



RESEARCH PAPER

**The Commodification of Marriage: A Marxist Critique of Soniah Kamal's *Unmarriageable***

<sup>1</sup>Nimra Nawaz and <sup>2</sup>Fatima Hassan

1. MS English Literature, Department of English, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of English, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

**Corresponding Author** [nimraanawaz@gmail.com](mailto:nimraanawaz@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT**

The present paper highlights how the commodification of marriage has emerged as a significant social issue in Pakistan. It aims to explore how individuals are reduced to mere commodities and how the institution of marriage gets commodified. The present paper adopts a qualitative and analytical approach and employs Lois Tyson's Marxist critique to examine the commodification of human relationships and the institution of marriage within contemporary Pakistani society, as depicted in Soniah Kamal's *Unmarriageable* (2019). This transformation is largely attributed to the pervasive influence of capitalist ideology, alongside values such as materialism and consumerism, which are deeply embedded in Pakistani culture and society. In light of the findings, the present paper calls for a critical examination of societal norms and stereotypes associated with marriage, urging a process of unlearning and re-learning the ideologies and practices that commodify and dehumanize individuals within the institution of marriage.

**Keywords:** Commodification, Marriage, Capitalism, Consumerism, Marxism

**Introduction**

Terry Eagleton (2011), a renowned literary theorist and critic states "...as long as Capitalism is still in business, Marxism must be as well" (p. 2). This work of Eagleton is a robust defense of Marxism against the popular and prevailing notion that the Marxist school of thought is irrelevant and outdated to understand the socio-cultural, economic, and political issues and challenges of the contemporary world. Eagleton in this book highlights the dynamic relationship between Marxism and Capitalism and provides a critical reflection on the continued relevance of Marxism in the contemporary world. He asserts that as long as Capitalism exists as a dominant economic system, Marxism will continue to persist as an ideological counterpoint, an opposing and resisting force against the exploitative practices of Capitalism (p. 2). Hence it will continue to resonate wherever Capitalism operates.

The present research takes the contemporary social issue of commodification of the institution of marriage and human relationships in Pakistani society and critically analyses selected Pakistani novel in English in the backdrop of the Marxist framework. This research also substantiates Eagleton's stance that Marxism is still relevant in the contemporary world and offers critical and valuable insights to understand social issues such as the commodification of human relationships and the institution of marriage in present-day society. The commodification of marriage refers to the process through which the social institution of marriage is treated as a commodity or a marketable product. The inherent sanctity and sacredness of this institution, which is traditionally based on unconditional love, companionship, mutual respect, and personal liking, gets diminished and it gets converted into a transactional arrangement.

By examining the anglophone Pakistani novel with Lois Tyson's Marxist critique presented in *Critical Theory Today* (2006) as a theoretical framework, this research intends to explore the role of literature in reflecting and critiquing the social issue of commodification of marriage. For this purpose, the novel *Unmarriageable* (2019) by Soniah Kamal is selected as it very vividly depicts the marriage culture and processes of commodification of marriage in the Pakistani social and cultural milieu. The present study explores through the lives and experiences of the characters of the selected novel, the marriage culture in Pakistani households and society at large. This paper also intends to shed light on how the social institution of marriage is a complex nexus of socio-cultural traditions, gender dynamics, and economic considerations. It provides a deep understanding of how contemporary Pakistani writers are addressing and critiquing this globalized phenomenon of commodification in the localized cultural setting, through their literary works.

Soniah Kamal, the author of the novel *Unmarriageable* is a Pakistani American novelist and essayist. Her writings majorly revolve around the issues related to culture, identity, and society. She very closely analyzes the circumstances around her and then pens them down with great artistry and craft. The rich characterization, witty diction, and vivid settings of her works keep the readers hooked and engaged till the end of the novel.

Her novel *Unmarriageable* published by Ballantine Books in 2019 garnered considerable acclaim from the audiences. This novel is an inspiration or more precisely the retelling of the classic and most famous novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by Jane Austen, however, the geographical setting of this novel is not the Regency England but the contemporary Pakistani society. Though there are many adaptations of the classic novel *Pride and Prejudice*, even then *Unmarriageable* successfully made its impression and got appreciation worldwide. The primary reason for its success lies in the fact that Kamal gives a very realistic outlook and setting to the characters of the novel (Kamal).

*Unmarriageable* revolves around the lives of the Binat family and their concern for finding a suitable suitor for their daughters. In this novel, Kamal highlights the very important issue of marriage, and all the socio-economic and cultural aspects related to this institute in a very befitting manner. She also voices her concerns regarding the influence of materialism and Capitalism on the marriage choices made by people in contemporary Pakistani society.

## Literature Review

Karl Marx propounded the concept of commodity fetishism in the nineteenth century. Marx (1867) writes that a commodity is a simple and easily understandable thing when it is viewed in terms of its use value. However, when the commodity enters a market to get sold or exchanged then it becomes supernatural or transcendent. People in the Capitalist society view it as an object with an independent identity and an inherent value. The buyers or the consumers only acknowledge the commodity for its exchange value in the Capitalist economic system. They only see and appreciate the visible object and fail to see the process of production, human labor, time, investment, and all the social and human relationships involved in the production and exchange of this product (pp. 47-48). Brand and consumer culture also stem from the concept of commodity fetishism.

Commodification can be described as a process of treating an object or a person as a commodity. It is the process of ascribing market value to objects, things, and even people. The etymology of the word commodification gets its basis from Marx's works and ideas. Marx in his monumental work, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (1867) introduces the concept of the commodity. He opines that a commodity can be a thing or an object with a use value and exchange value (pp. 4-6). But in the Capitalist and consumer culture, human beings are also treated as commodities or objects. Human emotions, values, and

relationships are also gauged on the parameter of their use and exchange value. Economic conditions determine the social identity of individuals and due to this reason, social and interpersonal relationships are also formed by keeping in view the economic and social position of an individual. This is called the commodification of human relationships when “emotions and feelings are commodified, packaged and sold for material benefits” (Irum & Yaqoob, 2018, p. 2223).

A sociological theory that also brings into light commodified social relationships is the Social Exchange Theory. This theory was first proposed by an American sociologist George Caspar Homans in an article titled Social Behavior as Exchange which was published in the *American Journal of Sociology*. Homans’ theory links the discipline of Sociology to the discipline of Economics because he suggests that social relationships and social interactions between people are established by keeping in view the concept of economics i.e., cost-benefit analysis. If the relationship demands greater investment, then there are fewer chances of people viewing it as a productive relationship and if there are greater chances of getting benefits from a particular relationship then people perceive it as a beneficial and profitable relationship. This reflects that an individual prioritizes their self-interests, gains, and benefits in social relationships. “...I found so and so rewarding; or I got a great deal out of him...” (Homans, 1958, p. 597). This notion sheds light on the treatment of social and human relationships as transactional arrangements.

Many scholars and critics have investigated the issue of commodification, dehumanization, and objectification in their scholarly works. According to Izzati and Syamsi (2023), women’s bodies are treated as commodities that can be purchased and traded (p. 76). Social media and television advertisements for the promotion and publicity of their products use the images of women. Arshad et al. (2021) in a research article, titled An Analytical Study of Women Objectification in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* examine the theme of women objectification in the three selected short stories by the contemporary Pakistani writer, Daniyal Mueenuddin. They explore the nexus of Marxism, gender dynamics, and Postcolonialism that contribute to the exploitation of women characters in the narratives. This complex and intricate nexus results in the objectification of women, particularly those of lower socio-economic class. They conclude that in the selected short stories by Mueenuddin, male characters are represented as independent and powerful figures while women characters are depicted as subservient and dependent on male characters (p. 59).

Adhikary (2023) in the research article, Commodification of Human Emotion and Marriage in Capitalism (A Reading of Probst’s *The Marriage Bargain* from a Marxist Perspective) examines how the male protagonist, Nicholas, and the female protagonist, Alexandria in the novel *The Marriage Bargain* use marriage as a tool to fulfill their financial needs. The novel explores the effects of Capitalism on relationships in late twentieth-century American society (p. 259). In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century English society, Jane Austen published her magnanimous work, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). Akman (2018) in the article, An Investigation of Socio-Economic Incentives and Implications of Matrimony on Women’s Lives in Jane Austen’s Novels writes that in Victorian society, socially empowering and economically rewarding job opportunities for women were negligible therefore becoming a wife of a socially and economically sound man was the prime goal in the lives of Victorian women (p. 1112). This is also explored in a research dissertation titled How Jane Austen uses marriage to get what she wants. Eberle (2011) states:

In a culture where marriages are based on riches rather than love or compatibility, it is only natural that people become less like individuals and more like objects. Austen criticizes this social norm through the theme of interchangeability. When people are used as a means to an end, the actual person ceases to matter and the goal becomes the determining factor. (p. 18)

Lee Trepanier (2014) in a chapter, Marriage and the Marketplace in Jane Austen's *Emma* and *Mansfield Park* which is a part of the book *The Free Market and the Human Condition: Essays on Economics and Culture* (2014) observes that there are several characters in Austen's novels, *Emma* (1815) and *Mansfield Park* (1814) who adhere to the marketplace ideology in relationships. He comments that these characters eventually realize the detrimental effects of commodifying social and human relationships. In an article titled, Changing Ideologies of Marriage in Contemporary Indian Women's Novels, published in the *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Sharma (2023) provides a critical examination of how contemporary Indian literature written by women sheds light on both the traditional and changing perceptions related to the institution of marriage in the Indian socio-cultural milieu. Sharma's study centers on two notable Indian novels in English namely, *A Matter of Time* (1996) by Shashi Deshpande and *Second Thoughts* by Shobhaa De (1996). This paper employs feminist theories informed by the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, and Sheila Cronan as a theoretical framework to explore the matrimonial world and experiences of Indian women (p. 1).

Khan (2021) in an article titled, Revisiting Jane Austen through *Austenistan: Pakistani and Western Perspectives* comments that this whole process of finding a suitable marriage proposal is very psychologically and mentally taxing for the parents in the Pakistani society (p. 27). Saeed & Rabbani (2021) in the article, Colonial Mimicry, and Cultural Identity as Tools of Subverting Colonial Legacy: A Decolonial Reading of Kamal's Novel *Unmarriageable* investigate the role of both, the indigenous native cultural identity and the appropriation of the ways and values of the colonizers to resist, challenge and subvert the long-lasting impact of colonialism in the Pakistani culture and society. This research on the novel *Unmarriageable* by Soniah Kamal majorly covers the Postcolonial dimension as it encapsulates the colonial practices and decolonial values and principles to dismantle the colonial legacy (p. 1708).

Gul et al. (2023) in their research work titled, Exploring the Oppression of Women in a Pakistani Novel *Unmarriageable* by Soniah Kamal observe the role of patriarchy and various socio-cultural pressures that come in the way of upward social mobility of women. They study the text primarily from the perspective of women and delve into how early, arranged and forced marriages of girl children in Pakistani society obstruct their career aspirations and personal growth (p. 320). Zainab et al. (2022) find intertextual connections between *Pride and Prejudice* and *Unmarriageable* (p. 622). Batool et al. (2023) in a very interesting and engaging research on *Unmarriageable* investigate the politics of dress. They contend that in literary writings the dress of a character becomes the marker or the determiner of their culture (p. 365). They are of the view that in *Unmarriageable* which is set in the Capitalist Pakistani society, the sartorial choices of the characters represent the divisions of the society based on caste and social class. They further argue that in this novel, the commodification of dress takes place. People want to dress up in such a way that they can impress others, and this is the impact of Neo-Liberal Capitalist ideology on the minds of people (p. 371). Iqbal et al. (2021) in their research article titled, Thematic Analysis of the Conflict in *Unmarriageable* by Soniah Kamal: A Formalistic Study examine *Unmarriageable* from a formalist approach. They first scrutinize the language and form of the novel and then in the light of the diction and choice of lexical items they analyze the characters and themes of the novel. Their study concludes that the author's emphatic, ironic, witty, and eloquent diction in the novel, unveils the very important theme of marriage in Pakistani society (p. 132).

The study and review of related literature reveal extensive research on the objectification, sexual objectification, and commodification of women within the realm of arts, media, and literature in capitalist patriarchal societies. However, there is a significant and notable research gap regarding the commodification of the institution of marriage within global literature and more specifically in Pakistani literature in English. There are

several research works published on the novel *Unmarriageable* by Soniah Kamal, but the dimensions such as Postcolonialism, Feminism, Cultural Materialism, Formalism, and so on have been explored by the researchers so far, the specific aspect of the commodification of the institution of marriage and human relationships in the novel remains underexplored. Therefore, this current research paper attempts to fill these research gaps by analyzing the process of commodification of marriage and human relationships through the Marxist lens in the Pakistani novel in English, *Unmarriageable*.

### **Material and Methods**

The present research is qualitative in its approach and employs textual analysis as a research method. The primary data comes from the text selected for the present research endeavor, *Unmarriageable* by Soniah Kamal. The secondary sources of data consist of related research articles, book reviews, conference papers, scholarly works, and so on. This research paper applies Marxism as a theoretical framework in general and Tyson's Marxist critique in particular for the textual analysis of the chosen novel. The researchers first closely and very minutely read the text of the selected novel to identify the themes and motifs related to commodification of marriage intricately woven into the narrative of the text and then in the light of Tyson's Marxist critique, the critical analysis of the selected textual references was conducted.

### **Lois Tyson's Marxist Critique**

Tyson is an academician and a literary critic. She worked as a professor of English at the Grand Valley State University, United States of America, and has several publications to her credit. Her works provide an in-depth analysis of critical theories and the practical application of these critical theories on various texts.

Tyson (2006) states that a commodity has a use-value, exchange value, and sign exchange value. To explain these three types of value, she gives an example that if someone reads a book for the reading purpose then it means the book has a use-value. If someone buys a book with a hidden motive of selling it for profit then the book has an exchange value and lastly, if a person purchases a book to impress other people about their intellectual abilities, then the book has a sign exchange value (p. 62). She then defines commodification as:

Commodification is the act of relating to objects or persons in terms of their exchange value or sign-exchange value. I commodify a work of art when I buy it as a financial investment, that is, with the intention of selling it for more money, or when I buy it to impress other people with my refined tastes. (p. 62)

Then she further goes on to define the commodification of human beings, she says human beings commodify other human beings when they form their relationships with each other for financial and social gains (p. 62) and the ulterior motive behind this is to get an advantage and benefit for themselves.

Building on Tyson's insights on commodification, the textual analysis of the selected novel, *Unmarriageable* is carried out in the forthcoming paragraphs to explore the theme of commodified marriages and relationships in the Capitalist Pakistani society. Additionally, other related concepts such as class structure, consumerism, the role of ideological forces, desire, and competition which are related to commodification and are thoroughly analyzed by Tyson in the book, *Critical Theory Today* (2006) will also be discussed and integrated in the analysis to provide a deeper understanding of commodification of human relationships and marriage in the selected novel.

It is pertinent to mention here the reason this paper uses Tyson's critique of Marxism as a theoretical framework and not of any other Marxist critic. It uses Tyson's critique because she specifically talks about the commodification of human beings and their relationships in a Capitalist economic system. While other Marxist critiques primarily deal with the commodification of objects, labor, and laborers in the capitalist market. Therefore, for the present research paper which essentially focuses on commodified marriages and relationships, Lois Tyson's Marxist critique fits well.

## Results and Discussion

In *Unmarriageable*, the head of the British School of Dilipabad, Naheed has two twin daughters named Gin and Rum who want to pursue a degree in fashion design, "Naheed had no doubt her daughters would make a huge splash in the world of couture and an equally huge splash in the matrimonial bazaar by marrying no less than the Pakistani equivalents of Princes William and Harry" (Kamal, 2019, p. 19). Here the use of lexical items such as "huge splash" and "matrimonial bazaar" reveals the materialistic and consumeristic tendencies. The phrase "huge splash" signifies the association of matrimonial success with significant social recognition and public display. It also aligns with the concept of conspicuous consumption. The term conspicuous consumption was coined by an American economist, sociologist, and critic of Capitalism, Veblen in the book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). He states, "...the imperative example set by the upper class in fixing the canons of respectability fosters the practice of conspicuous consumption" (p. 94). When an individual invests in high quality and luxurious products for the sake of appreciation and applause from society rather than their genuine need and utility then it means they have a materialistic outlook towards life. This materialistic outlook is an outcome of living in a capitalist society because wealth and consumption of lavish items are considered the symbols of social and financial status in a Capitalist society. Naheed's desire for her daughters to showcase their splendor for social prestige reflects this notion. In the same way, the use of the phrase, "matrimonial bazaar" portrays the marketplace concept of Capitalism and delineates that in a Capitalist society, marriage also becomes a transactional activity, and human beings get commodified. Naheed wants her daughters to get married to as rich and famous men as the English princes because she believes in what Tyson terms as sign-exchange value, and views marriage as a tool to achieve financial success as well as social respectability in society.

There is another instance in, *Unmarriageable*, which resonates with the theme of commodification and conspicuous consumption. The wedding of Nadir Shah with Fiede Fecker is highly anticipated and awaited in Dilipabad because it is the event of the elite families of the city and the arrival of many VIPs and members of the privileged class is expected in the wedding. Pinkie is extraordinarily excited to receive an invitation to this event because she considers it as an opportunity to find rich eligible bachelors for her daughters. She also takes this as an opportunity to impress others by showcasing her wealth and social status, "She clutched the Nadir Fiede invitation. This was a real rich man's fishing ground she was not going to waste. We must give a marriage present that rivals everyone else's. We must give thirty thousand rupees...we don't want to look like skinflints" (Kamal, 2019, pp. 36-37). For this purpose, she directs her daughters to wear fancy and opulent clothes and thinks about all those options for wedding gifts that can make her family look rich in the eyes of the city's elites, the Feckers, and the Shahs. This behavior of her mother incites anger and frustration in Alys. Alys tells Sherry:

I've wasted all afternoon listening to what gift will make us look rich enough and what we're going to wear in order to captivate eligible bachelors. You know how despicable I think this whole husband-hunting business is. Yes, Sherry said, I'm well aware. Chalo, best of luck. Let us hope you and Jena hunt good husbands. I don't even want to go, Alys said. A bunch of himbos and bimbos showing off to each other about who enjoyed the glitzier holiday this year. (Kamal, 2019, p. 50)

In the above-stated excerpt, Alys shows her disdain towards the superficiality of social displays and rejects the consumerist approach associated with the institution of marriage. People like Pinkie get pressured to give expensive gifts so that they may look worthy enough in the eyes of the privileged class. In Capitalist societies, the worth of gifts reflects the worth of their givers therefore, Pinkie only thinks of the finest options for gifts. Capitalism stimulates insecurities in people (Tyson, 2006, p. 63) and that is why Pinkie feels insecure about her social status and struggles with feelings of inadequacy. In addition to that, phrases like “fishing grounds” and “husband hunting” in the above-cited extract of the novel imply the act of commodification where the search for a life partner is treated as a calculative and transactional activity. One more example of treating marriage as a commodity is when Pinkie snaps at Jena and Alys, “Shame on both of you if this wedding ends and you remain unmarried. Cast your nets wide, reel it in, grab it, grab it” (Kamal, 2019, p. 41). The recurrent use of the lexical item, “grab” portrays the capitalist mindset of acquisition of commodities and here the social institution of marriage is treated like a trophy to be won or some commodity to be acquired in a competition.

Moreover, the expectation from women to flaunt their glamorous attires and femininity to grab the attention of eligible bachelors also reinforces the Capitalist and patriarchal values where women are objectified and treated as commodities. Unlike her mother, Alys seems averse to this commodified culture of marriage and remains totally unimpressed by the ostentatious display of lavish lifestyle and grand holiday trips of elites of their city. She expresses profound discontent with a system that commodifies relationships and objectifies women. Kamal (2019) writes:

Ten years ago, when Naheed had realized that Alys and Jena were Binats, her tongue had been a never-ending red carpet, for the Binats were a highly respected and moneyed clan. However, once Dilipabad’s VIPs realized that Bark Binat was now all but penniless – why he’d lost his money was no one’s worry, that he had was everyone’s favorite topic – they devalued Bark and his dependents. As soon as Mrs. Naheed gleaned that Alys and Jena were working in order to pay bills and not because they were bored upper-class girls, she began to belittle them. (p. 19)

The above-quoted excerpt from the novel *Unmarriageable* also offers a critical insight into the interconnectedness of social status and social validation. Mr. Barkat faces huge losses in the business and in addition to this, his share of inheritance is also manipulated by his brother. Resultingly, he and his family can hardly make ends meet. Their socio-economic status declines from high/privileged class to working/struggling class; the change in their socio-economic class also negatively influences their social relationships. The principal of the British School of Dilipabad, Ms. Naheed initially treats Alys and Jena with reverence but the moment she finds out about their financial hardships, her attitude towards Alys and Jena and the whole Binat family becomes very demeaning. This shift in attitude of Naheed exemplifies that within Capitalist societies human and social relationships are dependent on economic and social status. This reveals the tendency of capitalist societies to treat human relationships as commodities rather than appreciating human relationships for their inherent humanness and goodness. It also clearly depicts the deeply entrenched class system in the Capitalist societies.

Another character of the novel *Unmarriageable*, named Lady, who is the younger sister of Alys Binat speaks about a commodified view of life and marriage. She declares, “I’m going to make a brilliant marriage and only ride in the best of cars with a full-time chauffeur. And, Qitty, you will not be allowed in any of my Mercedes or Pajeros, because I’ll be doing you a favor by making you walk” (Kamal, 2019, p. 22). Lady’s vision of a happy married life is linked to the Capitalist notion of accumulation of wealth and ownership of material goods, especially luxury items such as luxurious cars. In *Critical Theory Today*, Tyson writes, “...Capitalism promotes the belief that you are what you own – that our value as human beings is only as great as the value of our possessions” (2006, p. 70). This materialistic

culture then gives rise to the demonstration effect which means that the people with riches and valuables are treated as prestigious members of a society. Moreover, they are considered trendsetters, their luxurious lifestyle is taken as an inspiration by the "Have-nots" to emulate the same in their lives. This eventually fosters a culture of competition between different social groups and classes.

There is another example in *Unmarriageable* that illustrates the element of commodification. Lady, upon seeing Sherry and her younger sister Mareea enjoying a comfortable life provided by Farhat Kaleen –whose marriage proposal was rejected by Alys– gets competitive and envious. Lady says, "Jena, Alys, please, for the sake of my soul, please find someone outstanding to marry you. You've already reached your sell-by dates, and before you completely expire, I also want to see what it feels like to have a benevolent brother-in-law" (Kamal, 2019, p. 227). The phrase, "reached your sell-by dates" and the use of lexical item "expire" for Jena and Alys imply the dehumanization of both Alys and Jena. They are reduced to the status of commodities and are treated less than human beings; they are demeaned and devalued because they are still unmarried and have crossed the marriageable age set by Pakistani society. The above-stated textual reference exhibits the coveted desire of Lady to see her sisters getting married to not only prestigious but also financially sound men. This will allow her to boast about her affluent relations to gain social validation from a Capitalist society because privilege and prestige are key indicators of a person's position in class-stratified Capitalist societies.

Darsee in the novel *Unmarriageable* articulates the struggles and challenges men face within the social institution of marriage. By the end of the novel when Alys and Darsee confess their mutual likeness and love for each other, Darsee remarks, "Do you have any idea how hard it is to find someone who likes you for who you are? Marries you for yourself and not your assets?" (Kamal, 2019, p. 213). This statement by Darsee brings attention to the often-overlooked situation and experience of men within the context of the commodification of marriage because the discussions on the commodification of marriage are generally expressed from the female perspective and are centered on the experiences of women. Darsee's statement speaks volumes about the struggles men face in finding a true partner for marriage who values them and marries them for their intrinsic qualities and not for their material assets in a Capitalist and materialistic society. Darsee's perspective invites a broader discussion on how the institution of marriage commodifies both men and women. This critical perspective challenges the dominant narrative that often neglects the emotional and psychological impact of such societal norms and attitudes on men within the context of marriage.

There is a constant fear of people and their opinions on the life decisions and choices of the characters. Before making any decision, especially the decisions related to marriage, the question "What will people say?" (Kamal, 2019, p. 284) echoes in their minds. Kamal very sarcastically and intelligently addresses this question, "What will people say" (p. 284) by adding a chapter with the same title at the end of the novel. In this last chapter of the novel *Unmarriageable*, Kamal states the entirely changed opinion of society about the whole Binat family, especially about Jena, Alys, and their friend Sherry. Three of them by the end of the novel get married to socially and financially prestigious men and this fact makes them worthy enough in the eyes of all acquaintances, friends, family, and close associates who initially left no stone unturned to ridicule them and make fun of them for their unmarried and poor social and financial status. Kamal through this question, "What will people say" comments on the dual standards and hypocrisy of Pakistani society which values status symbols and tags attached to people more than their inherent human qualities and it is also in line with what Tyson terms as sign-exchange value in her critique of Marxism (Tyson, 2006, p. 62). Kamal also provides an awareness that one needs to make decisions and life choices according to their wisdom, happiness, and circumstances instead of getting fearful



and pressurized by the biting criticism and harsh judgement of society because the opinions of society keep on changing with the changing social and financial status of the individuals.

## Conclusion

From the above-stated analysis and findings, it is concluded that Consumerism is a cornerstone of Capitalist ideology, and it operates through the concept of sign-exchange value which eventually leads to the commodification of human beings since human worth is measured by a person's outward appearance, social standing and monetary value. This perspective then adversely affects the emotional lives and socio-cultural relationships of the individuals, especially matrimonial choices and decisions. Furthermore, there is an element of unfulfilled desire and competition in the various characters of the selected novel. The idea of getting ahead not from their former self but from others – to be always better in every aspect than other people (Tyson, 2006, p. 57) constantly keeps them in a state of restlessness and perplexity. Characters such as Pinkie and Lady from the novel *Unmarriageable* exemplify this Capitalist ideology to outdo and surpass others in every aspect of life.

As literature reflects the socio-cultural milieu in which it is written then it means it has a capacity to either reject and resist or to reinforce the prevalent socio-cultural norms and ideologies of that time (Tyson, 2006, p. 66). In this context, Kamal through this piece of writing criticizes and resists all those notions that dehumanize and commodify individuals during the match-making process in Pakistani society. She makes use of Realism and satire as a form of narration in the novel *Unmarriageable* because many Marxist critics find realism and satire as powerful tools to express the socio-cultural ideologies, inequalities, and material realities of the Capitalist world of today (Tyson, 2006, p. 66). Through Realism and social commentary, they intend to educate the readers about the systemic injustices and inherent flaws in the Capitalist system. Kamal sketches the characters from almost all social classes and social backgrounds and the readers can easily find the reflection of these characters in their surroundings, real-life experiences, and social dynamics. In connection with Marxism and Realism, Tyson (2006) states:

Realism, for example, gives us characters and plot as if we were looking through a window onto an actual scene taking place before our eyes...For some Marxists, realism is the best form for Marxist purposes because it clearly and accurately represents the real world, with all its socioeconomic inequalities and ideological contradictions, and encourages readers to see the unhappy truths about material/historical reality, for whether or not authors intend it they are bound to represent socio-economic inequities and ideological contradictions if they accurately represent the real world. (p. 66)

Tyson's interpretation of Realism reinforces the idea that literature, when based on realistic portrayals, inherently and naturally addresses socio-economic and cultural issues and ideological conflicts and Kamal adheres to this notion while writing about the social problem of commodification of marriage in Pakistani society in the novel *Unmarriageable*.

## Recommendations

The increasing commercialization of weddings through the use of expensive marquees, luxury decor, designer clothing, and multi-day events reflects the deep entrenchment of capitalist ideology in contemporary Pakistani society. These practices transform marriage into a public display of wealth and status rather than a private, emotional commitment between two individuals. It is essential to reclaim marriage as a personal and meaningful event, centered on emotional connection, mutual respect, and shared values rather than consumerist spectacle. In line with the paper's call for unlearning and re-learning the ideologies and practices that commodify and dehumanize individuals

within the institution of marriage, it is crucial to create spaces where individuals can challenge consumerist assumptions about marriage. This could be facilitated through community dialogue, workshops, media and literature that encourage people to reconsider their views on relationships and marriages.

## References

- Adhikary, R. P. (2023). Commodification of Human Emotion and Marriage in Capitalism (A Reading of Probst's The Marriage Bargain from a Marxist Perspective). *Isagoge - Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(1), 257–272
- Akman, F. (2018). An Investigation of Socioeconomic Incentives and Implications of Matrimony on Women's Lives in Jane Austen's Novel. *Journal of the Faculty of Language, History and Geography*, 58(1), 1101–1127.
- Alam, R. (2017). *The Tea Trolley*. Outskirts Press. The United States.
- Arshad, F., Nawaz, N., & Kakepoto, I. (2021). An Analytical Study of Women Objectification in In Other Rooms, Other Wonders. *University of Chitral Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 5(2), 49–62.
- Austen, J. (2002). *Pride and Prejudice*. Penguin Books.
- Batool, M. (2023). The Neo-Liberal Subjectivity of Native Culture in Diaspora Writing: A Sartorial Reading of the Unmarriageable by Soniah Kamal. *Al-Qantara*, 9(1), 357–374.
- Eagleton, T. (2018). *Why Marx Was Right*. Yale University Press.
- Eberle, H. (2011). *How Jane Austen Uses Marriage to Get What She Wants*. [Undergraduate thesis, University of Tennessee].
- Gul E Zainab, Shaheen, A., & Qamar, S. (2022). Intertextual Correspondence between Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Kamal's *Unmarriageable*. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 6(4), 622–630
- Gul, N. (2023). Exploring the Oppression of Women in a Pakistani Novel *Unmarriageable* by Soniah Kamal. *International Journal of Human and Society*, 3(4), 320–327.
- Homans, G. (1958). Social Behavior as Exchange. *American Journal of Sociology*, 63(6), 597–606.
- Iftikhar, M. O. (2019, March 29). On Society's Views on Marriage. *The News International*.
- Iqbal, M., Kamal, S., & Shafiq, Q. (2021). Thematic Analysis of the Conflict in *Unmarriageable* by Soniah Kamal: A Formalistic Study. *Pakistan Journal of Social Research*, 3(2), 124–132.
- Irum, S., & Yaqoob, M. (2018). Commodified Relationships: A Study of Khan's Fiction through the lens of Consumerism. *NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry*, 16(1), 2222–5706.
- Izzati, N. A., & Syamsi, K. (2023). The Commodification of Women's Bodies in the Novel *Maysuri* by Nadjib Kartapati Z.: Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 6(8), 73–84.
- Kamal, N. (2019, February 17). Fiction: Jane Austen in the Punjab. *Dawn*.
- Kamal, S. (2019). *Unmarriageable*. Random House Publishing Group.
- Khan, A. (2021). Revisiting Jane Austen through Austenistan : Pakistani and Western Perspectives. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 09(03), 26–39.
- Marx, K. (n.d.). *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (E. Aveling, Ed.). Progress Publishers.

- Saeed, A., & Rabbani, S. (2021). Colonial Mimicry and Cultural Identity as Tools of Subverting Colonial Legacy: A Decolonial Reading of Kamal's Novel *Unmarriageable*. *Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 18, 1708–1715
- Sharma, B. (2023). Changing Ideologies of Marriage in Contemporary Indian Women's Novels. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 25(3), 1-2
- Trepanier, L. (2014). Marriage and the Marketplace in Jane Austen's *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*. In L. Trepanier (Ed.), *The Free Market and the Human Condition: Essays on Economics and Culture* (pp. 61–82).
- Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. Routledge.
- Veblen, T. (1899). *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Penguin Books.