

# Culture Of Silence Among the daughters in Laws of Bisavli Village, Mathura District, Uttar Pradesh: A Sociological Study

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## Abstract

Uttar Pradesh is an Empowered Action Group State with higher gender and caste based discrimination. The study aimed to understand the expectations imposed on daughters-in-law and the restrictions they face in terms of freedom, as well as to explore potential variations based on caste dynamics at Bisavli village of Mathura district, Uttar Pradesh. Thirteen women who had been married within three years preceding the study were interviewed including their mothers in law and husbands. According to the findings, a vast majority of daughters-in-law were required to conform to specified behavioral norms and were not permitted to exercise personal freedom. Their mothers-in-law and spouses played limiting roles in fostering this culture of silence. Lower caste women, on the other hand, appeared to enjoy greater freedom than the upper caste women. The qualitative aspect of the study allowed for a more in-depth examination of the participants' experiences and perceptions. The study shed light on the intricacies of relationships and power dynamics within Bisavli village through in-depth interviews and focused group discussion. The study emphasizes the importance of addressing societal expectations and limitations put on daughters-in-law, as well as advocating for their rights to autonomy, expression, and personal growth.

**Keywords:** culture of silence, daughter in law, gender, mother in law, Uttar Pradesh, women

## 1. Introduction

Marriage is the most fundamental of all the institutions across the world. In India marriage is treated as a sacred act that joins two families into an eternal bond. While in western society, marriage happens between two individuals, Indians marriages signify the relationship established between two families who happen to fall into the same social category, be it of same caste, religion, or social status. Thus, India is known for its arranged marriages. In India, almost all marriages are arranged. Even among the educated middle classes in modern, urban India, marriage is as much a concern of the families as it is of the individuals (Nanda, 1998). The whole idea of marriage in India stands at the crossroads of

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bargaining, negotiations, emotional exchanges and monetary gains or losses. Social evils existing in the system like dowry, turns the situation into a complex one. Since, the Indian society is patriarchal in nature with strong gender based connotations; women's status is put at risk. It is a woman who has to get displaced and adopt according to the needs of the new family she is married into. The struggle of a woman begins right from the day she gets married and she continues to struggle unless she herself becomes a mother in law. The cycle of this subordination and identity crisis continues. Woman as a daughter in law have many responsibilities to bear, be it immersing herself to the culture of her husband, or gradually settling into the role of a caregiver, eventually, a woman has to adjust and adopt according to the situations she is exposed to. A woman instills the social order of subordination in such a way that she stops questioning her subordinated status and hence, adopts a culture of silence. The concept propounded by Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire to denote the mindset of the oppressed, who stopped questioning about their subjugation and lost their critical consciousness. Likewise, Indian women too, specifically the daughter in laws are forced to adopt a culture of silence, and this scenario is more visible among the rural households, where girls get married at a tender age and are exported to a completely different environment without any warning or preparation. Studies suggest that there is a huge difference between the ways the daughters are treated compared to the treatment of daughter in laws in a household. The status of daughter in law is more of an outsider, and she becomes an insider only when she herself becomes a mother in law. The mobility of a daughter in law remains strictly limited, but on the other hand, a daughter can roam around freely in her own village even after her marriage. The unequal treatment of the daughter in laws and the high expectations attached to them impacts their mental as well as their physical health. Due to such reasons, for this study, only the daughter in laws belonging to the rural Uttar Pradesh was considered.

Empowering Action Group States like Uttar Pradesh with higher gender and caste based connotations have high incidents of domestic violence and wife beating. Increasing maternal mortality rates and declining sex ratio in the state could be attributed to the repeated pregnancies in the expectation of a son. Likewise, the high demand for dowry also jeopardizes the status of rural women in the state. The paper thus, focuses on exploring the experiences of the daughter in laws of Bisavli Village of Mathura district, Uttar Pradesh after marriage. The paper also investigates about the expectations of the in-laws from their daughter in laws and the extent to which they consider their daughter in law as ideal. The study attempted to explore whether caste status of the families have any role in determining the status of daughter in law of the Bisavli village. In order to conceptualize the theme of the study, the subsequent section delves deeper into the review of the studies done in the past.

## 2. Literature Review

Studies evince that the prevalent gender based discrimination serves as the prime factor behind the ill treatment of daughter in laws at the households.

### 2.1 Gender

Gender implies to differences, hierarchies, rankings which exist between the two sexes. Gender explains cultural constructions of various roles that are played by women and men in the society. Further, gender examines the aspect of shaping women's behavior according to the normative order of the society. According to WHO (2012), gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are

socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviors and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other.

Mead (1949), an American anthropologist, was among the first to empirically establish the distinction between men's and women's biological and social characteristics. She accomplished this quite dramatically through her research on masculinity and femininity among the Arapesh, Mundugamor, and Tchambuli, three New Guinea Island societies. So, based on this research, she argued that masculinity is frequently associated with aggression on the one hand, and femininity with nurturance on the other. This trait association has no inherent relationship with biological sex. Mead's research was instrumental in shaping the concept of gender in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Beauvoir (1960) gave a wholesome definition of gender that considers the socialization process as a key to the construction of one's gender based identity, she says that one is not born, rather becomes a woman. Denoting that, a woman is not born as a woman rather society makes her so, based on her biological characteristics. In her feminist classic *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir (1960) questioned the assumptions underlying such formulations. At least in the social sciences, there is now widespread agreement that gender differences are more social than natural. This clearly shows that gender is a social construct, not a result of biological differences. The term sex and gender are conceptually distinct.

Renowned feminist thinker, Butler, considers gender as a repeated set of acts performed by us based on the biological identity that we are born into. Butler confirms that gender is performed not through a singular act but through ritualized repetition. This repetition gives gender its illusion of stability; the repeated performance of gender in accordance with social norms (men ought to speak like this, women ought to dress like this) reproduces and re-inscribes those norms, making them seem legitimate and fixed. Butler defines a performative act as one that produces a series of effects. Because gender is performative, there can be no gender identity prior to gendered acts, because the acts continuously constitute the identity. Butler stated that no one can be a gender without engaging in gendered acts. She also stated that gender should not be viewed as a fixed identity. This implies that the concept of gender performativity leaves no room for gender as a stable identity.

Another theoretical aspect that needs a special mention is intersectionality which refers to the study of how women's intersecting identities, such as race, class, caste, religion, and sexual orientation, influence how they experience oppression and prejudice. It is a type of analytical framework for understanding how different components of women's social and political identities mix to generate distinct modes of discrimination and privilege, and how diverse characteristics such as gender, caste, and so on determine women's social status. Crenshaw (1989) invented the concept of intersectionality. Intersectionality covers a variety of elements such as race, humiliation, socioeconomic class, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, physical characteristics, language, and education, among others.

According to Menon (2015), the subordination of women has been fundamentally justified on the grounds of the biological differences. A women's identification with universal mothering role, their subjective experiences as embodiment of love, care, support, and men's proximity with public domain characterized by impersonal and professional nature are the products of socio-cultural contexts of

femininity and masculinity constructed during the process of our socialization. Social expectations from women as natural mothers, wives, daughters, and homemakers not only part of a patriarchal constructions, but also operate at the household spaces in the form of govern mentality, a concept theorized by Foucault, a French philosopher and sociologist to understand the power equations operating at different social structures. Household too serves as an agent of govern mentality by making women occupy the subordinated status without any protest. Some feminist geographers have argued that space and gender are socially constructed and women's bodies, their activities, and mobility are limited to certain physical territories and structures. For example, home is thought to be constructed through women's gender roles at the same time restricts women's access to freedom. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. As in societies usually gender disparity seems the major cause behind the inculcation of the culture of silence with reference to women and girls.

## 2.2 Culture of Silence

According to Freire (1971), the system of dominant social relations creates a culture of silence that instills a negative, silenced and suppressed self-image into the oppressed. The learner must develop a critical consciousness in order to recognize that this culture of silence is created to oppress. Also, a culture of silence can cause the dominated individuals lose the means by which to critically respond to the culture that is forced on them by a dominant culture. However, this concept has been used by Freire to deal with the inequalities prevalent in the education system. We have focused on applying this concept to conceptualize the status of daughter in laws who act as an oppressed and the in laws who dominate them become an oppressor. Culture of silence as a phenomenon has been viewed in the context of the exercise of power between dominant and subordinate groups, especially in male-female relationships, and the ways in which the oral contributions of the "muted group" are excluded, constrained or devalued. Furthermore, it has been noted that there are different social sanctions between cultures that may silence women in different ways.

As a result of social rejection, a culture of silence emerges. When people are stressed, anxious, uncertain, or fearful about how their messages will be received, saying nothing may seem like the safest option, but this can lead to miscommunications and problems. Conversely, when conversations and communications do not demonstrate humility, reciprocity, and equity, e.g. when we are talked down to, ignored, or not heard, people can become anxious, feel disrespected, humiliated, or suppressed, leading to a culture of silence. As a result of being disrespected, embarrassed, punished, humiliated, culturally misunderstood, and perceived as incompetent, a culture of silence developed.

A culture of silence describes the behaviour of a group of people of any size, as large as an entire national group or profession or as small as a group of colleagues, who do not mention, discuss, or acknowledges a given subject by unspoken agreement. Fear of political repercussions or social ostracism may motivate the practice, as may positive interest in group solidarity. It differs from avoiding a taboo subject in that the term refers to more specific social and political contexts rather than an entire culture. Conspiracy of silence, as a descriptor, implies dishonesty, sometimes favoring loyalty to one social group over another. It is more prevalent as a social practice.

Studies suggest that there are several reasons behind the muted existence of daughter-in-laws. For instance, the fear of getting ignored or beaten up physically, lack of confidence, desire to produce a good image in the eyes of the in-laws by remaining cordial and silent, etc. There are some studies that have been conducted regarding the daughter-in-law in context of culture of silence in terms of relationship between daughter-in-laws and mother-in-laws. Some studies have also focused on fathoming the relationship between repeated pregnancies and the interference of mother-in-law.

A study by Barua, & Kathleen (1995-1997) analyzed that the daughter-in-laws were treated quickly for illnesses interfering with domestic work and were expected to conceive in the first year of their marriage. However, difficulty related to menstruation and symptoms of reproductive tract infection often went untreated. Household work, protection of fertility and silence arising from embarrassment related to sexual health problems were the strongest factors influencing care-seeking. Husbands made the decision about health checkups and family size and mothers-in-law sometimes influenced these decisions; daughter-in-laws had neither decision-making power nor influence.

Thapa (1996) conducted a study in Nepal in which she concluded that high reproductive morbidity in many developing countries is due to the fact that women opt to neither discuss their problems nor seek medical care. Daughter-in-laws choose to suffer their affliction in silence and have a fear of being ostracized by fellow villagers since they don't know someone who can provide them proper and timely treatment.

Gigs et al (2001) conducted a study in Gambia titled as the burden of reproductive-organ disease in rural women in Gambia, West Africa and evinced that rural women, were expected to have a good reproductive and maternal health status, however, many of them were suffering from reproductive-organ disease. But, the prevalent culture of silence restricted them to share about it with their immediate family members. In inadequately resourced rural areas, with poor education, heavy agricultural and domestic labour, and limited access to quality health care, many women were not able to attain and maintain good reproductive health and wellbeing just because of culture of silence.

Allendorf (2006) examined in her study on the ideals and experiences of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship and contended that the relationship between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are dependent on various factors. Some women experience affectionate, high quality relationships with their mother-in-laws, while others' relationships are characterized by hurtful exchanges and long silences. The study showed a positive relationship between joint family and the relationship between the two.

Dixit et al (2015-2016) conducted a study on the association between early marriage and pressure from in-laws and family planning behaviors, among married adolescent girls in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The study confirms that in-laws' pressure on fertility is common and it affects couple communication about family size, and it is more so among newlywed couples.

Noreen, Jadoon, & Muhammad (2017) conducted a study in Pakistan named the culture of silence and secrets: repressions and psychological disorders among Pakistani housewives in fiction. They examined that Pakistani housewives suffered from emotional and psychological repression in their daily lives, which resulted in mental instability and psychological disorders. Through the analysis of two short



stories by Pakistani feminist writers Shaila Abdullah and Rukhsana Ahmad, this paper studies the repression of Pakistani housewives, and their emotional sufferings, to identify the long-lasting effects of emotional abuse among Pakistani women. Using the Freudian theory of unconscious as theoretical basis, this paper analyzed the unconscious of both female protagonists, the stereotypical Pakistani housewives. This paper analyzed that due to the culture of silence, women prefer to remain in their cage, a cage that restrains all their unexpressed emotions, fears and memories.

A study conducted by Almanza, Karra, & Pathak (2019) contents that restrictive social norms imposed by family members can limit women's access to social relationships outside their family. Daughter in laws of joint family are more prone to restricted mobility and inability to form social connections outside the household, especially those related to health, fertility, and family planning. These restrictions are mainly motivated by the misalignment of fertility preferences between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. The study highlights that daughter in laws sharing the same household with mother in laws have fewer peers outside the household and hence, are less likely to visit a family planning clinic and use modern contraception methods.

Kandpal & Baylis (2019) concludes in their study on the social lives of married women and their peer. The results show significant peer effects on only a few of the examined measures of women's autonomy. In contrast, peer effects exist on all considered outcomes of daughters' diet and time spent on chores. The findings suggest a large decay rate between effects on own empowerment and peer effects. Interventions targeting child welfare through women's empowerment may generate second-order effects on intra-household decision-making, albeit with substantial decay rates, and thus benefit from targeted rather than randomized rollout. In contrast, interventions on gender roles and women's autonomy may be limited by the stickiness of social norms.

Andrew et al (2020) conducted a study on social networks of young married women in rural Odisha, India. This is a group for whom highly-gendered norms around marriage, mobility and work are likely to shape opportunities to form and maintain meaningful ties with other women. We track the social networks of 2,170 daughters in laws over four years, and find a high degree of isolation. Wealthier women and women from higher castes and tribes have smaller social networks than their less-advantaged peers. Hence, confirming that higher caste of daughter in laws has no impact on the degree of their social mobility and freedom.

Deshpandey (2020) attempted to analyze through the dialectical study on patriarchal oligarchy, culture of silence and Ecofeminism. She portrayed an existentialist crisis faced by women and their quest for ultimate autonomous selfhood which coerces them to challenge the traditional constraints of patriarchy imposed on them. The struggles exhibited by characters in her novels are completely different from the ones experienced by women in western culture. The characters try to emancipate themselves from patriarchal clutches by embracing the mixed socio-cultural scenarios prevalent in society. She depicts a patriarchal society which is threatened by the increasing eminence of women around them and makes all possible efforts to prevent their progress.

**Gaps in the study**

The studies conducted so far failed to observe the firsthand experience of the daughters in law and mothers in laws through postmodernist perspective including the ideology of Freire (1971). The male perspective was missing in the studies conducted so far. A handful of studies adopted a sociological lens and none of them focused on Bisavli village, Mathura district Uttar Pradesh, India, where the present study was conducted. Moreover, the intersectional analysis of the relationship between mother in law and daughter in law was missing in the studies conducted so far.

**3. Methodology and Methods**

The study conducted was qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is primarily inductive in character, with a distinct framework. The researcher begins with a broad notion or query, and as the study progresses, these queries become more detailed. Then, through investigation, a pattern may develop. So, in qualitative research, observation is followed by a theoretical perspective or attitude. As a result, this study has been qualitative in character since we cannot quantify the experiences and perspectives as we can in quantitative research. And the data was gathered using the interview schedule as well as FGDs (focus group discussions) as a tool.

**Research Setting**

The research was conducted at Bisavli village of Mathura district, Uttar Pradesh. Uttar Pradesh is considered as one of the Empowered Action Group State (EAG) with higher incidence of caste and gender based prejudices. The Government of India (GOI) has named these states as Empowered Action Groups (EAG) states, which consist of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan (Arokiasamy & Gautam, 2008). The EAG states comprise almost 45% of Indian population. As far as Mathura district is concerned, rural areas of Mathura, male population is 962,028 while female population remains at 829,163. According to Census 2011, the male and female literacy were 81.97 and 56.89 respectively. With regards to Sex Ratio in Mathura, it stood at 863 per 1000 male, which is quite low. As per 2011 census, 70.32 % population of Mathura districts lives in rural areas of villages. The total Mathura district population living in rural areas is 1,791,191 of which males and females are 962,028 and 829,163 respectively. In rural areas of Mathura district, sex ratio is 862 females per 1000 males.

**Table 3.1 Data of Bisavli Village, Mathura District, Uttar Pradesh**

State Name	District Name	Sub District	Village Name	Name
Uttar Pradesh	Mathura	Mathura	Bisavli(124035)	Bisavli
Population	Persons	Males	Females	
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,274</b>	<b>1,770</b>	<b>1,504</b>	
In the age group 0-6 years	505	247	258	
Scheduled Castes (SC)	600	349	251	
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	0	0	0	
<b>Literates</b>	<b>2,060</b>	<b>1,360</b>	<b>700</b>	
<b>Illiterate</b>	<b>1,214</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>804</b>	

Source: Census 2011

### **Sampling Technique**

Sampling technique included purposive sampling because only those women were considered for the study who was the daughter in laws married within three years, other samples included the mother in laws and husbands of the respondents.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

In-depth interview, participant observation and group discussions were used to understand the standpoint of women and their immediate family members.

### **Tools of Data Collection**

Interview Schedule and Focused Group discussion were used to document the experiences of women.

### **Sample Size**

A total of 13 newly married daughter in laws were interviewed, out of which 10 belonged to *Jaat* community and other three belonged to lower caste. The researcher also interviewed the husbands of these women as well as their mother in laws.

## **4. Results**

Majority of daughters in law interviewed were high school dropouts and only three among 13 were 12<sup>th</sup> pass. Educational level of the daughters in law was not considered much important hence the criteria of ideal daughter in law did not include the educational qualification. According to the study, respondents were facing drastic changes such as increased responsibilities, pressure of bearing a child, behaving well with everyone, listening to the qualms without reacting, acting as a care giver, obeying the rules at home without being critical, and so on. Along with changes in the lives of daughters-in-laws, their basic rights were also threatened after marriage. In *Jaat* community, there were certain rules and regulations that were mandatory to be followed by daughter in laws and were essential in making them an ideal daughter in law. There were certain parameters such as being beautiful and intelligent, behaving according to society and family rules, not talking much, and respecting everyone in the family which were the essential qualities of ideal daughter in laws in the village.

However, a contrast was seen in case of the daughter in laws belonging to lower caste. Here, looks and intelligence were not that important but staying calm and uniting the family were the ideal responsibilities of daughter in laws. As Rajbati said, “*our mother-in-law says, eat well, wear well, stay calm and keep the whole family together, this is the quality of a good daughter-in-law.*” Community members other than Rajbati agreed with this statement.

### **4.1. Changes in the lives of daughter in laws after marriage**

After marriage respondents experienced many changes in their life in terms of responsibilities, in terms of control, in terms of behavior pattern, and in terms of equality and freedom. For instance, Aarti, a daughter in law belonging to *Jaat* community told that:



*“Before marriage I used to live carefree. There were no restrictions on coming and going anywhere. But after getting married, I can’t go anywhere and have to take permission for everything from my mother-in-law was father-in-law. Husband has no say in anything. I am not even allowed to eat without the permission of my mother in law. My life has changed upside after marriage.”*

Romi, too from Jaat community have had an experience to share regarding it,

*“Many changes came into my life after marriage. I have to touch everyone’s feet, everyone has to be respected, and veil has to be kept throughout. There is a lot of freedom in my maternal home; here I have to follow the rules of mother-in-law. Earlier I used to roam around freely in my village, but in my husband’s village, I don’t even know who lives in the neighborhood. I can go out only in case of an emergency that too related to my health.”*

Similar experiences were that of other respondents as well. A study by Vera-Sanso (1999) on the daughter in laws of Chennai, confirms that the relationship between the mother in law and daughter in law of rural India is that of domination and submission.

hooks (2015) contends that men and women both are taught to follow the hegemonic patriarchal values and accept the predetermined gendered role. Men and women are taught to follow this value system and comply with power and authority. Such a value system teaches men and women to understand power as a controlling and dominating element. In the study too, it was found out that the daughter in law remained passive since they had internalized the social order of subordination since the process of their socialization. They were afraid to say a word in order to maintain a good image of them as daughter in laws.

According to Foucault (1991) power is everywhere and comes from everywhere. In the current study, it was found that the in laws have *hegemony* over the daughter in laws and the *governmentality* at domestic spaces doesn’t allow daughter in laws to resist against the mistreatment and controlling behaviour of the in laws.

An intersectional perspective introduced by Crenshaw (1988), which considers the numerous layers of identity and power dynamics at work in society, can be used to understand and analyze the culture of silence among daughter-in-laws. Individuals have multiple social identities, such as gender, class, ethnicity, religion, and others, which can intersect and interact to impact their experiences and possibilities. A woman being marginalized due to her gender is doubly jeopardized when she becomes a daughter in law in a patriarchal set up. Power disparities within families are frequently reinforced by patriarchal standards and gender roles. Daughters-in-law are expected to conform to traditional gender roles, which can limit their agency and voice within the household. They may encounter pressures to prioritize their husbands' and in-laws' needs and desires, resulting in a culture of silence as they navigate their roles and obligations.

In a patriarchal society, daughters-in-law are seen as outsiders who must adapt to the established family dynamics. This creates a power dynamic where they feel compelled to conform and remain silent, not challenging or questioning existing family practices or decisions resonating with the findings of Althusser (). Althusser contended that the process of interpellation works best when it is invisible, when individuals accept cultural concepts as if they are clear or natural, like when men act one way and women act another. Interpellation works best when people don't think about being interpellated in the first place (Hall, 1985). Girls too are trained from their childhood to behave a certain way and are treated like an outsider in their paternal home as well getting prepared to be given to another family when the right time comes.

#### 4.2 The ideal daughter in law syndrome

According to Homan (2017), the daughter-in-law represents a strict social code of what it means to be a good woman and is founded on traditional notions of what it means to be honorable. Hence, only the daughter in law of the family has to maintain the dignity, purity, and sanctity of the family. Aarti belonging to upper caste confirmed that,

*“Yes there is some proper criteria for becoming an ideal daughter in law, such as I obeying the in-laws, being properly dressed in saree and avoiding suit. The amount of dowry that a daughter in law brings with herself is also related to her treatment in the family. Likewise, cooking, sewing and interested in increasing the family size are some other parameters. Likewise, an ideal daughter in law never talks loudly and wears a veil to cover her face, if any woman fails to follow these rules; they are considered a bad human being and are even abused and beaten by the in laws.”*

Reshma belonging to other backward caste community also confirmed that bearing a child is also considered as a great responsibility of a daughter in law and she is given more importance if the child is a male.

*“It’s been a year since I went out, I feel suffocated here. My mother in law never allows me to go outside. I haven’t met my parents after marriage; my mother in law says that I can go to my parents’ place only if I become pregnant. They already know that I have a health issue that’s why I can’t get pregnant. Sometimes they ridicule me for that. A daughter in law who bears a child is also considered as ideal in the family. However, a male child is given more importance and thus, a daughter in law having a male child is paid more attention and given extra importance.”*

Rich (2001), stated that women are gendered in the patriarchal society to be inferiors, victims and weak. Another daughter in law, Reshma from OBC community told that,

*“I use to wake up in the morning, and sweep, before making tea for everyone which is then followed by household chores. I have my meal only after others have it, if a daughter in law eats before her in laws and husband, she is considered a bad woman and is cursed. Likewise, sitting before the in laws is also taken as a bad and unacceptable behaviour.”*

The views of the lower caste women remained the same as that of the upper caste and other backward caste women.

So, based on the observations made above, and as reflected by the experiences of the aforementioned daughter-in-laws, silence can be used to communicate a variety of emotions, including disagreement, surprise, grief, defiance, approval, embarrassment, obligation, criticism, soothing, humility, regret, condemnation, or permission, among others. Some cultures believe that silence is an important component of nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication, which includes listening behaviors, is an important component of social currency, and this type of tendency is present in this hamlet among daughter-in-laws, but is more common in the Jaat community. Elder family members believe that the capacity to replace strong emotional outbursts with polite silence is vital for social cohesion within the family. As a result, the culture of silence is born.

### 4.3 Pressure of family planning on respondents

There is a kind of pressure on respondents regarding family planning by their husband/ other family members. Respondents witnessed this by their statements such as;

Aarti from upper caste community stated that–

*“After a few months of marriage pressure starts coming from mother in law and sister in law to have children. And they insist on visiting a doctor and taking a medicine. I wished to have child after a year or so but they told us to have a child as soon as possible. My husband too has no say in this and insists me to listen to his family.”*

Likewise, it was also found out that there was a deep rooted misconception among husbands and their family regarding contraceptives such as condoms and pills. For instance, Mala, a daughter in law from other backward caste community shared that, *“My husband tells me that the contraceptives are not good for health. The chemicals used in making these contraceptives make people infertile. That’s why we never use any such methods.”* The misconceptions related to contraceptives remained visible in all the castes.

In all of the cases it was seen that mother in laws had a strong say regarding the family size of their son. It was also found mother in laws were keen to have a male grandchild and pressurized their daughter in laws to go for another child just after six months of having a girl child which led to repeated pregnancies and poor maternal health status of daughter in laws. One such case was revealed by Soni, a daughter in law from an upper caste community.

*“We have had a girl child last year, and now I am pregnant again with a child, since my mother in law wanted to have a male grandchild, she started insisting us to go for another child. Although, doctor had warned me to wait for at least two years, but we had to go for another child due to that pressure.”*

Similar instances were shared by other respondents as well, which highlights the huge role played by mother in law in the family as an agent of patriarchy. Dowry also remained the major topic of discussion with the respondents. The next section deals with the same.

### 4.4 Respondents view on dowry

Respondents considered dowry as a bad practice but also considered it as a prerequisite for marriage. One statement by Arti, from upper caste reflected that,

*“Dowry was taken in my marriage. But this practice is not correct. And there is a demand from the groom's side that we should have gold, TV, etc. And according to me the girl's parents give everything on their own but nowadays everything is fixed from the side of the boys”.*

Another respondent, Priyanka from other backward caste told that,

*“My marriage was fixed on 15 lakh on the demand of groom’s family. But this practice is not correct. This is the also reason for female feticide. And there is a demand from the groom's side. This signifies the prestige of groom’s family. And that’s why people usually follow this practice. This practice found highly in Jaat community.”*

All in all, respondents criticized the practice of dowry but also admitted about it being a social evil. Moreover, it was also considered as a precondition for marriage and the treatment of daughter in laws also remained highly dependent on the amount of dowry they brought with themselves. The presence of dowry was also seen in the lower caste community. It was also found out that lower caste imitated the upper caste when it came to dowry and son preference, reinstating the presence of sanskritization, a term

meant to denote the imitation of cultural practices by the people from lower caste from the upper caste in order to gain a reputation in society (Srinivas).

#### 4.5 Views on restrictions imposed and bad omen attached to the daughter in laws

A respondent named Rajbati belonging to other backward caste revealed that,

*"On the first day of my marriage I was forbidden to speak and was not allowed to go anywhere without the permission of my mother in law. I can only leave the household if I fall ill or when I am going to my parents' house. However, it's difficult to go anywhere without consent."*

Almost same kinds of experiences were shared by the respondents from other communities. As can be seen in this study, social expectations from daughter-in-laws as natural moms, wives, daughters, and homemakers are not only part of patriarchal constructions, but also function in the material surroundings of the society. According to feminist geographers, space and gender are socially constructed, and women's bodies, activities, and movement are restricted to specific physical regions and institutions. Home, for example, is understood to be formed through women's gender roles while also restricting women's access to independence.

There was one more striking finding of this study which included the tendency of the in-laws to stigmatize the newly weddings daughter in laws if any mishap took place in the family. Majority of respondents admitted of felt this way. For instance, a respondent named Aarti, stated that,

*"In every daughter-in-law considered as a faulty. For example, if a new daughter-in law comes to the house and someone's work gets spoiled or someone dies, then it is said that the daughter in laws has brought the bad omen with her and she is considered as unlucky for the family."*

This finding resonates with the findings of Derdar (2018) in his study on the daughter in law and mother in law relationship in Moroccan culture. The author found that in Moroccan culture a bride is deemed *saga* or a bad omen/unlucky if some mishap befalls the in-laws after her arrival. Among the things the mother-in-law must do to stop other future misfortunes are forcing the son to divorce using witchcraft. However, in the present study, the instances of witchcraft weren't found.

#### 4.6 Husband's perspective

In a patriarchal society, wives are defined as inferior; husbands are assumed to own them, and to have the right to dominate them, including through the use of force (Jejeebhoy, 1998). A study by Singh & Arora (2008), confirms that men play significant roles in decisions affecting women's reproductive and maternal health. Because of women's poor standing in Indian society, they must still rely on their husbands to receive suitable and necessary health care for their ailments. The findings of the present study signify the same. Husbands were considered as the only one with whom the daughters in law conversed with immediately after marriage. It was found that majority of husbands interviewed considered themselves superior and more knowledgeable compared to their wives and expected their wives to behave like a subordinate. They also treated their wives as a liability and expected them to perform the wifely duties right from the beginning. They also expected their wives to serve their families and parents as a caregiver. To exemplify, Harveer, a husband from *Jaat* community expressed that the first priority of a daughter-in-law is to serve her mother-in-law and father-in-law and take care of her family. Another respondent named Rinku shared that silence is the real jewel of a daughter in law. If she becomes too expressive, it becomes troublesome for the family to tackle her. All the husbands

interviewed showed opposition in providing their wives equal opportunities and freedom. In joint families of *Jaat* community daughter in laws did not enjoy freedom at all. However, the lower caste households with nuclear families gave more freedom to their daughters in law. Hence, the findings evince that the newly weddings husbands of *Jaat* community were in favor of the persisting culture of silence among the daughter in laws of their family and expected their wives to adopt that culture right from the beginning to avoid quarrel and fights.

#### 4.7 Perspectives of mothers in law

In India, mothers in law have a significant influence on family decisions on home activities. They were similarly likely to influence the number of sons their daughters-in-law to have and the responsibilities that a daughter in law has to bear (Char, Saavala & Kulmala, 2010).

A study by Allendorf (2015) evinces that daughters in law and mothers in law are simultaneously strangers and close family members. Their relationship is the most complexed relationship which has many layers. In rural India, specifically in joint families, mother in law becomes an agency, an authority that reproduces patriarchy and patriarchal ties. As an immediate family member, a mother in law becomes the first point of contact after husband that determines the position of a daughter in law in the family. According to Anukriti et al. (2020), co-residence with the mother-in-law is inversely associated to her daughter-in-law's mobility and ability to build social ties outside the household, particularly those pertaining to health, fertility, and family planning. It also restricts the social behaviour of daughters in law that negatively affects their self-confidence,

In the present study too, it was found out that mothers in law were critical of their newlywed daughters in law. For instance, Neela Devi from *Jaat* community shared that,

*“There is a need to control daughters-in-law for a peaceful familial relationship. If a daughter in law is not controlled she breaks the family. An ideal daughter in law is the one who abides by the rules and never questions anything. If she starts questioning, she is considered a bad woman. Nobody respects her and her life becomes miserable. When I was a daughter in law I also faced problem and had to adjust. This is our fate.”*

Majority of mothers in law opined that, the life of women is filled with sacrifices and challenges reinforcing the presence of interpellation. At every step of life women have to sacrifice and being a daughter-in-law a woman has to sacrifice her whole life the family she is married into. She loses her identity while doing this. But for the family's welfare and peace as a daughter-in-law, a woman has to lose her freedom, her personality, her identity, and ultimately her everything without questioning the prevalent norms.

Hence, the present study suggests that the patriarchal ties and *governmentality* prevalent at the domestic spaces leads to the creation of a culture of silence among the daughter in laws. Their status in the family is determined by their submissive behaviour, naïve nature and the extent of care they provide to others without asking for anything in return. Daughters in law are not expected to raise question and hence, their critical consciousness is never awake. They are trained to act as a subordinate by accepting the social order of subordination. The hegemony of mother in law becomes critical in guiding the behaviours of other family members towards the new daughter in law including her husband. However, the striking finding of the study is that, the extent of freedom is slightly more prevalent in case of the lower caste women compared to that of the *Jaat* community. This can be attributed to the fact that gender based connotations are higher in dominant castes compared to the lower castes.



## 5. Conclusion

In rural India, the relationship between daughter-in-laws and mothers-in-law is complex, and it is frequently influenced by the prevalent culture of silence, which oppresses the daughter-in-laws. Rural India is recognised for its patriarchal social structure, in which women's duties and obligations are frequently specified within the household and society. Within this paradigm, daughter-in-laws frequently confront a variety of problems and expectations when they integrate into their husbands' households. The culture of silence aggravates these issues by discouraging open communication and the sharing of concerns or frustrations. Daughters-in-law may find it difficult to express their ideas, demand their rights, or handle family difficulties. This culture of silence can create a power imbalance in the home, with mothers-in-law frequently wielding authority and influence. The outsider position of the daughter-in-law might further marginalise her and limit her agency in decision-making processes. This dynamic might lead to the dependence, mistreatment and isolation of the daughters in law.

In an EAG state like Uttar Pradesh with higher caste and gender based connotations, efforts should be undertaken to address these challenges and foster more inclusive and equal interactions between daughter-in-laws and mothers-in-law. Initiatives for women's empowerment, education programmes, and community interventions should be introduced to promote gender equality within households. Encouragements of open discussion, empathy, and safe venues for daughter-in-laws to express themselves are critical steps towards changing the culture of silence. Husbands should play an important part in making their home a safer place for their newlywed. Husbands can help improve the connection between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law in rural India by actively participating in the reformation of old conventions, promoting open communication, and creating gender equality. This collaborative effort involving husbands and wives, as well as broader cultural changes, can assist to create a more inclusive and empowered atmosphere for daughters-in-laws, where they are cherished and respected.

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