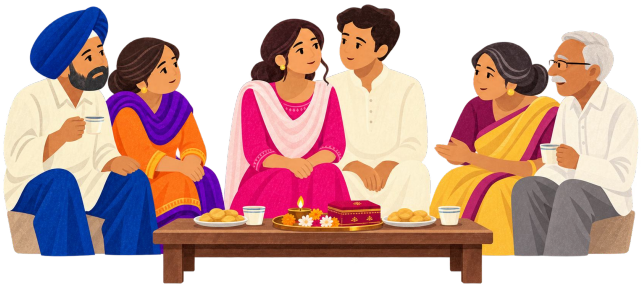
Listen to how dual the track is.

Ishita's parents had already accepted her choice. They liked the boy, had known him for two or three years, and had met his family. But relatives kept asking about marriage proposals. Her father made it clear they were not looking. Although her parents had concerns about him being Brahmin, they were willing to support the marriage if Ishita felt she could adjust and be happy.

Her aunts still wanted her to marry a Punjabi boy. Their concern wasn't explicitly about caste. They saw love marriage itself as risky, believing it could lead to problems in Indian families.

The roka, or formal engagement, was the first time both families came together. Relatives who had only heard about the couple finally met in person. It was through this meeting that the families began building a relationship.

Family acceptance, then, wasn't simply about meeting a checklist of criteria. It also depended on people meeting and getting comfortable with one another.



Four criteria to predict risk and future

Location	Who moves, and whether both families remain close
Caste	Whether everyday family life will fit. For example, food, rituals, roles and relatives
Horoscope	Whether the match feels safe enough to proceed
Money / salary / house	Whether the couple will be financially secure and socially matched

3.1 Location: who moves and whose future stays reachable?

"Nearby" is rarely just a location preference. It decides who stays close to parents, who moves, and whose career has to adjust.

For some, living nearby means being able to care for ageing parents. For others, location matters because of their career. These priorities can clash when the right job is far from where the family wants them to live. Women are often expected to move into the husband's geography, though the interviews also show clear exceptions, where women protect their career location or men are willing to move.

Location is not just about where the couple will live. It is also about whose career will be affected and who will have to live farther from their parents.

Shivani Arora, 29, woman, Lucknow
For Shivani, who had recently agreed to an arranged match, the location filter was less about a preference for a metro lifestyle and more about whether she could visit her parents when they needed her.



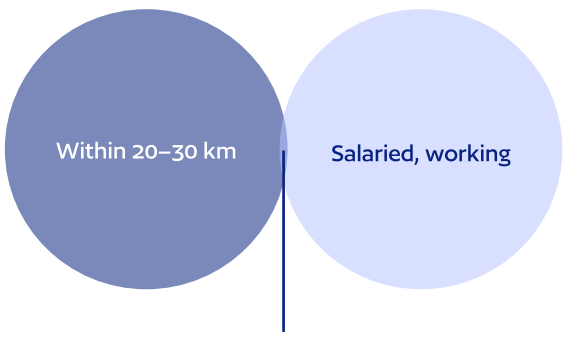
"Because I am a single child, that's why I wanted to stay near my parents. Whenever they need, I can come. Many people were from Bangalore side, Mumbai, so coming from there would have been a bit tough. For a partner, I wanted Lucknow or around Lucknow, up to Delhi and Noida side."

Noida cleared the bar. But prospects from Bengaluru and Mumbai did not, and suggestions from relatives of prospects from faraway cities or abroad were turned down. She was prepared to move to her future husband's city, but the filter was set so that her parents remained within a come-and-go radius.

That is the requirement: eldercare reach after she marries out.

Put that next to Hemachandra in Nellore, who has the same preference but a different collision. He wants a working girl and someone from "Nellore or a little further out, around 20–30 km." He was either getting prospects from faraway cities who were working but unwilling to move, or prospects from nearby towns who were unwilling to work.

"I looked within our district, around 20 to 30 kilometres... It's enough if she does a job and has minimum education like a degree. But when we look nearby, we don't find girls who have both a degree and a job. The ones with jobs are farther away, and the ones nearby don't work."



Overlap ≈ 0
the impossible pool

What this means

Location is rarely just about choosing a city. It is about deciding what should remain possible after marriage.

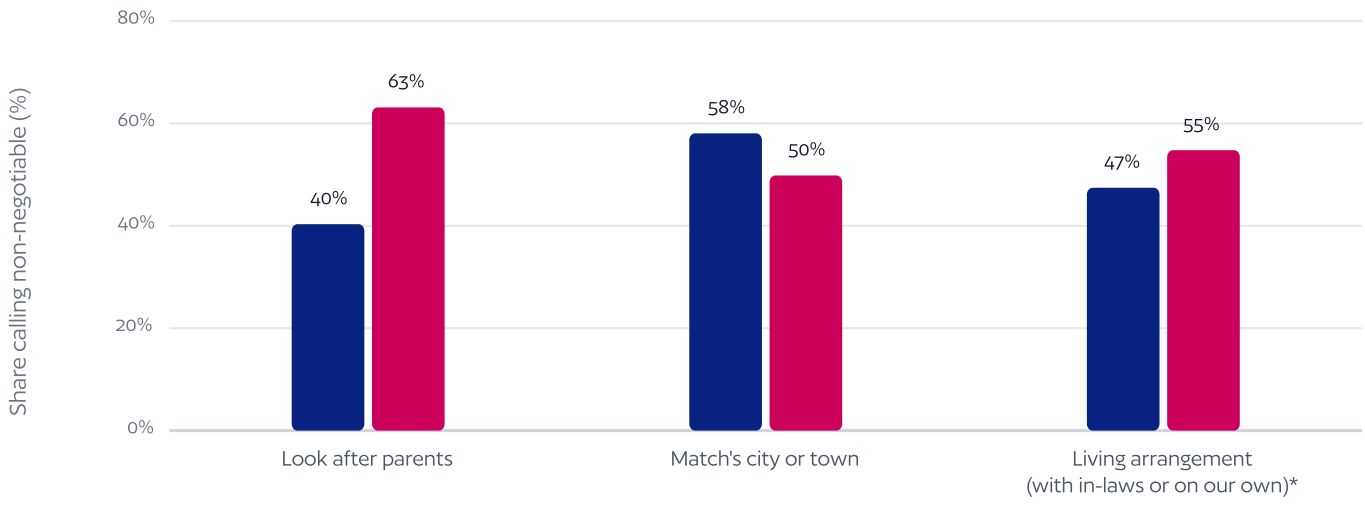
- **Parents:** Can I still reach them when they need me?
- **Two families:** Can we manage festivals, functions and regular visits?
- **Careers:** Can both people continue to find good work?
- **Distance:** How far can we move before one of these becomes difficult?

The woman moving to the husband's city is common in the interviews, but not universal; some women protect their career geography, and some men are willing to relocate.

Figure 5: How non-negotiable are location and living arrangements?

Share of respondents rating location, eldercare, and household living arrangements as non-negotiable (%), Arranged vs Love. N=692 (287 currently searching; 142 married); Love n=263 (all married).

58% of arranged respondents said the city or town a match lives in was non-negotiable when choosing (vs 50% in love).



*Share for whom living with in-laws or on their own was a dealbreaker either way. It doesn't show which setup they preferred.

Arranged Love married

3.2 Caste: household fit, adjustment asymmetry, next-gen risk

Caste is rarely discussed only as a label. Families often talk about the life they believe comes with it.

This also reveals an asymmetry: "adjustment" often means the woman adapting to the husband's household. But caste is not equally rigid everywhere. Some families negotiate after knowing the person. Others are open only to certain castes. Some boundaries do not move at all.

Being "open to other castes" means different things to different families. Caste may no longer decide whom someone can marry, but it can still shape concerns about the family they are marrying into and the expectations of married life.

Shubham Singh Kushwah is from Indore. The woman he married was from a different caste. **For him, that was not the problem. For his family, it was.** It took three years to convince them. His sister supported him first. His mother stopped speaking to him for months. His father remained firm.

> "My father just kept saying what the relatives would say, that I married in another caste, this and that. Majorly he was just thinking what people would say. That was the biggest problem."

But the worry went beyond gossip about this marriage. **His parents were already imagining what an inter-caste marriage might do to the family's future.**

They worried that when Shubham Singh Kushwah had children, their mixed-caste background could make it harder for them to find matches. They worried about how relatives would see the family and whether other marriages in the family would be affected.

> "They were thinking that if you have a baby in the future, then there will be a problem in getting him/her married because the background will be checked, so they will come to know that your wife is of another caste. They were thinking too far ahead rather than how happy I am today."

For Shubham Singh Kushwah, the evidence was the relationship in front of him. **For his parents, the risk stretched into marriages that had not happened and children who had not even been born.**



What this means

Same-caste love is easier to explain.
The family may not have chosen the person, but caste makes the choice feel more familiar and acceptable.

“Open to other castes” often has limits.
A family may accept Jain or Agrawal, for example, while keeping religion, location or other caste boundaries fixed.

The boundaries can get very specific.
Caste, sub-caste and gotra can each become separate checks.

Families think beyond the current marriage.
They worry about how an inter-caste marriage could affect siblings, cousins or even their future grandchildren’s matches.

So caste is not simply fading.
In some families the boundary is widening, but the logic behind it – family fit, social acceptance and future alliances – can remain.

3.3 Horoscope: gate, namesake, remedies; the forgery that was refused

The importance of a horoscope depends on when it is checked. In some arranged marriages, families compare kundlis before the couple even speaks. A mismatch can end the proposal before the two people get a chance to know each other.

In love marriage, the same kundli may arrive after years together. Here, it does something different: it gives the family reassurance about a relationship that already exists.

And a mismatch does not always mean rejection. Some families seek another opinion, perform a puja or follow a priest's remedy. Others treat the result as final. Some barely use horoscopes at all.

What matters, then, is not simply whether a family "believes in horoscope." It is when they check it, who cares about it, and what they do when it does not match.

Families do not use every criterion equally. They lean hardest on the ones they believe will protect them from an uncertain future.

Shubham Singh Kushwah (continued from page 28, 3.2 – Caste: household fit, adjustment asymmetry, next-gen risk)

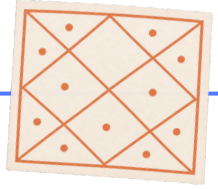
His story did not end with his family's objections over caste. After three years of resistance, both families checked the kundli and it matched. For his parents, the horoscope offered reassurance to say yes to the risky marriage.

The same family that had worried about caste, relatives and future children now had a traditional signal saying the marriage could work. That is what makes horoscope interesting in these interviews.

The same chart can do completely different jobs depending on **when it appears.** For Shubham Singh Kushwah's family, it brought peace of mind after the harder battle had already been fought.



Arranged Marriage
Will they get a chance?



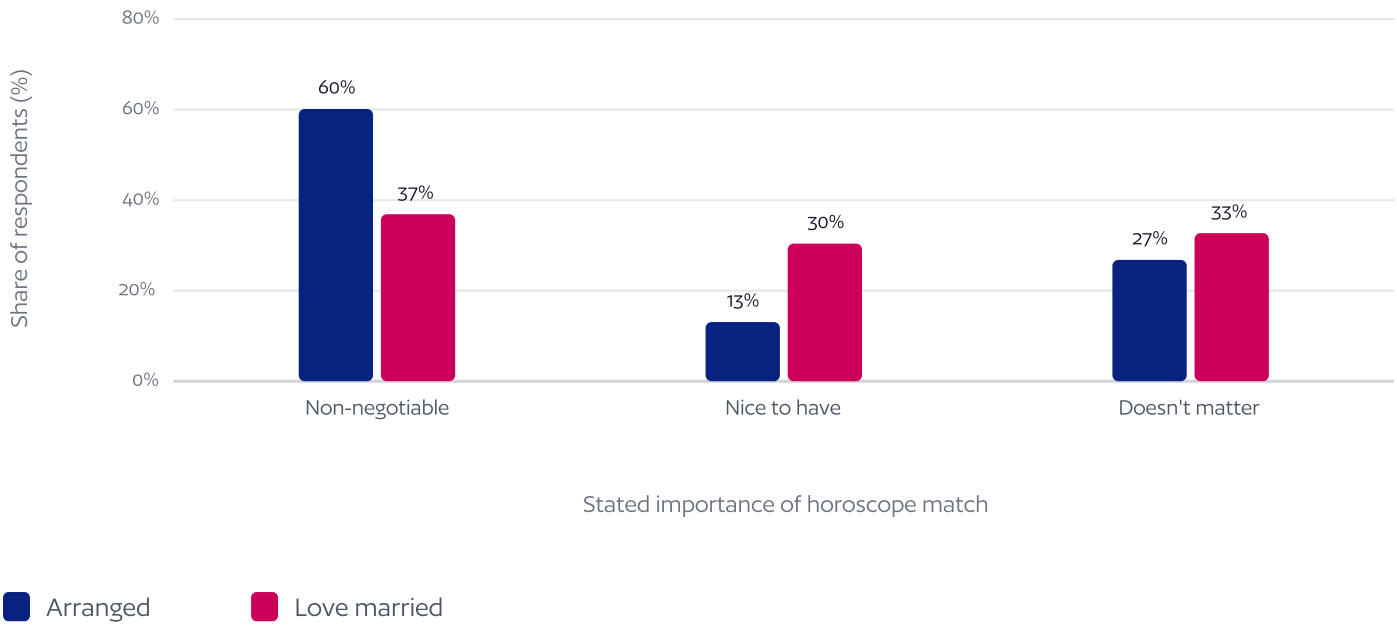


Love Marriage
Let's do it for peace of mind

Figure 6: How important is horoscope in a marriage?

Distribution of respondents (%) rating the personal importance of horoscope compatibility during their marriage search. Evaluated from the marrying individual's perspective (Q4.1c). N=429 (287 currently searching; 142 married); Love n=263 (all married).

60% of arranged respondents call horoscope non-negotiable, compared to only 37% in love marriages.



3.4 Money: salary as permission; gift vs ask vs market coercion

Money becomes a consideration in marriage long before dowry comes up. For many couples, the first question is whether they are financially ready to marry.

Anbalagan Palani crossed a six-digit salary, and his parents interfered less in his life. A stable income did more than prove he could earn. It made his relationship look ready to become a household.

But salary can mean different things in different families.
A government job may signal security.
A high salary may signal status.
An "own house" may suggest independence.

For Shivani Arora, preferring a salaried job over business was also about whether her husband would have time for family. And expectations can become unequal: a woman with a good salary may still be expected to marry someone earning much more.

Money is therefore not one criterion. It is a bundle of expectations about security, status, independence and readiness.



Dowry
Dowry adds another question: **who gets to decide how money moves between the two families?**

Reena distinguished between parents choosing to give something to their daughter and the groom's family naming what must be given. Sindhu's family walked away when a dowry ask became too high. Hemachandra didn't care about dowry himself, even though his parents still asked for it.

The important question is not simply
"How much money?"
It is who sets the terms, who receives the benefit, and whether saying no can cost the marriage.

In the end, it's really about the future

Location, caste, horoscope and money are trying to answer a question about the life that comes after marriage.

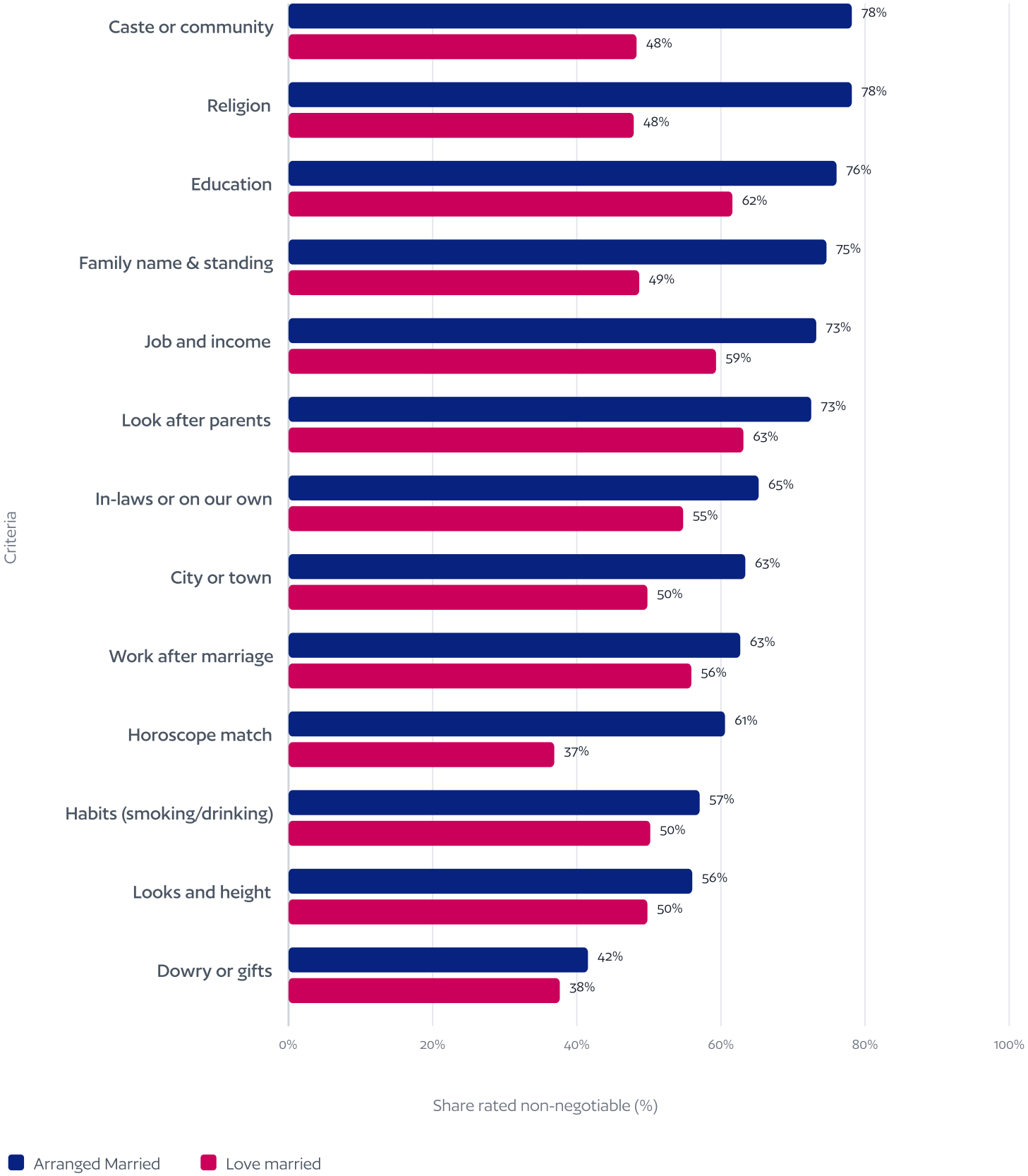
These criteria are not equally important to every family, nor are they always negotiable. One family may bend on caste but insist on horoscope. Another may ignore horoscope but refuse to compromise on location or income.

That is the larger insight:
Families are not only filtering for a person. They are using today's criteria to reduce the risks they imagine in tomorrow's life.

Figure 7: What are the non-negotiables in a marriage?

Share of arranged-married (n=142) and love-married (n=263) respondents who rated each profile field as strictly non-negotiable (%). N=405

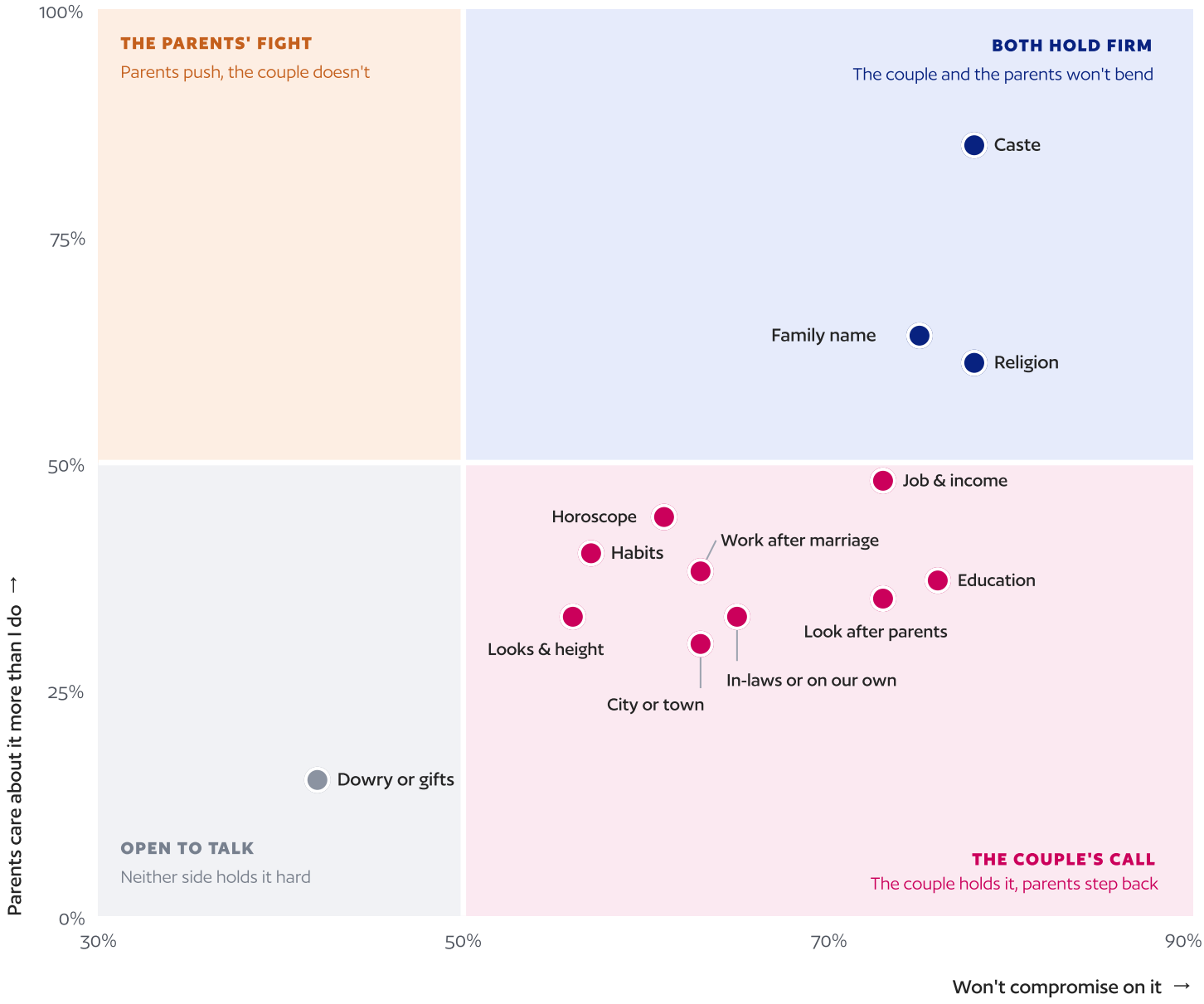
Married arranged (n=142) vs love (n=263). Differs from Figure 5, which includes those still searching.



The negotiation map – arranged marriage

Survey · 142 people who married through an arranged match

Each dot is one thing people look for in a partner. The further right, the more people say they won't compromise on it. The higher up, the more say their parents care about it more than they do.



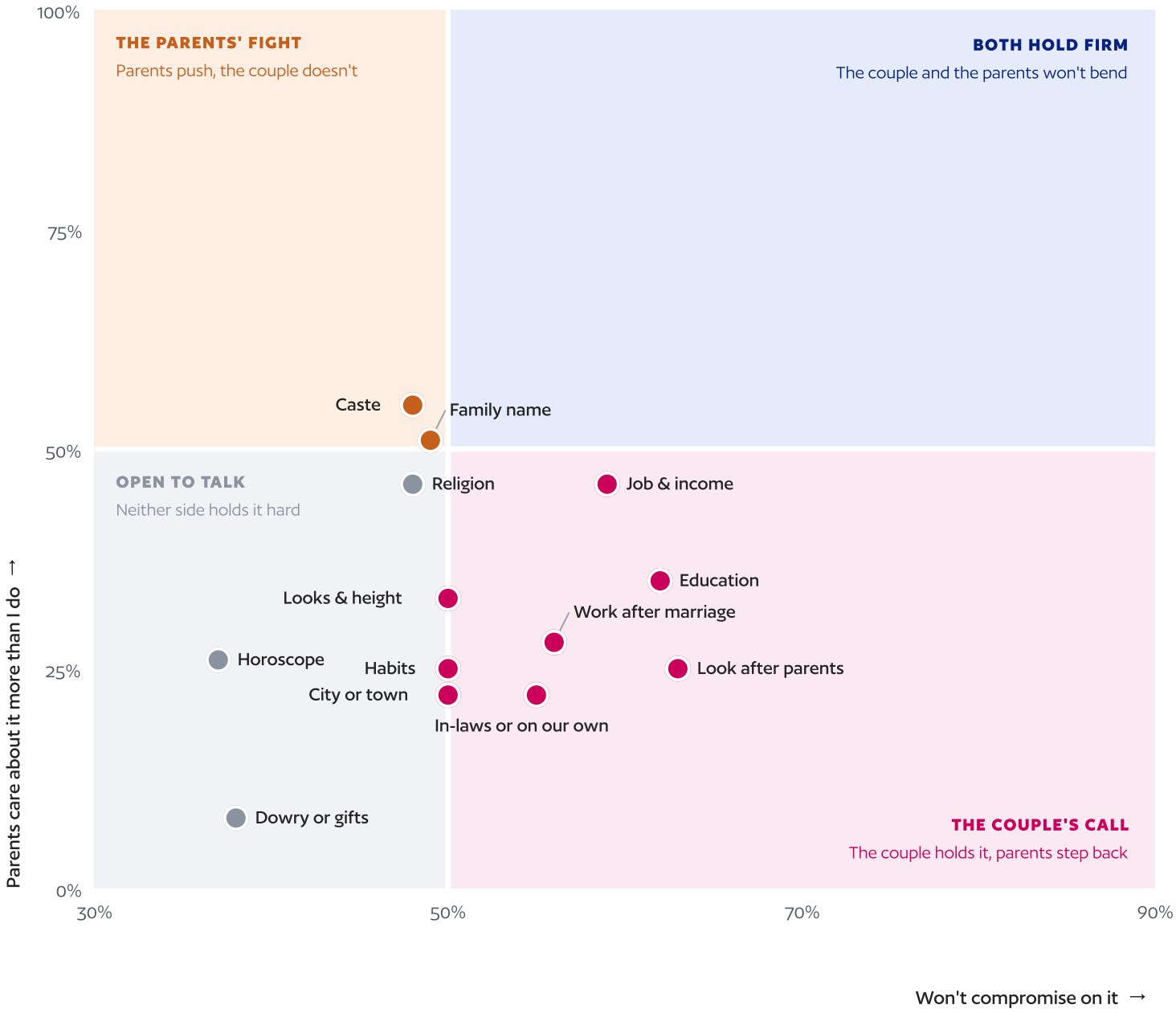
- Three criteria are held firmly by both sides: caste (78% won't compromise, 85% say parents care more), religion and family name.
- Almost everything about married life is the couple's call: job, education, work after marriage, looking after parents.

Base: 142 arranged-married respondents (Q4.1 & Q4.2). Dividers are set at 50%. Top half: criteria parents cared more about. Right half: criteria the respondent refused to compromise on.

The negotiation map – love marriage

Survey · 263 people who had a love marriage

Each dot is one thing people look for in a partner. The further right, the more people say they won't compromise on it. The higher up, the more say their parents care about it more than they do.



- Fewer than half the couples hold caste or family name firm (48–49%), but over half say their parents care about them more.
- Nothing is held firmly by both sides. The couple's own line is married life: looking after parents, education, job.

Base: 263 love-married respondents (Q4.1 & Q4.2). Dividers are set at 50%. Top half: criteria parents cared more about. Right half: criteria the couple refused to compromise on. (Note: Looks, habits, and city sit exactly on the 50% line).

Figure 8: In arranged marriages, men and women hold almost the same criteria

Share of arranged-married men and women who rated each criterion non-negotiable (%). The line between the dots is the gap between them. Sorted from where women are stricter to where men are.



Base: arranged-married men n=84, women n=58 (57 for looks and in-laws). Survey question 4.1. Gap = women minus men, in points. At these bases a gap needs to be about 17 points to trust; none here reaches that, so read every gap as small. Axis starts at 30%.

Figure 9: In love marriages, women hold job and income far harder than men: 75% against 44%

Share of love-married men and women who rated each criterion non-negotiable (%). The line between the dots is the gap between them. Sorted from where women are stricter to where men are.



Base: love-married men n=133, women n=130. Survey question 4.1. Gap = women minus men, in points. Bold gaps are large enough to trust at these bases (about 12 points); grey gaps could be chance. Axis starts at 30%.

Horoscopes get digitised in Modern Bharat

How spiritual-tech platforms and automated matching engines monetise marriage anxiety into instant incompatibility scores and paid rituals.

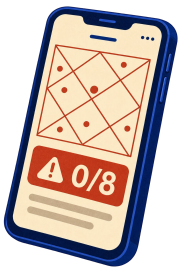
SAVED BY A SECOND OPINION

CASE FILE: THE "NADI DOSH" DEADLOCK (HYDERABAD)

In Hyderabad, an arranged match between two software engineers stalled when a matrimony app computed a "0/8 Nadi Dosh" incompatibility score. The wedding was saved only after an offline astrologer re-evaluated the full birth charts and found a natural cancellation that the software's binary rules had ignored.

The Binary Red Flag

When two working professionals in Hyderabad connected on a matrimony app, their families were initially aligned. But before conversations could progress, the platform's automated horoscope engine cross-referenced their birth coordinates and flagged a severe "Nadi Dosh" – awarding them 0 out of 8 points. Terrified by the app's automated incompatibility warning, the groom's parents panicked and prepared to call off the alliance, fearing health issues and misfortune.



The Human Override

Rather than abandoning the match, the families consulted a veteran regional astrologer. A deeper review of their full Lagna kundlis revealed that differing Nakshatra Padas naturally cancelled out the defect (Nadi Dosh Parihar) – a classic interpretive nuance that the app's rigid calculator had flattened into a zero score. Reassured by human expertise over a machine verdict, the families proceeded to marry.



(Source: The South First (2026) · AstroNidan (2024))

3 WAYS THE RITUAL GOT DIGITISED

Instant In-App Match

Platforms like BharatMatrimony, Jeevansathi, and Shaadi auto-generate horoscopes in 9+ languages from raw birth coordinates. What once took an in-person temple visit now takes seconds via automated "AstroMatch" badges on candidate profiles.

(Source: BharatMatrimony Frequently Asked Questions)

Paid live chat/call

Apps like AstroTalk (₹1,176 Cr revenue in FY25) and InstaAstro turned marriage anxiety into micro-transactions. Users pay ₹10 to ₹200 per minute to consult vernacular astrologers for second opinions on app-generated doshas and marriage delays.

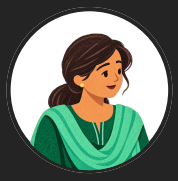
(Source: The Economic Times (2026). Online astrology service Astrotalk's FY25 revenue surges 81% to ₹1,176 crore · The Economic Times (2025))

E-Puja / Kumbh Vivah

When algorithms flag a "Manglik Dosh" or planetary obstacle, spiritual platforms like VAMA and YatraDham immediately sell digital remedies. Families book remote temple pujas via live streams; on VAMA, a group dosh puja costs just ₹700 against ₹3,000 for a private ritual.

(Source: Inc42 Media (2023). Decoding the cosmic rise of Indian spiritual-tech startups)

From Our Fieldwork



"We didn't put my horoscope into any matrimony apps. In our caste, we have separate WhatsApp communities where these horoscopes get circulated – girls' horoscopes on one specific day, boys' on another."

Suma, 25, woman, Mysore

The Unsolved Gap

Binary scores cannot handle interpretive nuance

Horoscope algorithms compute compatibility in milliseconds, but treat complex Vedic astrology as rigid binary filters. When software flashes a red flag, it creates synthetic anxiety without providing resolution:

- **Zero Contextual Nuance:** Automated tools evaluate standalone flaws without checking classical chart cancellations (pariharams), prematurely killing viable matches on false alarms.
- **Monetising the Panic:** When an app marks a score as "incompatible," it pushes users into paid live calls or expensive e-puja remedies rather than explaining astrological context.
- **Family Deadlocks:** Software gives conservative parents a digital excuse to veto proposals, leaving young couples to navigate algorithmic rejection with no human mediator to bridge the gap.

Once a biodata goes online, it stops belonging to the person in it.

A study of one of India's biggest matrimony sites shows how easily profiles are copied in bulk, how much they reveal, and how often someone else writes them.

THE UNREGULATED PROFILE MARKET

CASE FILE: THE UNCONTROLLED LEAK (UTTAR PRADESH)

In 2023, researchers at CSH Delhi (Ferry & Subtil) investigated data exposure on commercial matrimonial platforms. By setting up an ordinary user account, they demonstrated that platforms have almost no boundary controls: they were able to extract and duplicate 1.24 lakh user profiles across Uttar Pradesh. Instead of empowering candidates with private, secure matchmaking, digital platforms have made private family pedigrees – caste, gotra, property, and personal photos – vulnerable to bulk extraction and uncontrolled circulation outside the candidate's knowledge.

Sorting people like inventory

When matchmaking moved online, platforms promised individual agency and open choice. Instead, the analysis of 1.24 lakh profiles revealed that software standardised the traditional family scorecard. Profiles explicitly enforce granular filters – demanding sub-caste pedigree, gotra lineage, horoscope compatibility, and parental property details before a candidate can even be evaluated as an individual.

Losing control of personal details

Once formatted into digital documents, these profiles escape personal control. The study documented how static biodatas containing personal phone numbers, salary slips, home addresses, and unedited family photos are extracted and recirculated across unregulated digital channels.
A candidate's private life becomes an unverified, permanent data file forwarded among thousands of strangers without their knowledge or consent.



(Source: CSH-IFP Working Paper 19, Mathieu Ferry & Jeanne Subtil, 2023 · Centre de Sciences Humaines)

HOW BIODATAS CIRCULATE

₹50 Biodata Websites

Websites like MarriageBiodataOnline charge ₹50 to make a decorative PDF. They are built for parents to show relatives and brokers, focusing on salary, gotra, and property rather than what the person is like.

(Source: MarriageBiodataOnline (2026). Template Catalog and Pricing Specifications)

Caste WhatsApp Groups

Community admins collect biodatas and forward them into large WhatsApp groups organised by caste and income tiers, sharing people's personal phone numbers without asking them first.

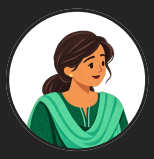
(Source: CSH-IFP Working Paper 19 (2023). Digitized Matchmaking & Regional Strategies)

The Instagram Background Check

Young people ignore the PDF and secretly search the person on Instagram or LinkedIn to see their real lifestyle, friends, and everyday habits before agreeing to a meeting.

(Source: Norton Cyber Safety Insights Report: Special Release – Online Creeping (2023))

From Our Fieldwork



"Whenever anyone sends a biodata, they never give their Instagram ID in it. I had to go find him on Instagram myself, and we chatted there for 15–20 days before even swapping phone numbers."

Kaveri Agrawal, 30, woman, Indore



"I was never even added to [the matrimonial WhatsApp] group, [my father] was added... our biodata must have gone somewhere in the group, so then seeing that, they must have called dad."

Karan Rathi, 35, man, Jaipur

The Unsolved Gap

No control over your own data

A matrimonial PDF is a high-risk identity packet. In a single document, it bundles personal phone numbers, home addresses, salary slips, family wealth markers, and unedited photos.
Once dropped into a community WhatsApp group or shared with a broker, the candidate loses all agency over their own information:

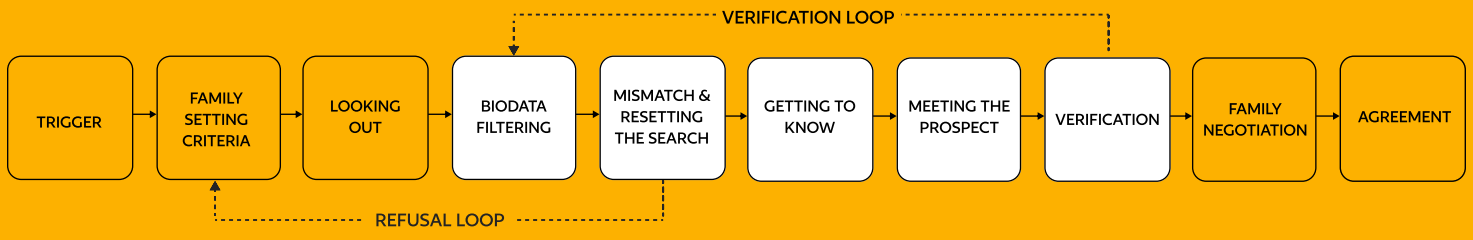
- **No Expiration:** The document lives forever in forwarded chats, accessible months or years after a person has paused their search or got married.
- **No Privacy Boundaries:** Anyone in a 1,000-person group can download, screenshot, and archive the file without the candidate's consent.
- **No Verification or Recourse:** There is no mechanism to revoke access, prove whether claims on the document are authentic, or remove contact numbers once privacy is breached.





04

Family confidence and personal confidence are built differently



White boxes indicate stages where this theme appears in the journey.

ARRANGED MARRIAGE JOURNEY

In arranged marriages, a family can know everything about the household and still know very little about the person their child is expected to marry. A good match on paper is not necessarily a good match between two people.

When the families agree, it triggers another search for compatibility between the prospects.

The household check:

- Is this household what it claims to be?
- Is the job real, the house real, the reputation solid?
- Will the neighbours vouch for them?

The partner check:

- Can I picture everyday life with this person?
- How do they handle anger? What are their routines?
- Will I matter to them on an ordinary Tuesday?

These are different expectations. The people we interviewed run both checks at the same time. And they will turn down a match the family has approved if the personal check comes up unsatisfactory.

Theme 01 showed that arranged matches start with plenty of legitimacy and little intimacy. This theme stays with arranged matches and follows what happens next: how prospects create a protected space to learn about each other firsthand, while the family's checks carry on alongside.

Shivani Arora is 29. She was born and raised in Lucknow, where she lives with her parents and a pet; she is their only child. She has been searching for a suitable boy for about a year. A friend set up her profile first on online matrimonial websites. Relatives sent matches on WhatsApp, but few matched what she was looking for: the right height, a Mona Punjabi family, and someone in or near Lucknow so she could stay close to her parents. By the time we spoke, she was engaged. The roka (engagement) hadn't happened yet. The getting-to-know-him phase had happened.

They met on 10 November, but the vetting had already begun through an online social-media check. Shivani Arora and her best friend scrolled through every corner of his Facebook profile to understand him or check ‘vibes’.



> “When I hadn't met [him], I had searched his entire Facebook ID. Me and my friend sat down and searched his entire Facebook, where has he gone, how many friends he has... he was quite fond of travelling... and thankfully that Facebook ID was not locked either. Since nowadays people lock it, so that wasn't locked either. So a trust gets built up, right, that if there was something like that, the other person would keep it locked.”

Scrolling through his profile made him feel less like a stranger. His travel photos, his friends, even the fact that his account was public offered small clues about who he was. Later, they exchanged Instagram IDs and began talking. With a friend beside her, she was conducting her own version of a background check, piecing together impressions from his online footprint. When they finally met, their conversations took over the verification and the data gathered online became nudges to sustain conversations.

> "We spent 20 to 25 days... by talking we became confirmed and sure that no, we can do this, we can move forward. So by talking I got clarity on a lot of things, how he is by nature, whether he will give importance or not, and how his routine is... we were talking on call, video call was also happening... I needed 20-25 days, I needed some time to say yes."

Her parents weren't part of those daily calls. They spoke with his family once or twice, mostly to exchange pleasantries. "The proper talk that happened was between me and him only." At the first meeting, her mother asked about his hobbies and future plans, partly to see how he carried himself.

The families conduct their own due diligence, but through a different route.

> "My mausa ji, where my fiancé works, by luck he knew someone who was a colleague of his. So he inquired with them... then after that they got a family background check done. That also, they made inquiries with their neighbours etc. So they also gave a good response, so then we moved forward."

When we met her, Shivani Arora was still unmarried and still in the arranged process, with matrimony apps part of her search.







What this means

- **Two separate investigations.**
  The family checks the household's reputation; the prospect checks if they can imagine everyday life together once parents leave the room.
- **Profiles can't test personal chemistry.**
  The prospect checks the person: Can I picture everyday life with this person?
- **No conversation means no marriage.**
  If the candidate never talks, avoids meetings, or refuses to open up, the prospect will often veto the match even if the parents approve.
- **Late mismatches still break deals.**
  Even after families feel aligned, months of personal conversations can uncover deep lifestyle differences and collapse the match.
- **Vulnerability carries a cost.**
  Sharing personal truths or hesitations before genuine trust is built often gets weaponised or leads to sudden rejection.
- **Facts vs slow discovery.**
  Families look for hard facts they can verify immediately; couples look for emotional rapport that can only be discovered over time.

Simran, 26, woman, Indore

Simran turned to arranged search after a failed relationship. After relatives sent poorly matched profiles, Simran's mother suggested matrimony apps so she could search on her own terms.
She explains what the apps gave her that relatives couldn't: "There I can talk to a guy without any pressure of families from both the sides or without any pressure of a broker or a relative. I can speak to him, I can express myself, I can get to know him better there."
Early on, she shared her medical history (PCOD and slipped disc) with a prospect. His family demanded fresh tests; the match eventually collapsed, but the private details spread through community networks.

Simran didn't stop being honest – she changed when she shares. Now, sensitive personal information is held back until trust and mutual commitment are already established.



The closer a criterion comes to everyday married life, the harder it is to compress into a biodata field.

Prospects wonder what these claims actually mean.

"GOOD FAMILY"	• Financially secure? • Locally respected? • Socially familiar? • Approved by the broker?
"PROGRESSIVE"	• Their response to the other partner's choices? • Open to dressing differently? • Less restrictive about daily customs?
"NO BAD HABITS"	• Depends on what the family counts as a bad habit.

Figure 10: Number of prospects spoken with by active searchers on matrimony platforms

How many prospects they have actually spoken to, by phone, video or in person. % of people searching.

46% of active searchers haven't spoken to a single prospect yet

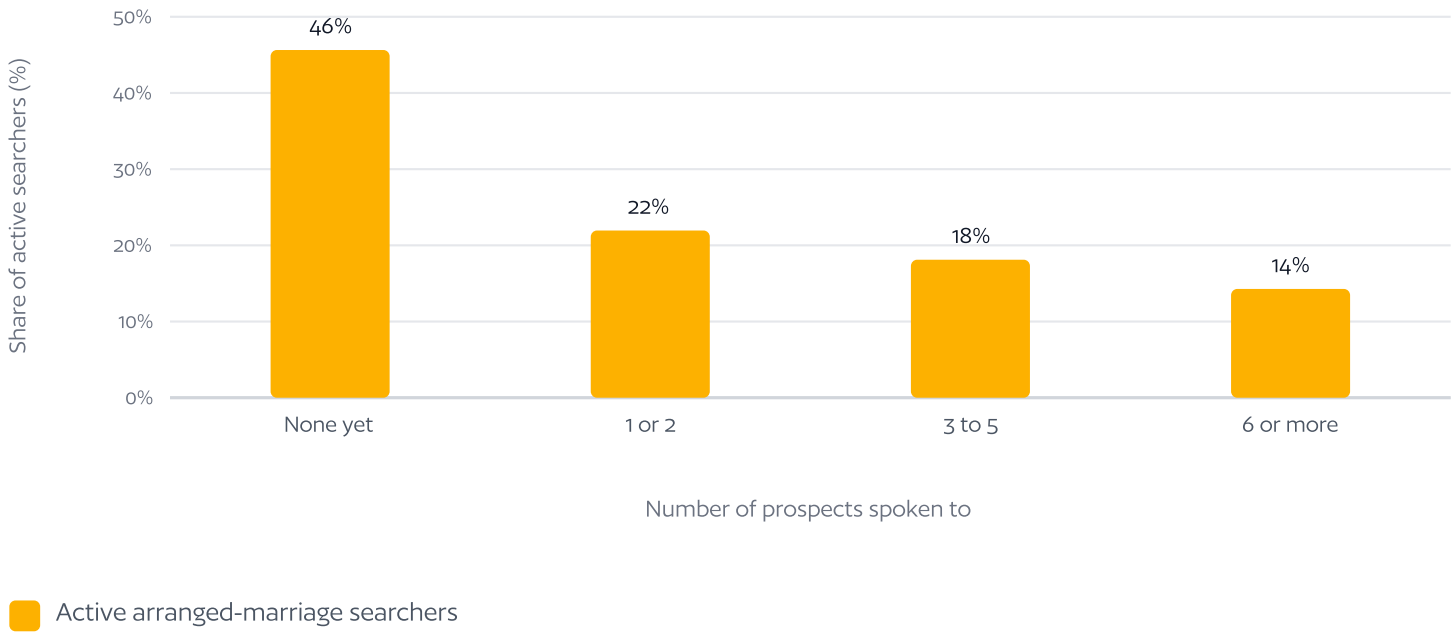
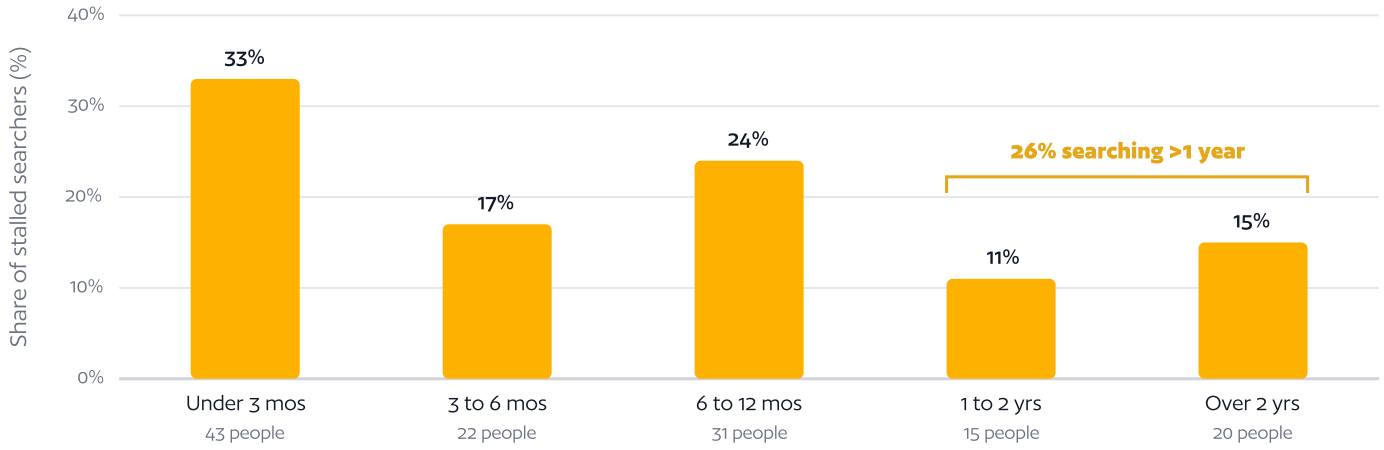


Figure 11: How long have searchers with zero conversations been looking?

Search duration breakdown among active searchers who haven't spoken to a single prospect yet (Q2.1 × Q2.2). N=131 of 287 active searchers (Lokal)

26% Over a quarter of stalled searchers (26%) have been looking for more than a year without having even a single conversation.



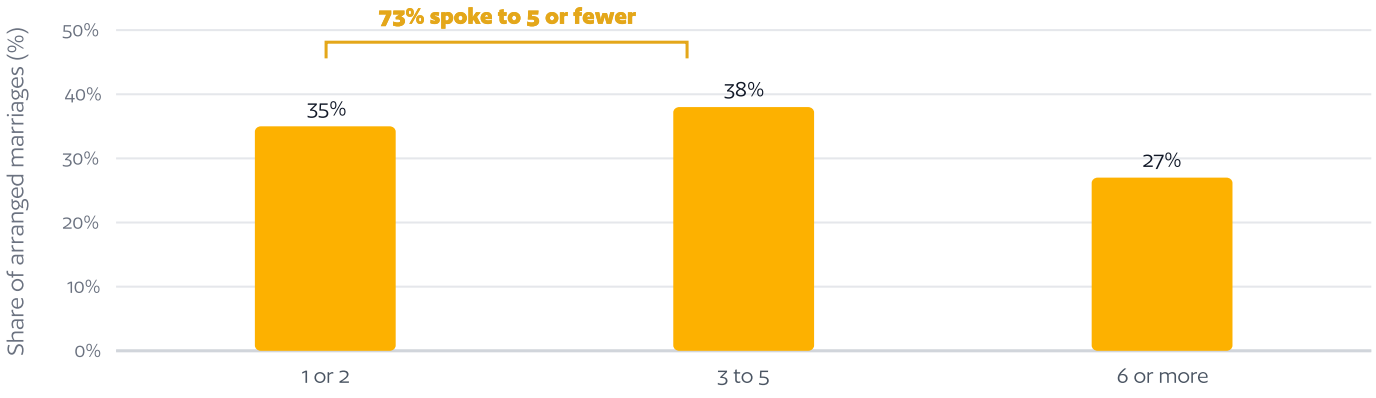
Duration of search among respondents who haven't spoken to any prospect

Active arranged-marriage searchers

Figure 12: How many prospects did couples speak to before finalising marriage?

Distribution of arranged-married respondents (%) by total prospects spoken with before marriage. N=142 (Arranged married)

73% Most arranged marriages were settled after speaking to five or fewer prospects

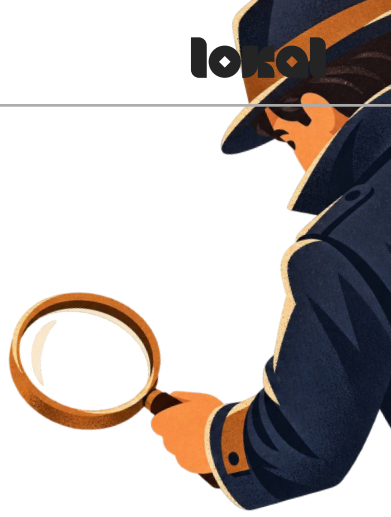


Prospects spoken to before marrying

Arranged married

The Pre-Marriage Spy Economy

How families in smaller cities pay private investigators ₹2 lakh or more to verify what apps cannot authenticate.



THE DOSSIER – CLAIM VS. REALITY

CASE FILE: THE RENTED CLINIC & LUXURY CAR (JAIPUR)

In Jaipur, a family hired a private detective agency to verify a prospective groom who claimed to be a practising doctor with his own clinic. Fifteen days of physical surveillance revealed the entire lifestyle was staged: the clinic was rented by the hour, the ₹50-lakh luxury car was leased for meetings, and the "doctor" was actually a nursing student.

When "Asking Around" Stopped Working

Traditionally, families verified a match by asking trusted relatives or local neighbourhood elders. But as matchmaking moved to matrimony apps and distant cities, that informal kinship network broke down. When a match lives three states away in Bengaluru, Pune, or Gurgaon, families have no natural way to verify whether the job, salary, or lifestyle on the profile is real.

The rise of paid surveillance

To fill this trust vacuum, families in cities like Jaipur increasingly outsource verification to private detectives. For ₹50,000 to ₹2 lakh or more, investigators shadow prospects, verify workplace attendance, interview neighbours under false pretences, pull court records, and audit salary claims – turning the final stage of arranged marriage into a physical corporate audit.



(Source: The Times of India (2026). Behind the Veil: Demand for private detectives for pre-wedding checks rise in Jaipur after Sonam, Siya cases)

WHAT DETECTIVES ACTUALLY UNCOVER

Hidden Prior Marriages

Detectives search local court registries and interview past neighbours to uncover undisclosed earlier marriages, informal separations, or ongoing divorce disputes.

(Source: The Times of India (2026). As matches go online, pre-shaadi calls to detectives see a surge)

Faked Jobs & Incomes

Physical visits to office premises frequently expose faked MNC designations, home-run insurance desks disguised as "tech startups," or forged degree certificates.

(Source: Hopestone Advisory (2025) · First Indian Detective Agency (2025))

Secret Debt & CIBIL Checks

Families increasingly demand consensual CIBIL credit checks before engagement, exposing hidden personal loans, business defaults, and credit card debt.

(Source: Eimager Matrimonial Protocols (2025). Consent-Led Identity, Income Verification and CIBIL Checks)

From Our Fieldwork



"They even verified my certificates, whether original or fake! Will they give me a job or what? Then they ask to see my land documents. If they have [a] doubt, [let them] check my character, whether I drink or smoke. You are giving a girl with trust[, so] find out. But how much land I have, how much debt, how much money, why would I tell all that? Those are personal matters."

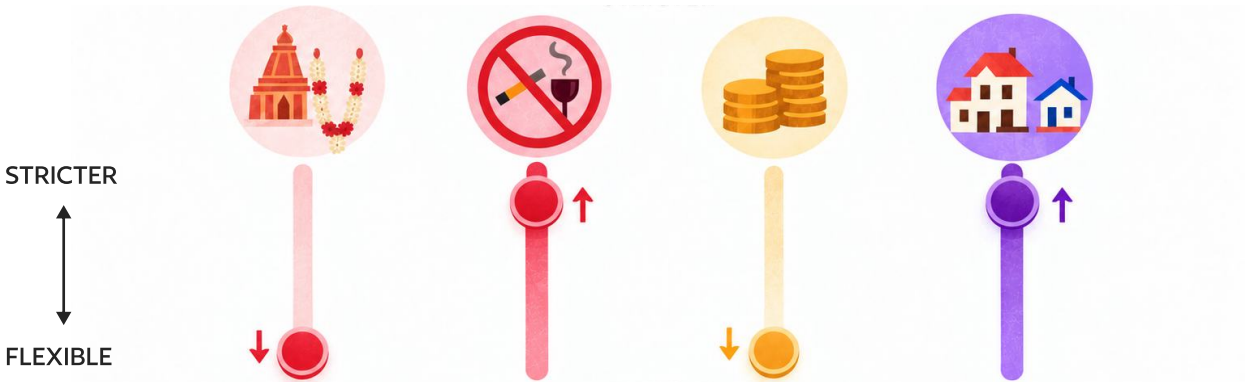
Adinarayana, 31, man, Nandyala

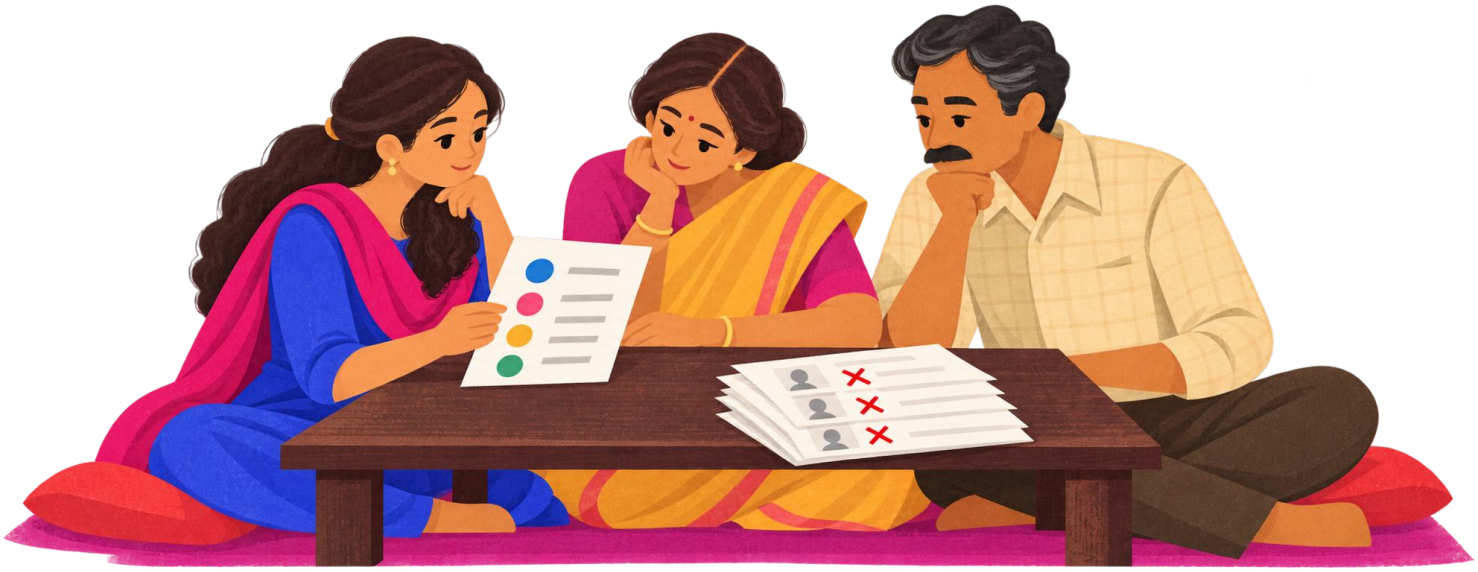
The Unsolved Gap

The Unregulated Trust Industry

Families are forced to hire private detectives because digital platforms create an illusion of safety:

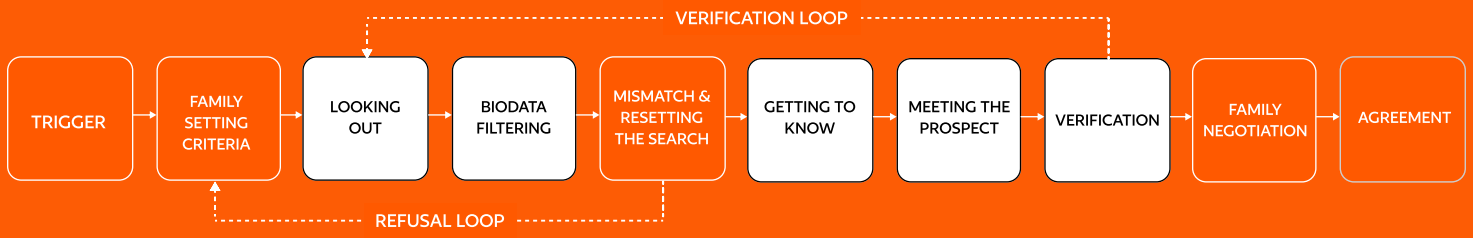
- **The Cosmetic "Blue Tick":** Platforms market verified profiles, but their fine print reveals that verification only checks a selfie – not salary, employment, criminal records, or prior marriages.
- **The Outsourced Burden:** Matrimony sites explicitly state that "the onus of verification lies entirely on the user."
- **The Unregulated Fix:** To bridge this trust gap, families spend ₹50,000 to ₹2 lakh+ on shadow detectives who operate in an unlicensed legal grey zone – trading private call records and conducting intrusive surveillance just to confirm basic facts.





05

Repeated failures make some filters flexible and others stricter.



White boxes indicate stages where this theme appears in the journey.

ARRANGED MARRIAGE JOURNEY

The longer families search for a match, the more their priorities change. Some expectations become easier to let go of. Others become non-negotiable, especially after rejection or disappointment.

We often assume that the longer an arranged marriage search goes on, the more families lower their expectations. Our interviews revealed a more complicated picture.

People don't simply realise their expectations were "too much." Match after match teaches them which items actually predict everyday married life, and which were just for show.

A good education may seem like a sign of maturity until a few disappointing meetings prove otherwise. Similarly, when someone lies about drinking or owning a house, income and property begin to matter less than honesty and the ability to verify what is being claimed.

As the search goes on, people may become more flexible about whom they consider, but more demanding about what they need to know. And the criteria are rarely theirs alone. Parents and relatives continue to insist on things the person getting married may no longer care about.

Earlier, we saw how families use caste, location, money, and horoscope to judge a match. But years of searching through brokers, apps, and meetings can change which of these criteria matter, and not everyone in the family changes their mind in the same way.

For almost two years, Simran reviewed 70+ profiles but met only four men. She began with clear criteria: good education, financial stability, a small family, a corporate job and preferably a separate home.

> "First I was like[:] corporate employees, a good package, a tall guy, nuclear family, and educated family... these four[or] five points were the non-negotiable[s] for me. But now I've altered a few things after seeing so many matches and meeting so many people."

This was not simply "settling." She considered a partner who had paused his formal degree to run his family business after his mother fell ill during COVID. But she firmly rejected a wealthy, US-educated prospect with a ₹1-crore package when she caught him lying on social media about his lifestyle.

Some credentials mattered less; what everyday married life would actually feel like mattered more.

Her list became shorter; her judgement became sharper.

Senthil Arumugam grew up in Edappadi, Salem, in a middle-class home. Now working in Tiruppur, he has been searching for a match for over two years. After years of endless delays and false starts with traditional brokers, he recently turned to matrimony apps. Those two years of friction fundamentally shifted his search criteria.

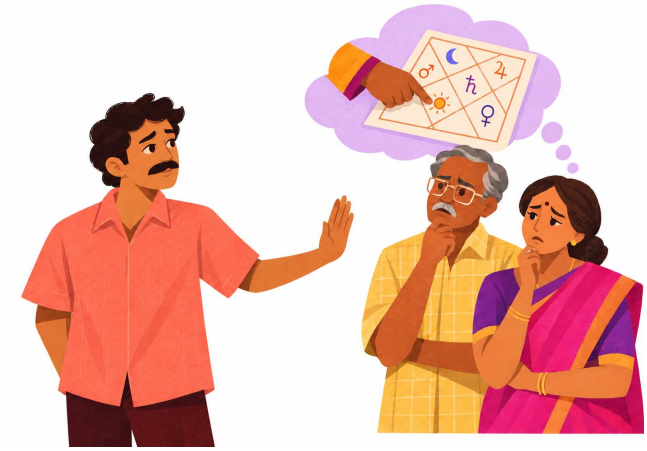
Education: tightening to avoid rejection.

A broker once introduced him to a highly educated woman who turned him down. Having studied only up to Class 10, he came away with a new preference: someone educated no further than Class 10 or 12, from a simple household, who could look after the home.

“I haven't studied so they don't need to be educated either,” he explained. His app searches now reflect that decision.



Over time, he softened his stance on horoscopes, even though his parents may still insist.



“Now I have given up on horoscopes altogether,” he said. Years of relatives checking charts and matches falling through had made him question the point of it all.

Yet he still considers astrology “somewhat important.” Not because he believes in it, but because his family might insist. “If family suddenly says we need to check horoscopes, it will mess things up.”

Caste, meanwhile, remains “very important.” He still wants someone from a similar cultural background, preferably near Tiruppur, and a simple, middle-class family is enough.

What this means

- People rarely give up on wanting a good marriage. They change their minds about what will get them there.
- The weightage for different criteria might evolve over time: education can become a band to stay within, horoscope a family formality, caste strong for one person and weak for another.
- Fatigue doesn't only soften filters. Rejection teaches people to avoid it, and lies teach them to double-check.
- A large pool of options can still mean fewer meetings and more caution.
- The checklist belongs to more than one person. The prospect, parents, and relatives each guard against different risks.
- Even when a filter moves, the worry behind it (an unfamiliar family, caring for elders, trust, rejection) often stays and returns in another form.

Hemalatha's parents (Vijayawada)

One lie changes everything

Hemalatha's parents wanted a man with a good education, a high salary, and his own house. On a regional matrimony site, a background check showed that one profile's "own house" claim was false. They didn't lower their expectations about property. Instead, they stopped trusting matrimony profiles: not everything you read is true.

At the same time, their view on caste shifted. They had assumed a match would come from their own caste. But after seeing same-caste profiles without homes of their own, they began to consider another caste, as long as the house and salary were real.

Their trust in the platform tightened. Their caste filter loosened. Both moves served the same concern: a secure home.



Figure 13: Where do families search for arranged matches?

Share of respondents who used each channel during their arranged marriage search (Q2.4, multi-select). N=429 (Arranged)

58% Family and relatives remain the most widely used search channel (58%), followed by matchmakers/brokers (34%) and matrimony apps (29%).

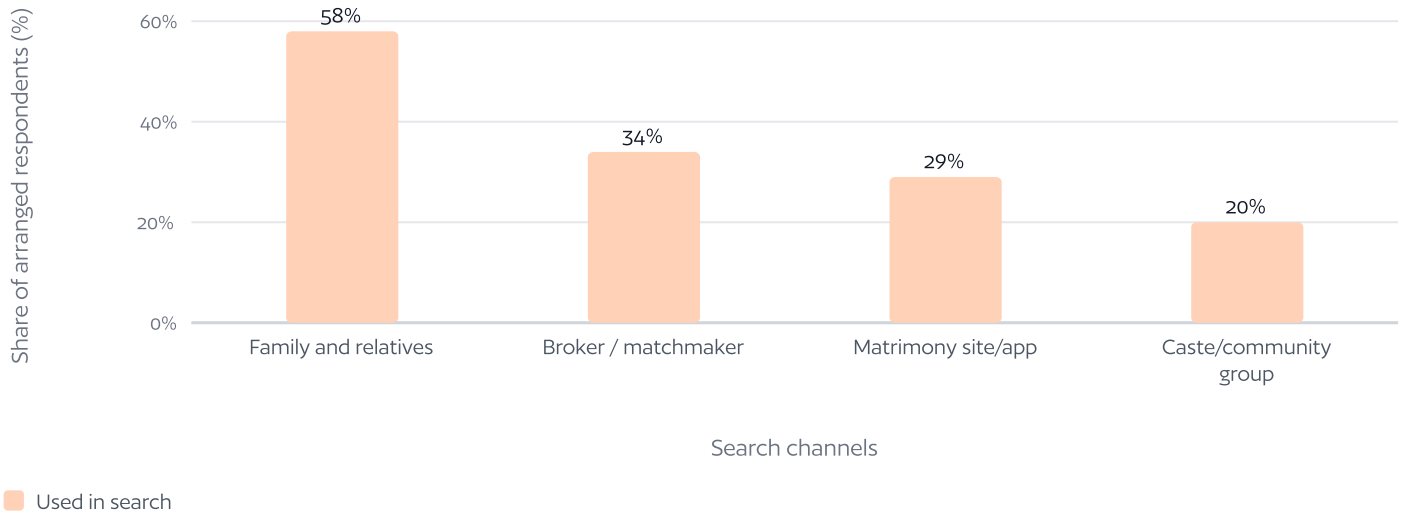
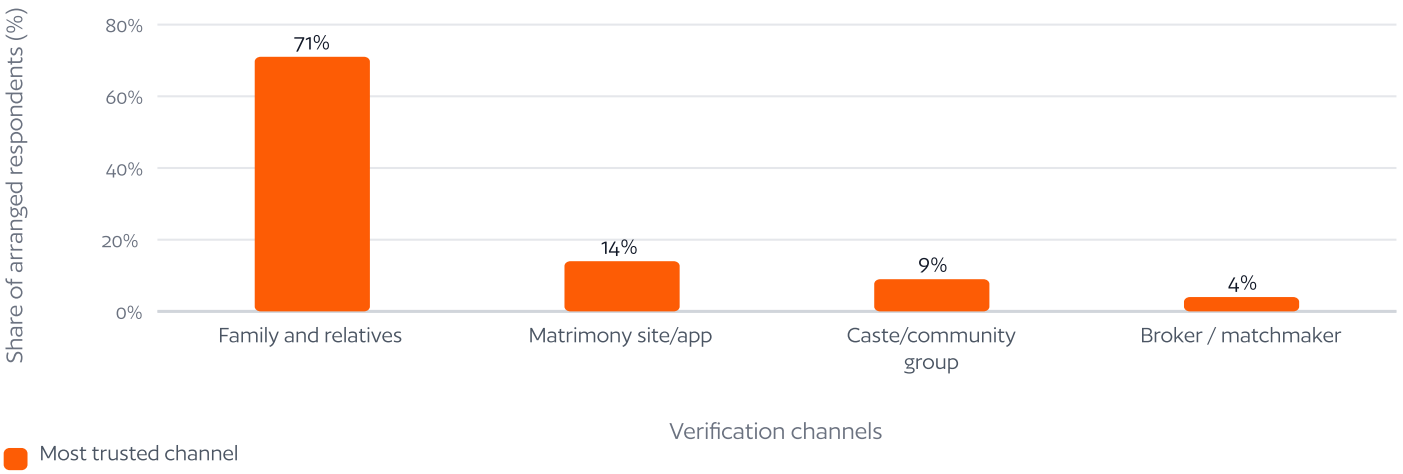


Figure 14: Which channel do families trust most to verify matches?

Share of arranged marriage respondents rating each channel as the single most trusted for profile verification (Q2.6). N=429 (Arranged)

71% Trust is overwhelmingly concentrated in family (71%) – 5× more than matrimony apps (14%) and nearly 18× more than brokers (4%).



The Matrimonial Scam Economy

How fake call centres and runaway bride syndicates monetise the exhaustion of a prolonged search in Tier-2/3 India.

THE PREDATORY CALL CENTRES

CASE FILE: THE KANPUR AI CALL-CENTRE RING

In 2026, UP Police busted a multi-desk call-centre operation in Kanpur that systematically preyed on older bachelors and divorcees. The gang used AI-generated photos and trained telecallers to pose as prospective brides, extracting lakhs in progressive fees for introductions that never existed.

Targeting the stalled and desperate

Operating out of three houses in Kanpur's Naubasta and Kidwainagar, a syndicate ran clandestine call centres staffed by 23 female telecallers. Using AI-generated portraits and stolen photos, they flooded matrimony platforms with fake bride profiles designed to bait older bachelors (aged 35–50) and divorcees who faced acute social stigma and had exhausted their offline family networks in Tier-2/3 towns.



The micro-fee extraction trap

Victims were groomed through polite WhatsApp chats for two to three weeks until emotional trust was established. Telecallers then began demanding progressive fees – asking ₹3,000 to ₹6,000 at a time for "kundli matching," "family phone unlocks," and "travel allowances" for promised visits. By the time Kanpur Police raided the ring, **₹41 lakh** had been siphoned through 11 bank accounts from victims across UP and other states, without a single real meeting ever taking place.



(Source: The Times of India (2026). Cops bust gang duping people in name of matrimonial firm, 24 held · Hindustan Times (2026))

OTHER SCAMS

The Micro-Extraction Factory

Bogus agencies and rogue WhatsApp admins charge small, non-refundable fees for "VIP profile unlocks" and "verified family contacts." Amounts are kept low enough that victims feel embarrassed to file an official police FIR.

(Source: The Indian Express (2026). How Agra-based 'cheat small, cheat many' matrimonial scam worked)

The Runaway Bride Syndicate

Brokers exploit skewed sex ratios in rural belts (Rajasthan, Haryana, Maharashtra), arranging rushed temple weddings for cash-poor families. Within 3–7 days of marriage, the bride flees with family jewellery and cash, often leaving the groom's family heavily indebted.

(Source: NDTV News India (2025). Runaway Bride's Arrest Leads To Fake Marriage Racket Bust)

The "Customs & Emergency" Trap

Scammers pose as high-status NRI grooms (doctors, engineers, pilots) on matrimony platforms. After winning emotional trust, they claim an expensive gift parcel or gold jewellery sent for the bride is "stuck at airport customs," demanding ₹50,000 to ₹5 lakh in urgent UPI transfers to pay clearance duties.

Source: Ministry of Finance, Government of India (2023). Official Fraud Alert: CBIC Matrimonial Dating Customs Scams

From Our Fieldwork



"Brokers tell the girl's side one thing and tell us another to take money from both sides. They take the advance, and after that, their phones are switched off. There is a lot of fraud happening."

Adinarayana, 31, man, Nandyala

The Unsolved Gap



Silence, shame, and cosmetic KYC

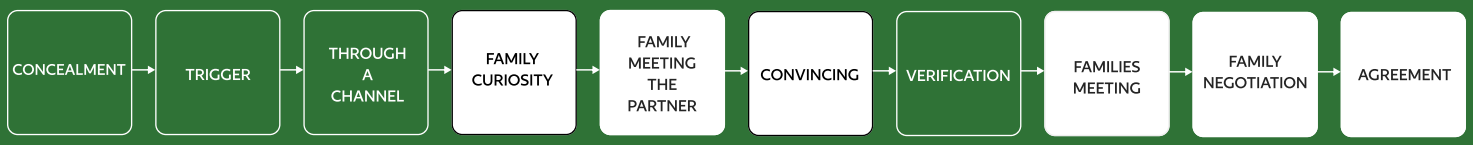
Matrimonial fraud thrives in the blind spots between shallow platform verification and fragmented local policing. Because victims are trapped by social stigma, syndicates operate with near-total impunity:

- **The Shame Barrier:** Victims (especially older men and duped families) rarely approach the police, fearing public humiliation and permanently ruined marriage prospects in their hometowns.
- **Cosmetic Verification**: Platforms only verify OTP phone numbers, allowing scammers to cycle through disposable burner SIMs and AI-generated portraits without identity checks.
- **No Interstate Recourse:** Syndicates operate call centres in one state while harvesting victims across state lines, exploiting the lack of cross-border cybercrime enforcement for micro-fraud amounts.



06

The family may accept your love interest and still shape your marriage.



White boxes indicate stages where this theme appears in the journey.

LOVE MARRIAGE JOURNEY

Families may be willing to let their children choose whom to marry, but still expect a say in how they live afterwards. Accepting a love marriage doesn't necessarily mean accepting everything that comes with it.

Every marriage involves negotiation between two families. In a love marriage, the stakes are higher and the negotiation gets harder. The couple has already chosen each other, so the families negotiate around that choice.

What they hold on to is the right to shape married life: where the couple lives, whether the daughter-in-law works, which religion or community is "acceptable," how the two families stay in touch, who cooks, who cares for elders, and which rituals are optional and which become everyday expectations.

The real question isn't just: Who has the final say?
It's: **Who decides what?**



Ankita Singh, 27, is a sports teacher in Varanasi. She had a love marriage and became a Gupta. His family accepted her, but that was only the start. Everything after was about what the marriage would look like.

Her boyfriend warned her that his family wouldn't agree. She was firm: she would marry only with their blessing. When he offered to elope, she said no.

She could choose her partner. But she knew she'd be living her days with his family.
His mother put off meeting her for a month or two. When they finally met, she got straight to the point: Will you work after marriage?
Ankita said yes. The mother agreed, but added, “In my family, till date no one has really worked much.” Ankita held her ground: “Someone or the other will have to start, right.”

> “Because parents agreeing is also necessary[. W]e love each other, [but] that life we have to spend with them. If we go from one place to another, then [he] won't be with me all day[;] all day [his] parents will be with me. So they also need to be on board.”

Then the mother asked if she loved her son. Ankita said that if she didn't, she wouldn't be sitting there. The mother liked that.

The mother had other worries too. Had her son been trapped? Would the new daughter-in-law keep up the family's prayers, fasts, and routines? It's a big family. They share a terrace and gather on every festival. Accepting Ankita didn't make those expectations go away.

They got engaged in January and married in April. By the wedding, Ankita says, her mother-in-law was the happiest person in the room. But the negotiations weren't over.

Ankita's story shows how many decisions sit inside one marriage. The family accepted her, but still questioned her working, still expected prayers and fasts, still chose the wedding venue, still changed how the kitchen was run, and still needed relatives to accept food from her hands. She handled each one practically. She won them over, refused to elope, kept her job, gave a little on clothes, and let her work speak for her.
It wasn't one decision. It was many, made by different people.

What this means

- **Approval is not lifestyle freedom.**
  In a love marriage, a parent saying “marry this person” is not the same as saying “live however you want.”

- **Everyone sorts their trade-offs.**
  Couples, especially women, decide what to give up and what to hold on to. The choices differ from person to person. What stays the same is that everyone is sorting.

- **Layers of authority.**
  The prospects choose the person and their dealbreakers. Parents and in-laws set conditions like work, rituals, and living arrangements. Relatives decide whether to accept her. Daily life keeps getting renegotiated, down to hiring a cook or what the father-in-law calls her.

- **Choice within pre-set boundaries.**
  Freedom to choose can come with limits already built in. Shashank Goswami, a Lucknow father, says, “if the boy likes her, then I am nobody,” yet also prefers a Hindu, upper-caste match, while adding that he would accept whoever his son brings.

- **Autonomy and tradition grow together.**
  Not every family works this way. But it explains how personal choice and family influence can grow at the same time.

Suma, 25, woman, Mysore

Giving up some things, holding on to others

Suma (25) grew up in an eight-person joint family in Mysore. When she met her husband – a Bengaluru entrepreneur four years older – at a sangeet rehearsal, her parents resisted: at home, a love marriage was "a big rejection," and it took ten days just to get them to listen.
Once both sides agreed, his family set their conditions: a grand wedding, and that she leave her chartered accountancy firm job to manage their family business. Suma relocated to Bengaluru and accepted the shift without resentment: "Wherever it is, it is the growth for us."

On other fronts, she held firm. As an only child, her long-standing condition was that her parents receive equal importance. She kept her childhood rituals and made in-law eldercare conditional on mutual respect: "If they involve me in all the decision-making, even I would love to take care of them." She gave way on city and career for the couple's collective growth, but never on her parents' standing, her customs, or her voice in the home.

Shashank Goswami, man, Lucknow (Parent)

"I am nobody," with limits built in

Shashank Goswami wants his son to choose his own wife, and he says it strongly:
"If the boy likes her, then I am nobody, whatever he says I will do that."
Even if he disagrees, "whatever my thinking is will become secondary," because "he is the one who has to live with her."

But in the same interview, he sets limits. She should be Hindu, preferably upper caste, and "it shouldn't be that she turns out to be from another religion or he brings someone from Scheduled Caste." He also says that if his son brings someone outside those lines, they will accept her.

So it isn't a hard no. But his son's free choice already sits inside boundaries his father has drawn. The freedom and the limits come from the same person.

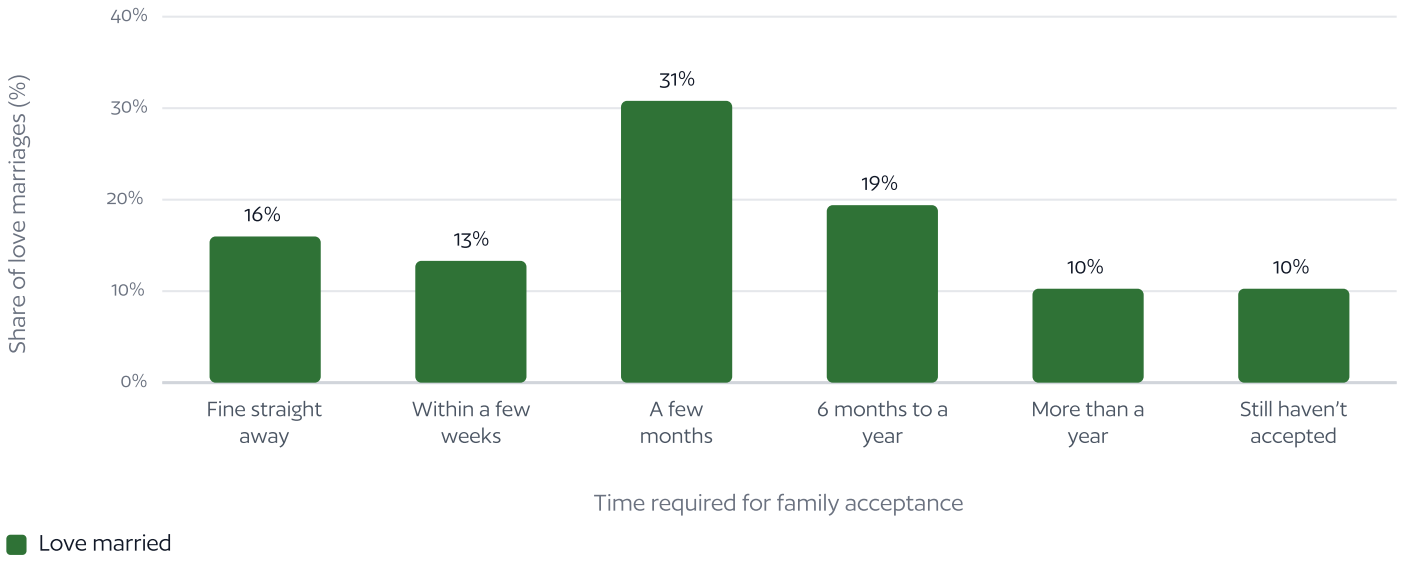
Parents may say "your choice" while still shaping which choices appear reasonable.



Figure 15: How long did it take for parents to agree to the love marriage?

Elapsed time from disclosure to parental acceptance (may continue after the wedding). N=263 love marriages

Parental acceptance in love marriage is a negotiation, not an immediate blessing. Instant approval is a rare exception (16%), while **60% wait months or longer**, and a further 10% never fully accept even after marriage.

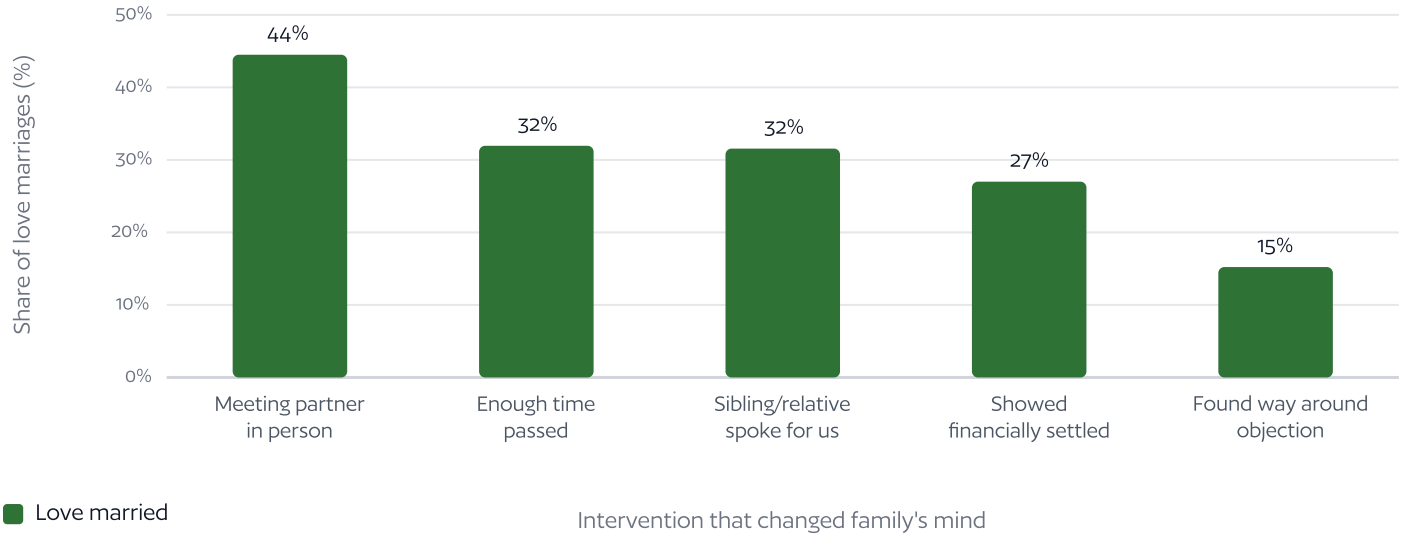


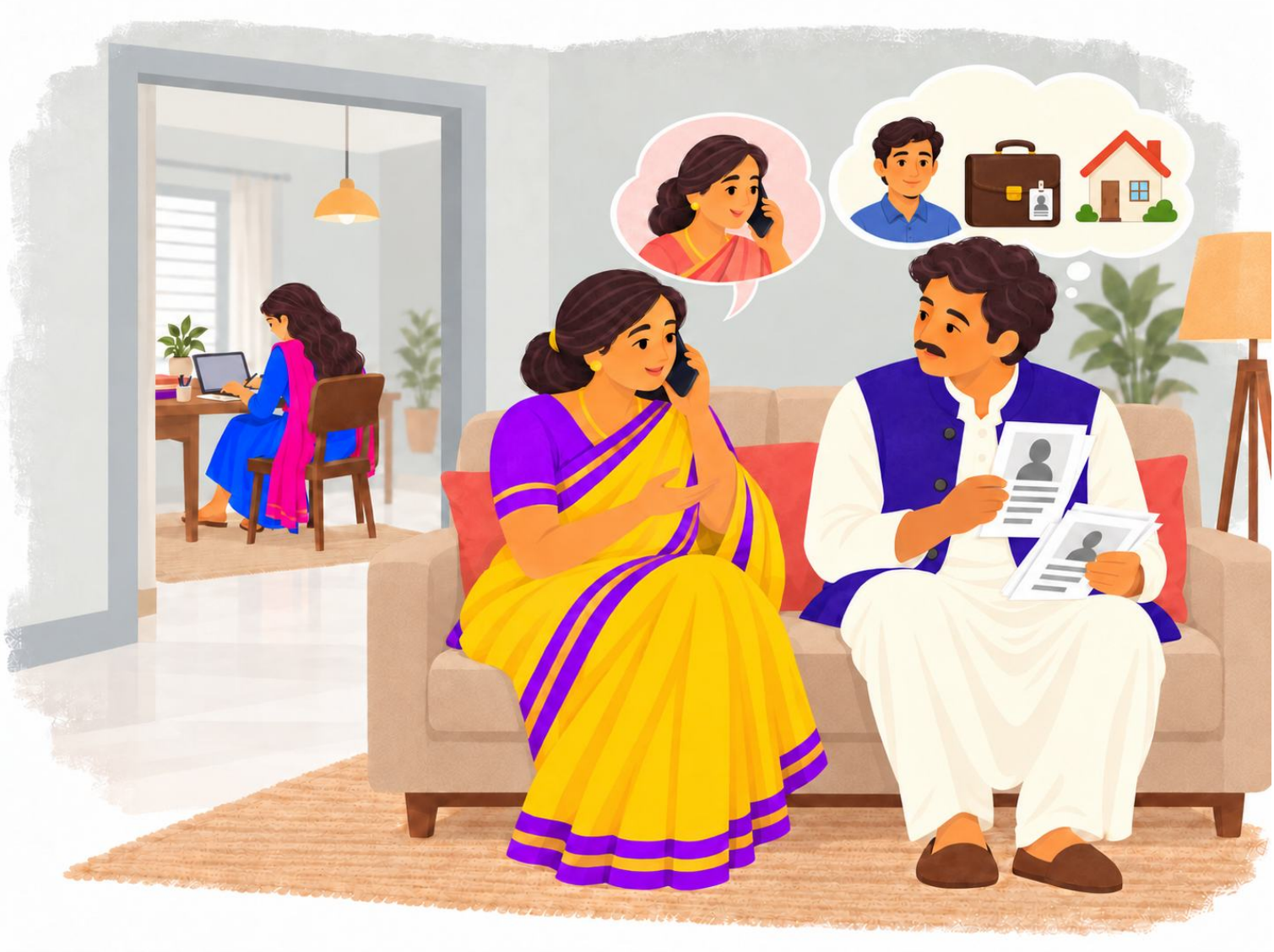
Acceptance timing and persuasion — the gate into shaping — not the household negotiations after they say yes.

Figure 16: Interventions & factors that persuaded hesitant families to accept the match

Persuasion factors from disclosure to acceptance (may continue after the wedding; multi-select). N=263 love marriages

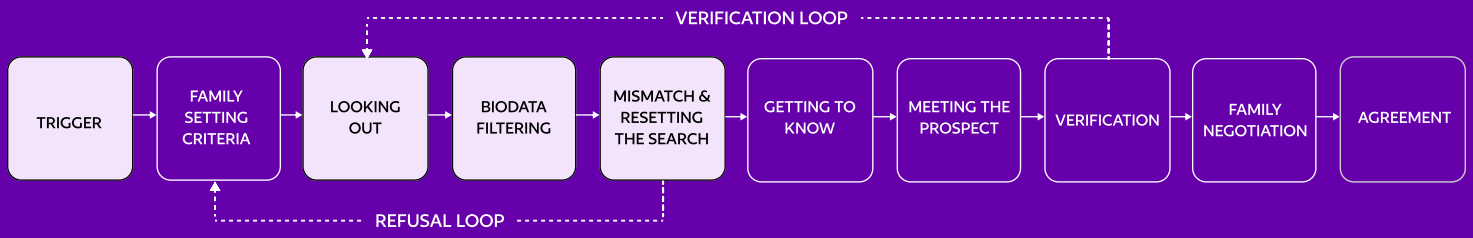
Abstract love doesn't convince parents – tangible evidence does. **In-person meetings are the single biggest mind-changer (44%)**, dissolving imagined community stereotypes far more effectively than time alone (32%) or financial proof (27%).





07

The prospect may stop looking and yet the family might continue the search.



White boxes indicate stages where this theme appears in the journey.

ARRANGED MARRIAGE JOURNEY

Turning down a match just brings the next one. The family's search only stops when someone says yes, or names a person of their own.

Apps treat marriage search like a switch. You're either looking or not. The profile is live or deleted. If the person goes quiet, the assumption is that the search is over. But that isn't the case.

The person getting married is often not the only one searching. A dance teacher deletes her matrimony profile, while her relatives may still be looking. A daughter refuses to talk about marriage for a year, while her mother keeps photos on her phone and shows her one every week. Parents start circulating horoscopes because "it is the right age," before their daughter has met anyone. Stopping your own search doesn't stop your family's.

Stopping your own search doesn't stop your family's.



Gauthami, 22, woman, Anantapur
Gauthami teaches classical dance and music and wants to stay close to her family in Anantapur. She tried a matrimony app herself. She checked salary and job, took numbers, and asked the men to speak to her parents. Each time, one side wasn't interested. After a month or two, she deleted her profile.

> "I'm not searching anymore, madam, I gave up. I haven't logged in anywhere now. I am just doing my job, that's all. If my parents have informed any relatives, maybe they might be looking."

Her family, she says, is "just looking for the sake of looking." No rush. But if a good match comes, they'll go ahead.

The family's search started long before her app. At 21, her parents asked relatives to find a broker. That didn't work out. Then she tried the app. Now, what comes next? Another broker, or something else? "Only parents will know that, even I don't know."

Gauthami stopped searching. Her family's search didn't necessarily stop, and she doesn't control what happens next.

Not all inactivity means the same thing

When someone says “no” during a marriage search, what exactly are they saying no to?

- **Not now:** One participant postponed marriage while pursuing a government job.
- **Not this method:** Karan Rathi rejected a community marriage convention because it felt like an “exhibition,” even while his parents continued the process.
- **Not searching myself:** Gauthami stopped using the app and focused on work, while relatives may have continued looking.
- **Not marriage:** Padmavathi, a mother in Machilipatnam, continued circulating biodatas, as her duty as a parent, even after her daughter explicitly stated she did not want to marry.

Someone who stops using a matrimonial app may still want to marry. Someone who delays marriage may have nothing against a particular match.

These are different kinds of refusal, each with different implications. A “no” becomes meaningful only when we know what it is actually about.

A quiet search is not a paused search

Some people are actively searching but deliberately keeping the search private. Sudhakar was looking for matches, but only his mother knew. He planned to involve his sister and brother-in-law only once a promising match appeared.

Naveen similarly hid his app use from friends to avoid gossip or the impression that other matchmaking routes had failed.

> "I use the app but I don't tell my friends... if I tell one friend, he will tell four others: 'Did you finally go to an app because nothing worked out?' So I keep it private."

This is different from dormancy. Dormancy is about whether the person is actively searching; privacy is about who knows they are searching. **Search effort and search visibility become two different things.**



In non-metro markets, marriage search is rarely a single-user journey. An "inactive" account does not mean the search has ended.

This creates a few important distinctions:

- **The profile owner may not be the person doing the searching.** Parents or relatives can source and filter matches.
- **A pause may be about relief or control**, not lack of interest. Pushing someone to re-engage can add to the pressure that made them step away.
- **Not everyone wants the whole family involved.** Sometimes the search works through just the prospect and one trusted parent until a viable match appears.
- Having the right to reject a match is different from agreeing that the family should keep searching.
- **People may return for one promising person** without wanting to restart the entire search.

For matchmaking platforms, activity, visibility and willingness to marry should be treated as separate signals. A quiet account does not tell you, by itself, what has happened to the search.

What this means

- **The family runs its own clock.** It can start before the person is ready and keep going after they stop. It often starts with "the right age" or a sibling's wedding, not with the person's own readiness.
- **The search runs on channels the person doesn't control:** Caste WhatsApp groups, community registers, brokers, relatives, neighbours. A profile can travel through these channels without the person ever seeing it.
- **Saying no to a match doesn't end the search.** It just brings the next one. The search closes only with a yes, or when the person names someone of their own.
- "Not now" isn't always a way out. Sometimes it's a condition: after a job, after a house. The search pauses and restarts when the condition is met.
- A family continuing to search isn't always gentle support. When a daughter doesn't want marriage at all, it can mean daily conflict.

Figure 17: How do people describe their arranged marriage search experience?

Distribution of active searchers (%) across one-word qualitative search descriptions. N=287 (Active searchers)

65% Nearly two-thirds of active searchers describe the process through negative friction – calling it tough, confusing, lonely, or emotional/tiring.

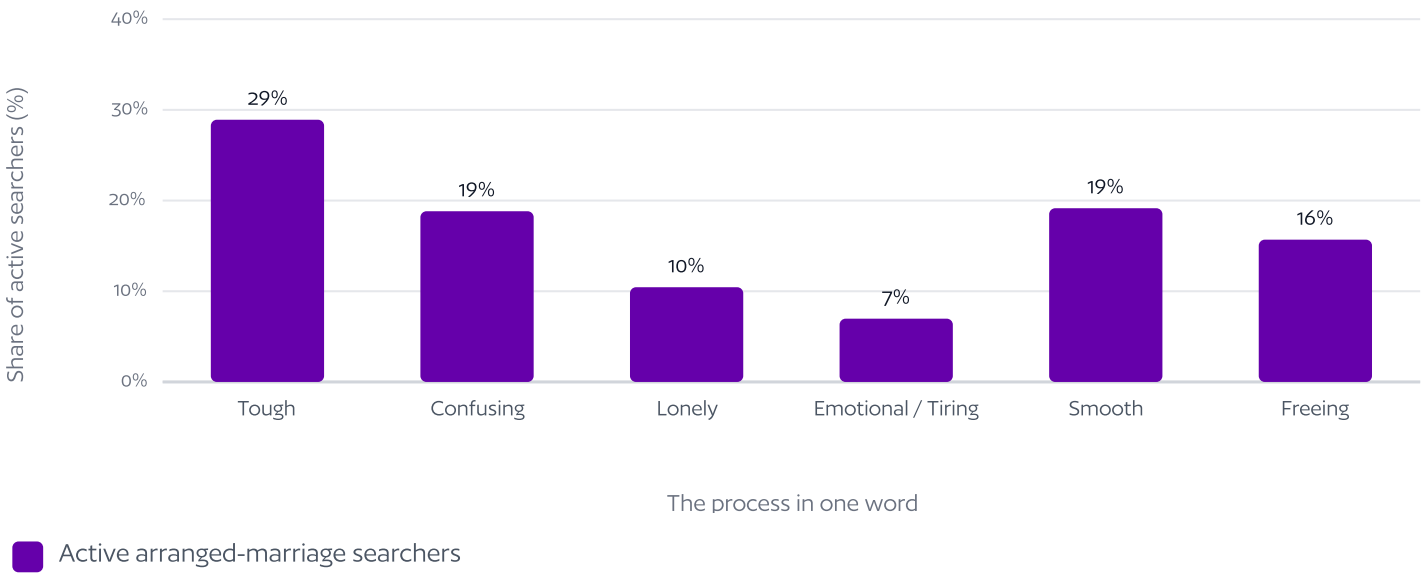
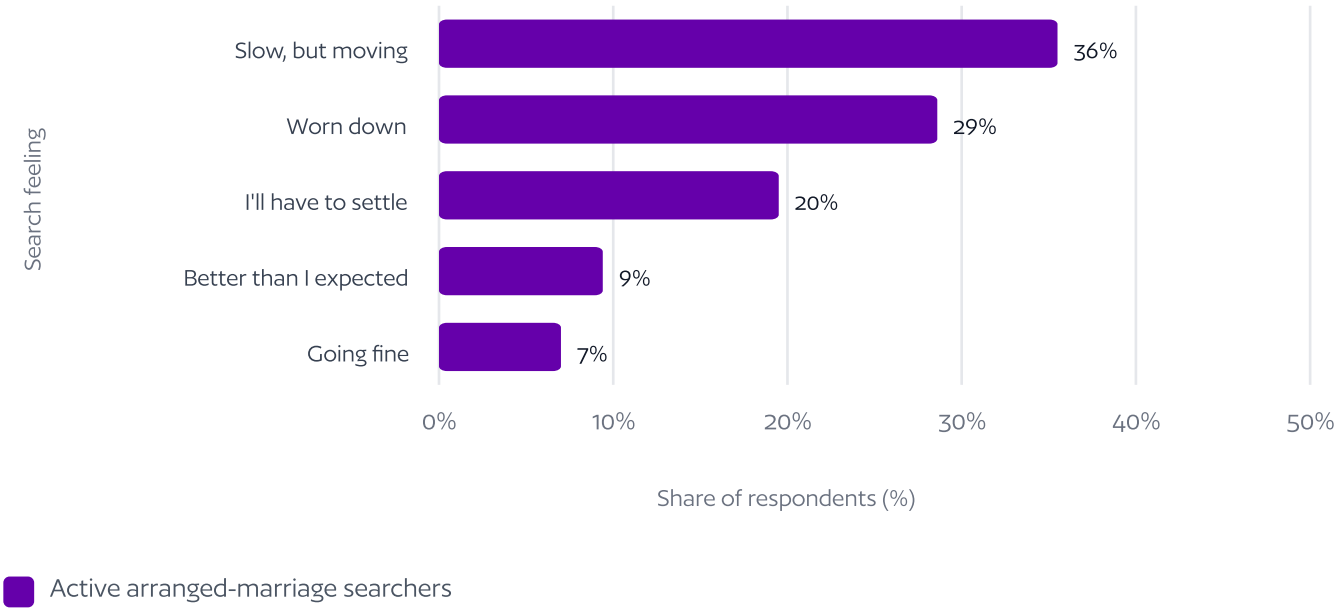


Figure 18: For active lookers in arranged marriage, how does the search feel?

Self-reported search sentiment and progress among active matrimony searchers. N=287 (Active searchers)

Arranged search in Bharat is an endurance test, not a quick browse. 29% feel worn down by the search, while 20% are starting to think they'll have to settle. **The largest group, 36%, describe progress as "slow, but moving."**



The offline matchmaking machine

How physical store networks, printed caste directories, and local brokers run the real marriage economy across Bharat.

INSIDE THE UNBRANDED OFFLINE BAZAAR

CASE FILE: THE SAMAJ SAMMELAN FORM

In Jaipur, Manju Rathi (58) regularly paid to submit her 35-year-old son's profile to the community Parichay Sammelan, collecting printed directories (Samaj Pustikas) to search on his behalf. Her son refused to ever take the stage: "Why make an exhibition of yourself in a public display?" Even as the prospect opted out of the public spectacle, the offline community machinery continued circulating his biodata.

The 90-Second Stage Audition

In convention halls across cities like Indore and Panchkula, matchmaking looks nothing like a phone screen. At annual **Parichay Sammelans,** more than a thousand young men and women queue backstage with badge numbers. When called, each candidate gets 90 seconds on a microphone to announce their name, sub-caste, height, salary, and degree before an auditorium of parents taking furious notes.

Physical Receipts over Algorithms

Offstage, parents crowd registration counters to buy printed Samaj Pustikas (caste directories) and exchange paper biodatas by hand. Even digital giant Matrimony.com maintains over 130 physical retail storefronts across India because parents in Bharat distrust invisible algorithms for life-altering decisions. They demand face-to-face reassurance and local mediators they can hold accountable.



(Source: Dainik Bhaskar – Indore Parichay Sammelan & Sarvjatiya Parinay Smarika)

OTHER OFFLINE CHANNELS

The big caste book

Families pay ₹500 to ₹1,100 to list their children in printed community directories (Samaj Pustikas). Distributed at annual meets and local retail counters, these books index hundreds of candidates strictly by sub-caste, gotra, height, and salary bracket.

(Source: Dainik Bhaskar (2026). Khargone Vishwakarma Samaj Youth Parichay Sammelan · Amar Ujala)

The Local Broker

Independent mediators charge from ₹1,100 for registration to ₹50,000+ upon marriage. Their key role is emotional diplomacy: carrying sensitive proposals between living rooms, verifying family finances, and softening rejections without creating neighbourhood feuds.

(Source: Blessings Matrimonials (2026). Why Indian Marriage Brokers Still Matter in Modern Matrimonial Searches)

The WhatsApp Schedule Admin

Community elders run closed, caste-specific WhatsApp groups with strict broadcasting rules. To manage high message volume, admins enforce fixed schedules – female profiles on Tuesdays, male profiles on Thursdays – manually vetting every PDF before sharing.

(Source: Rest of World Global Reporting (2024). How WhatsApp Became a Cultural Force)

From Our Fieldwork



"At the caste association, they keep that big book with all our profiles. To copy down one profile's phone number and address from it, they charge ₹30 to ₹50."

Lokesh, 34, man, Karur

"We relied on brokers for years. They come home, speak nicely, show photos, and ask for money... that is how everyone in our town still searches."

Adinarayana, 31, man, Nandyala

The Unsolved Gap

The missing human buffer

Technology makes it easy to filter profiles and send PDFs, but software cannot handle the emotional friction of an arranged marriage. Once families connect, apps offer zero support during the most delicate stages:

- **No Emotional Buffer:** Software cannot follow up on ghosted messages, soothe parental anxiety, or soften an awkward rejection between families.
- **No Nuanced Mediation:** Algorithms cannot navigate unspoken financial expectations, dowry undercurrents, or subtle family status tensions.
- **No Local Accountability:** Digital profiles offer no community collateral or trusted mediator to step in and keep negotiations from collapsing.

Conclusion

In a modern marriage, the debate is never about it being love or arranged. Every marriage we studied had to become two things before it could happen: wanted by the couple, and explainable to the family. The two routes differ only in which one comes first.

In arranged marriages, the family's yes comes first and intimacy has to be built inside it. Young people test chemistry in phone calls their parents set up, slow down timelines they did not choose, and learn which of their parents' criteria are real and which were only proxies. Caste, religion and family name rarely move; both generations hold them.

In love marriages, intimacy comes first and the family's yes has to be earned. Couples manage who hears about the relationship, in what order, and with which facts ready. Parents are rarely told first. By the time they are, the case has been built: a sibling or friend on side, the job and income settled, and the objection that will come (usually caste) already anticipated.

Neither route frees anyone from the family. Each changes when the family enters and what it gets to decide.

That makes a marriage in Bharat less a single decision than a sequence of disclosures and negotiations, each one carrying risk for someone. What is missing is not more profiles or better filters. It is help with the steps in between: knowing the person behind a biodata, choosing when to tell, and giving parents what they need to say yes and to say it with pride.



Addendum

Figure 19: How families found out about the relationship (Women vs Men)

Circumstances of parental discovery in love marriages (%). N=263 (Men n=133, Women n=130)

18% vs 9% Women were twice as likely to be forced to disclose by an arranged match search (18% vs 9%).

44% vs 33% Men were more likely to disclose voluntarily when ready (44% vs 33%).

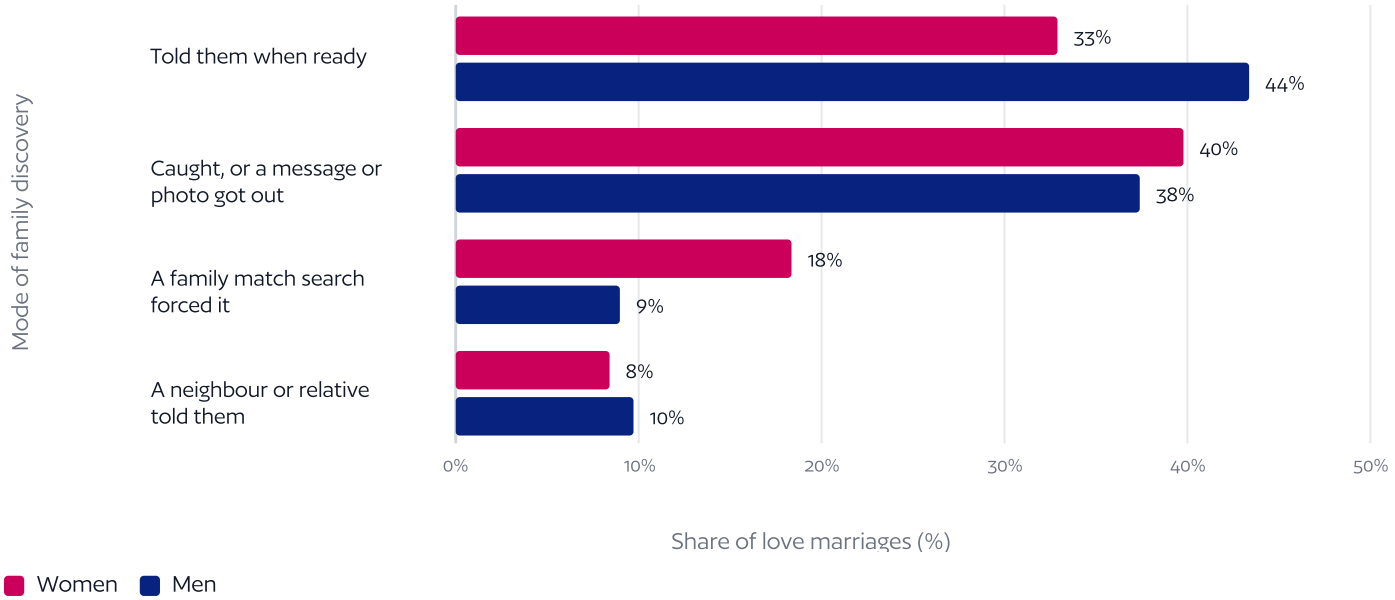


Figure 20: Where do couples live after marriage?

Current household setup reported by married couples (%). N=405

65% of arranged couples live with their parents

51% of love couples set up an independent household in the same city as parents.

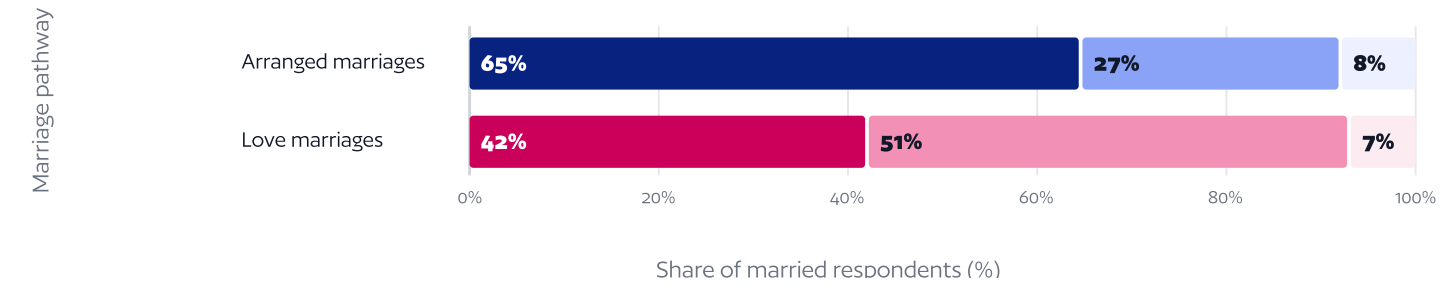


Figure 21: Who did women and men tell first?

First person told outside the couple in love marriages (%). N=263 (Men n=133, Women n=130)

31% vs 10% Women went to their parents directly three times as often as men (31% vs 10%).

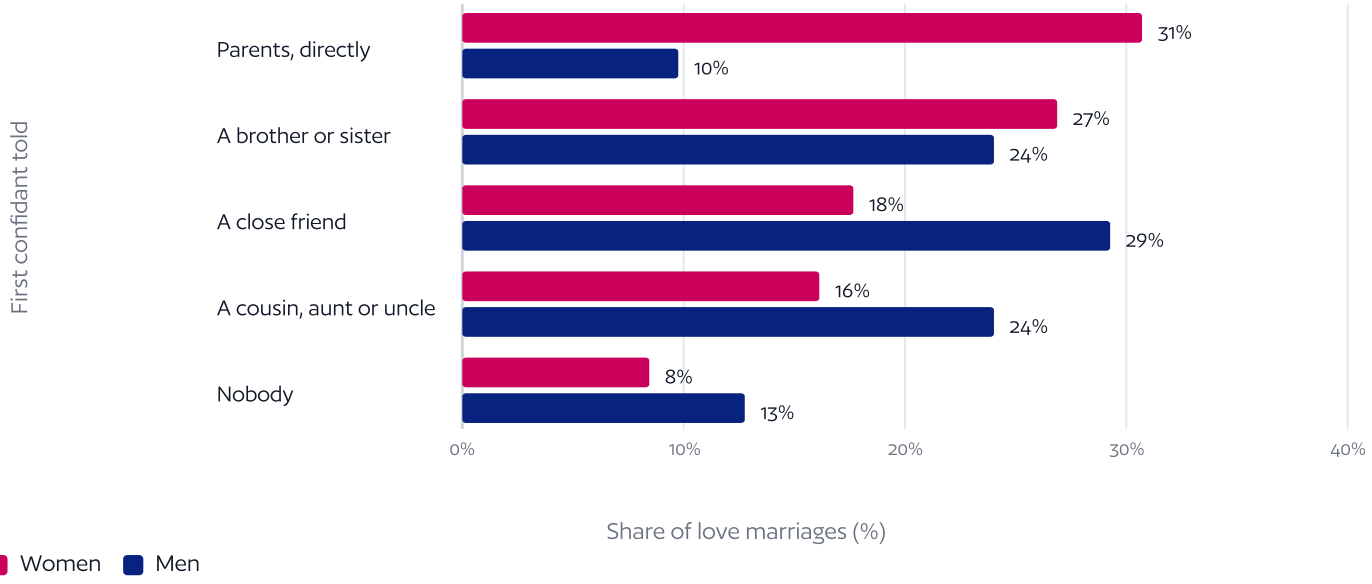


Figure 22: How long before the family accepted the relationship?

Time elapsed before parents accepted the match (%). N=263 (Men n=133, Women n=130)

16% vs 5% Men's families were three times as likely to still hold out and never fully accept (16% vs 5%).

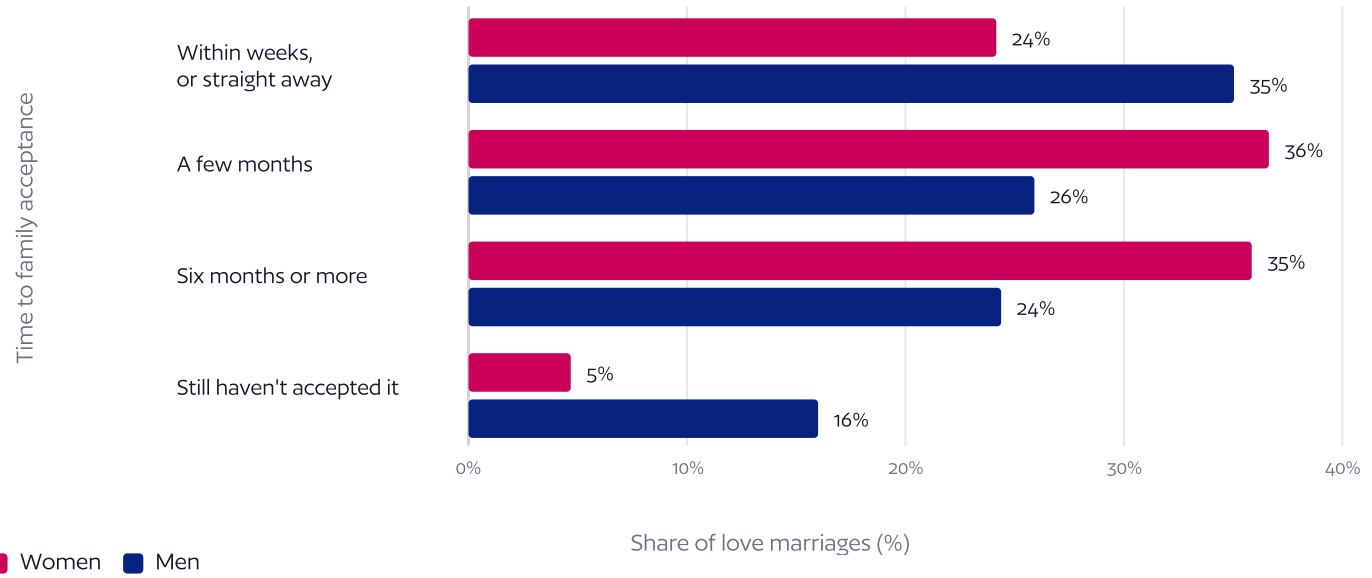


Figure 23: How did the marriage actually turn out?

Retrospective evaluation of marriage outcome (%). N=405

2× Compromise Love marriages report 2× more conscious give-and-take in settling in (21% vs 11%).

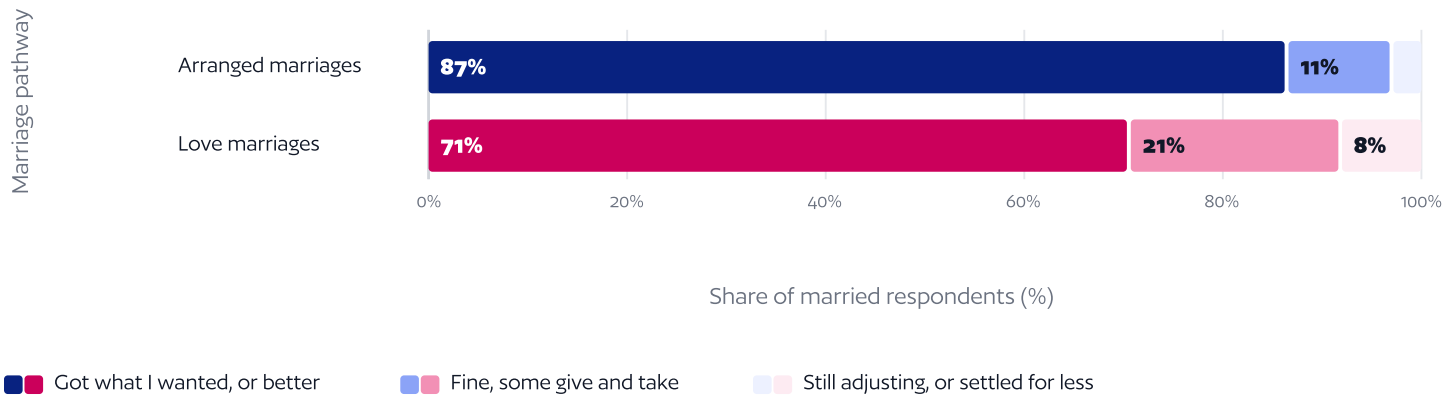


Figure 24: The marriage journey in one word

Single-word retrospective evaluation of the marriage experience (%). N=405

26% of love couples describe it as "Tough" (vs 22% for arranged).

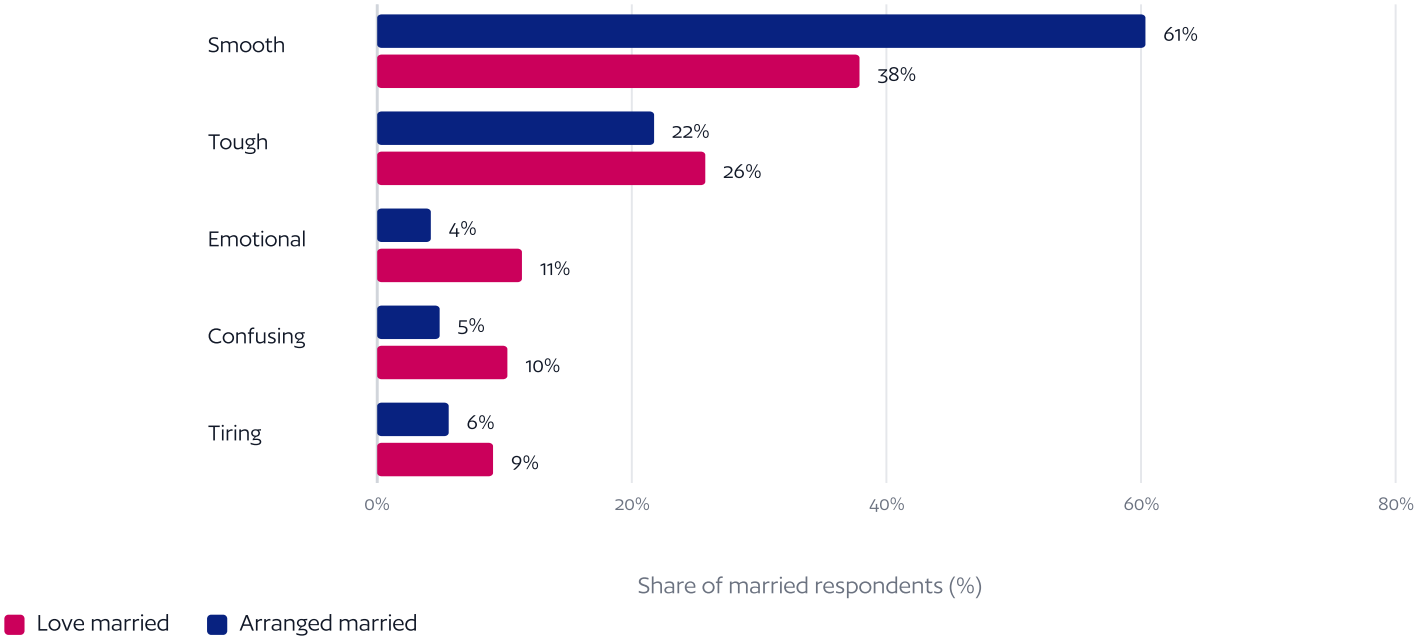
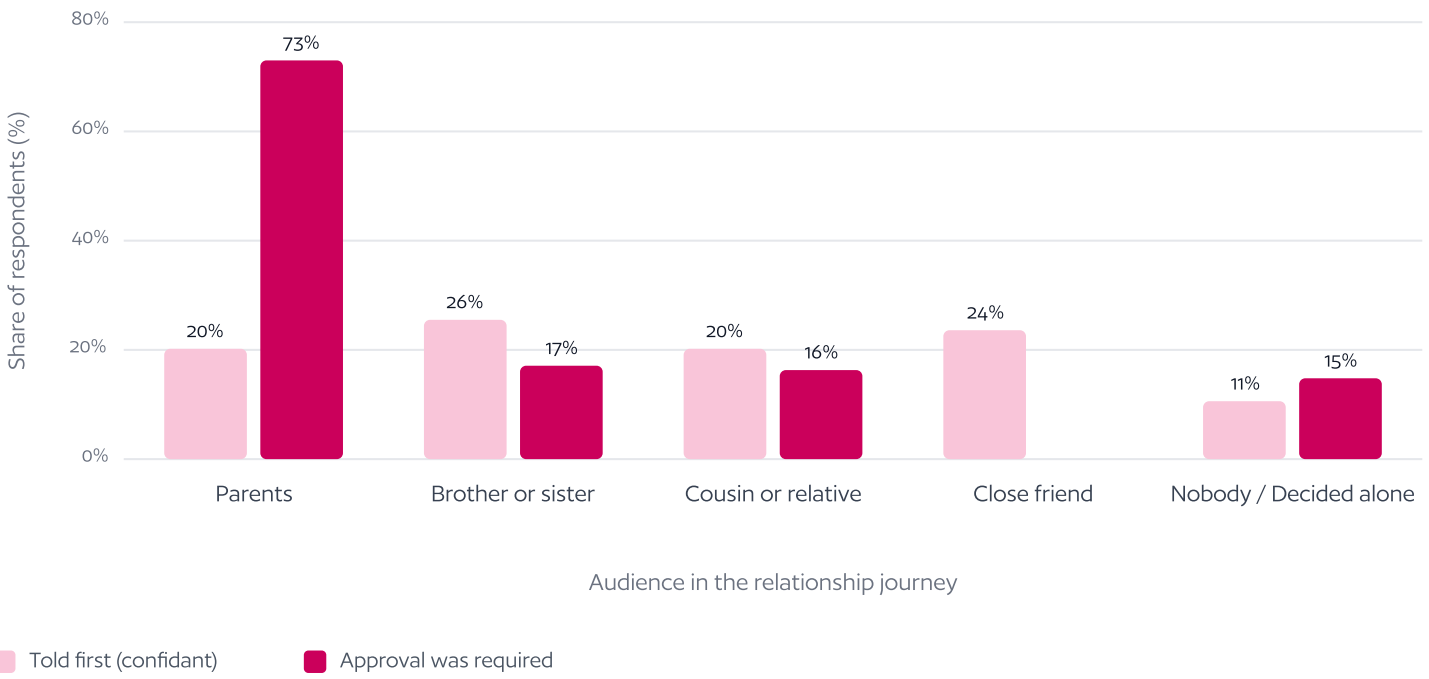


Figure 25: Who you tell first isn't the one whose approval is needed

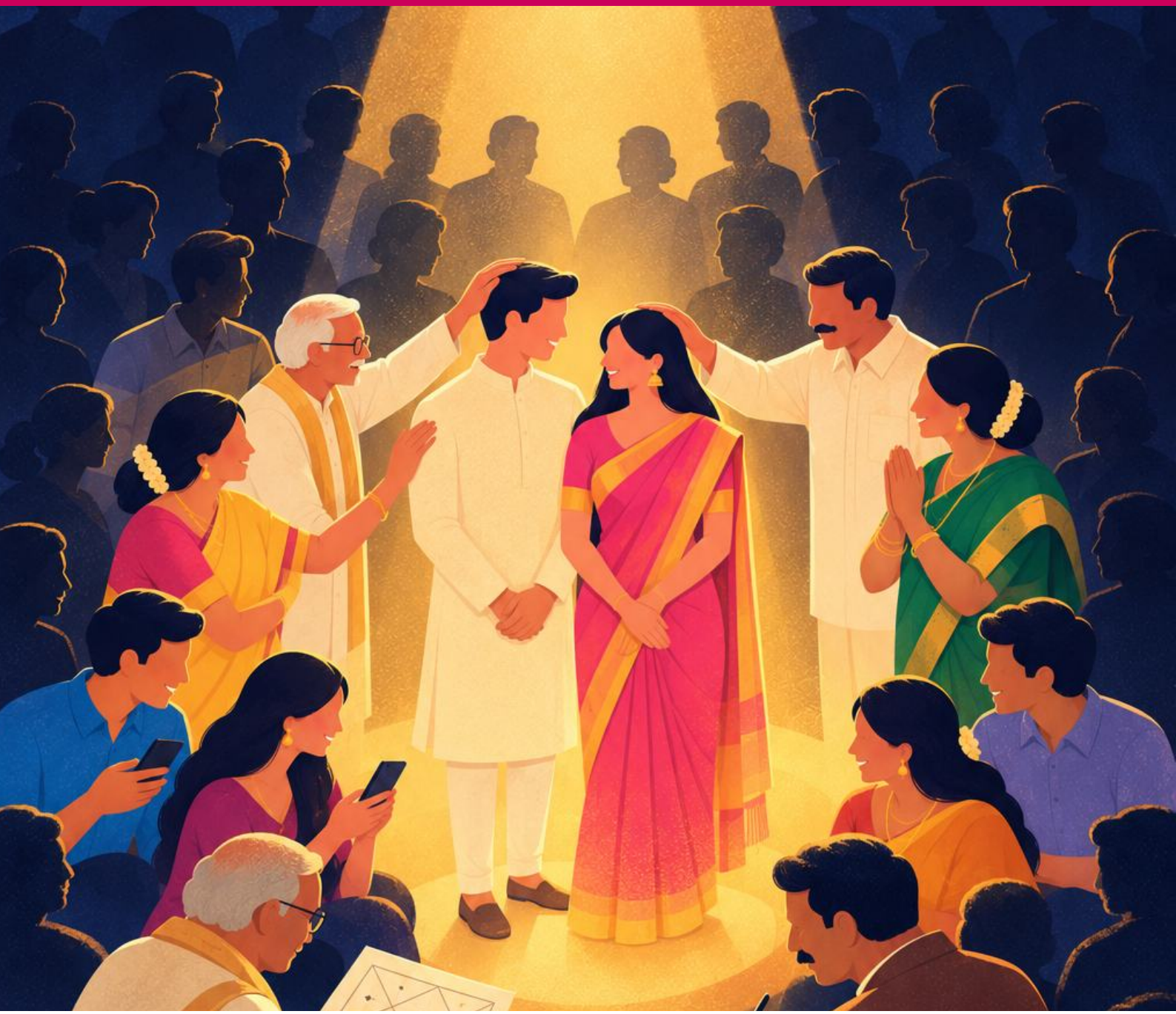
First confidant informed compared to approvals required to proceed, % of love marriages. N=263

73% Still needed parental approval: While siblings and friends hear the secret first, the final decision almost always rests with parents.



Modern Marriage: Bharat Edition

How young India and their families navigate the journey of marriage in Tier-2 and Tier 3 India



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