



Fear Of Marriage Among Women In Kerala

***Saheeba Sabakka**

*Southern School for Advanced Studies, Calicut

Received: 12/05/2026

Revised: 13/06/2026

Accepted: 30/08/2026

Published: 20/09/2026

ABSTRACT

Romantic love and marriage are important aspects of lifespan development. A healthy marriage provides a primary support system for individuals in the long term and so is a cornerstone for a sound society. Especially for women in Kerala, marriage is considered an important milestone and for many cultures it is sacred. Though culturally varied, unmarried individuals face a higher risk of depression, loneliness, anxiety and isolation in the long term stemming from various life stressors, lack of consistent emotional support and the feelings of lack of meaning and purpose. Fear of intimacy among both genders has long been a concern that was addressed through psychological interventions like premarital awareness programs and counseling sessions at various educational, cultural and religious institutional levels. Recently there has been a spurt in fear of marriage among women in Kerala giving way to controversy. Studies identify various socio-cultural factors that have led to this widespread phenomena as fear of commitment, losing independence, marital abuse and domestic violence, financial burden, betrayal and infidelity etc. The current study seeks to conduct a discourse analysis of recent articles on the issue as found on newspapers by women, in order to derive a psycho-social analysis of marriage in the recent social context of Kerala; the fear of marriage among women and its causes and implications. The study tries to make recommendations for further psychosocial interventions as necessary regarding the pertaining issue.

Key Words – *Marriage, Fear of Marriage, Women in Kerala, Gamophobia*

Marriage not only serves as the biological necessity for survival and security but also the innate need for a "secure base," where a partner or family unit provides the emotional safety required to explore the world confidently. Further, it is a cross-cultural phenomena designed to ensure the successful rearing of offspring

and the pooling of resources (Weisfeld et al., 2017; Levine & Heller, 2010). Healthy partnerships offer unparalleled opportunities for self-discovery and the development of empathy (Miller, 2021).

Nevertheless, the significance of this institution relies on the meaningful

and quality connection it provides. When family life is characterized by healthy attachment styles and effective conflict resolution, it fosters a sense of belonging and helps human flourishing. Marriage represents a lifelong psychological journey where roles are continuously negotiated with deepening intimacy, allowing individuals to find purpose within a collective identity (Gottman & Silver, 2015).

The current study tries to find a psychosocial analysis of the fear of marriage among Kerala women by analysing the public discourses of women on the issue.

METHOD

Problem:

Why has marriage and family become an aversive choice for educated, working women in recent Kerala ?

Objectives:

Major Objective:

To draw a psychosocial analysis of fear of marriage among women in Kerala;

Minor Objectives:

- (i) To understand what marriage is meant in women's perspective in the recent social context of Kerala;
- (ii) To analyse how choice of education and career have mediated women's aversion to marriage in Kerala.

Design: Qualitative method is used.

Sample: Purposive sampling is used to meet the desired criteria. 5 very recent

articles written by keralite women and published in mainstream news including;

1. “ Kalyanavum Joliyum Nammal Kaanaan Madikkunnath “ by Nadia Muhammad, Senior Non- Vocational Teacher, Vattenad GVHSS; published in Madhyamam Editorial dated December 19 2025;
2. “Penkuttikalude Thalparayavum Nishchayadaardiyavum Mathiyo?” by Dr. Najiya . P. P, Assistant Professor in Department of Sociology, University of Calicut; published in Madhyamam Editorial dated December 11 2025;
3. “Joliyo Kalyanamno Enthanu Penkuttikalude First Choice?” by Thwayyiba Arshad, Statistician Specialist in Qatar Ministry of Public Health; published in Madhyamam Editorial, Dec 5 2025;
4. “Being single and happy: Are women losing faith in the institution of marriage?” by Mahima Roselin Varghese, educator, communicative English trainer and writer ; published in TheHindu.com dated August 04, 2024;
5. “Gamophobia among young girls in Kerala: Fear or choice?” by Arya A. J. ; published in Mathrubhumi Features dated 03 August 2023

Analysis: Discourse analysis was used.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The discourse analysis of the five selected texts yielded three super-ordinate themes that correspond directly to the study's objectives. The first theme addresses how marriage is currently understood by Keralite women (Minor Objective i). The second theme traces how education and career choices mediate this understanding (Minor Objective ii). The



third theme synthesises the first two into a psychosocial account of the so-called "fear of marriage" (Major Objective), moving the discussion from what marriage means, to why women are reprioritising it, to how this reprioritisation should be psychologically understood.

1. Meaning of Marriage in the Recent Social Context of Kerala

1.1 The Domestic Burden as a Lived Reality

Thwayyiba contends marriage and family are treated as "a woman's primary responsibility," a designation that continues to shape the domestic experience and is often experienced as a lived reality rather than a choice. Roselin Varghese similarly characterises marriage as a "constant tussle" within domestic life, a struggle between old ideals and new demands. As women enter the workforce, this transition is met with disproportionate labour, visible in the "chaotic mornings and altered family routines" described by a social media respondent. Taken together, these testimonies suggest that while women's roles have expanded outward into the workplace, the internal expectations of the home have remained rigidly fixed, leaving women to individually absorb the burden of reconciling old and new ideals.

1.2 Long-Term Commitment Experienced as Irreversible

This unequal daily burden compounds, over time, into a perception of marriage as an irreversible, long-term liability. Roselin describes marriage as a "lifelong baggage," while Nadia characterises it as a "long-term negotiation." Rather than being understood

as a site of simple domestic harmony, marriage in these accounts comes to represent an enduring struggle and a potential loss of personal agency across the life course.

1.3 Marriage as a Compulsory Institution

This sense of irreversibility is sharpened by the perception that marriage is not freely chosen but socially compelled. Arya quotes Kaikasi, who characterises marriage as an "imposed compulsory institution," a view echoed in Nadia's description of "rigid expectations and inflexible mindsets." As Shintu notes, the decision to remain single requires markedly more courage than the decision to wed, an asymmetry that, as Roselin argues, reflects a society more comfortable with forced conformity than with women's independence. When marriage functions as a mandatory social requirement rather than a voluntary partnership, it reinforces traditional roles and constrains individual agency.

1.4 Gendered Social Norms as the Underlying Mechanism

Underlying this sense of compulsion are gendered social norms that assign fundamentally unequal roles within marriage. Arya, quoting Priya, notes the pervasive cultural belief that women are inherently "supposed" to marry, while men are cast in the singular role of breadwinner. These norms channel women toward domesticity and men toward financial provision, reinforcing a cycle in which individual identity is routinely subordinated to traditional community expectations.



Together, these four sub-themes indicate a shift in meaning: marriage is no longer spontaneously understood as a secure or voluntary partnership, but as a compulsory, gendered, and long-term burden imposed disproportionately on women. This redefinition sets the context for understanding why education and career have emerged as competing priorities.

2. Choice of Education, Career, and Independence over Marriage

2.1 Financial Independence as a Foundation

The pursuit of financial independence functions as the foundational strategy by which women respond to the burdens identified above. As Arya notes, the drive to secure one's own income before marriage is stronger than ever, largely because financial reliance on a partner can leave a woman "at their mercy for everything." Thwayyiba similarly contends that attaining financial autonomy is the primary means by which women overcome prevailing societal expectations.

2.2 Self-Actualisation as an Extension of Independence

Financial independence, in turn, opens space for self-actualisation. Roselin contends that prioritising education and career allows women to find "their voice and their space to navigate life," a process Thwayyiba identifies as essential to overcoming societal notions of a woman's role. Participation in education and employment is therefore reframed as a conscious, self-actualising choice rather than a surrender to social momentum.

2.3 Social Status Beyond the Domestic Role

This self-actualisation extends outward into a redefined social status. Thwayyiba argues that women's pursuit of higher education and employment secures a recognised social standing historically tied solely to the roles of wife or mother. Engagement with academia and the workforce exposes women to democratic and egalitarian values, empowering them to see themselves as equal citizens with inherent rights.

2.4 A Redefined Sense of Security

Finally, education and career culminate in a redefined sense of security, one no longer contingent on marriage. Nadia frames the drive toward education and career not as a rejection of partnership but as a pursuit of a "safe, supportive marriage" on one's own terms. Professional success also eases long-standing parental anxieties tied to son preference, as educated, independent daughters demonstrate that financial and emotional security need not depend on gender.

These four sub-themes reveal a cumulative logic: financial independence enables self-actualisation, which confers social status, which in turn produces a new, self-sufficient form of security, one that competes directly with, rather than opposes, the institution of marriage. This cumulative shift provides the empirical basis for the psychosocial reinterpretation of "fear of marriage" that follows.

3. Psychosocial Analysis of the "Fear of Marriage"



3.1 Reframing "Gamophobia": Choice, Not Pathology

The analysis begins by challenging the premise embedded in the term "gamophobia" itself. Arya argues that placing career above marriage is not an act of fear but a "matter of mere priority," and Kaikasi criticises the pathologising of this decision as a "phobia," arguing that doing so dismisses a rational, autonomous decision-making process. This reframing, that delay or avoidance reflects clarity of life goals rather than irrational dread, establishes the interpretive lens for the remaining sub themes.

3.2 Educational Empowerment as Statistical Evidence for the Reframing

This reframing is supported by demographic evidence. Thwayyiba cites Kerala's 90% literacy rate and a female higher-education enrolment rate exceeding that of males by 52%, indicating a structural shift toward job security and financial independence. What is frequently labelled a "fear" of marriage is, on this evidence, better understood as the logical outcome of expanded opportunity: as women gain the tools for self-sufficiency, they rationally prioritise securing a professional identity before undertaking domestic commitments.

3.3 Structural Inequality as the Underlying Cause

If the shift is rational rather than phobic, its cause must be located structurally rather than psychologically. Arya, quoting Kaikasi, notes that society has long tolerated men delaying marriage for career growth, yet expresses concern

only when women exercise the same agency. This double standard is compounded by what Dr. Najiya describes as a "mencentric" public sphere that fails to accommodate menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. In workplaces built for those without domestic obligations, a career pause for marriage or family risks permanent professional setback, making delay a calculated survival strategy rather than a phobic avoidance.

3.4 The Emancipatory Function of Career

This structural inequality gives career pursuit a function beyond individual ambition. Dr. Najiya posits that education and professional employment serve as tools for survival and livelihood, offering a route out of generations of systemic and socio-economic oppression. For many women, prioritising a career is a strategic necessity for escaping cycles of marginalisation that traditional, restrictive marital frameworks might otherwise perpetuate.

3.5 The Erosion of Marriage as a Secure Base

Even as career pursuit offers a route to security, marriage itself is increasingly perceived as failing to provide the security it once promised. Roselin observes that marriage "no longer serves as a secure sanctuary," a shift driven by high-visibility failed marriages, the social stigma of divorce, and, as Arya notes, the harrowing prevalence of "dowry deaths, domestic abuse, and mental harassment." Nadia adds that women are increasingly wary of entering domestic spaces marked by "rigid expectations and inflexible mindsets," where personal growth and

evolving needs risk being ignored. Read alongside 3.1 – 3.4, this reluctance is best understood not as an irrational phobia but as a rational defence against a system that has repeatedly failed to protect women's dignity and safety.

3.6 Alternative Relationship Models as an Adaptive Response

As the perceived risks of traditional marriage rise, alternative partnership models emerge as a logical adaptive response rather than a rejection of intimacy altogether. Arya quotes a PhD scholar at Christ University who describes cohabitation as a "better option," since it allows for companionship without the rigid legal and social entanglements characteristic of formal marriage. This suggests that the underlying priority is not the avoidance of a shared life, but the preservation of the ability to enter or exit a relationship on the basis of mutual respect, rather than institutional compulsion.

DISCUSSION

From a psychological and evolutionary perspective, marriage and family are fundamental to human flourishing. As outlined in the works of Levine, Heller, and Gottman, humans are biologically wired for attachment; a stable partnership provides a "secure base" that regulates emotional stress and fosters physical health. In an ideal framework, marriage is a "shared meaning" system—a sanctuary where two individuals create a unique culture of appreciation and mutual support.

However, for women in Kerala, this psychological ideal often collides with a rigid social reality. While marriage is

intended to be a sanctuary, many find it to be a "constant tussle" and a "lifelong baggage." The traditional "mencentric" structure of society and the workplace often fails to recognize female vulnerabilities—such as pregnancy and the disproportionate burden of domestic labor. In the recent context, the "secure sanctuary" of marriage is often eroded by the risks of domestic abuse, financial dependence, and the loss of "voice."

As found in the current study, Theme 1 establishes that marriage, in its current form, is experienced by Keralite women as a compulsory, gendered, and long-term burden. Theme 2 shows that education and career provide a cumulative alternative pathway to independence, status, and security. Theme 3 demonstrates that, against this backdrop, delaying or avoiding marriage is not usefully understood as "gamophobia" — an irrational phobia — but as a rational, structurally grounded response to a genuine erosion of marriage's function as a secure base. It is this reinterpretation, rather than a clinical fear response, that the study's recommended interventions must address.

The dramatic rise in female literacy and higher education enrollment in Kerala has fundamentally altered marriage preferences. Education and career are no longer just "options"; they are tools for "emancipation and survival", particularly for those from marginalized backgrounds. By attaining "financial independence", women shift the power dynamic of marriage into an institution of "long-term negotiation". This independence allows women to prioritize their own "personal path" and "self-actualization", ensuring



that if they do choose to marry, they do so from a position of strength, seeking a partner who respects their choices rather than a system that demands subjugation.

Ultimately, the "fear" or "phobia" of marriage often discussed in the Keralite context is a misnomer. It is not an irrational dread of intimacy, but a rational prioritization of safety and dignity.

CONCLUSION

"Gamophobia" seen in Kerala is not a disorder but a socio-psychological evolution. Women are successfully shifting

the paradigms of marriage. Interventions must, therefore, focus on psychosocial aspects as also support women's autonomy with regard to her choices.

Suggested Interventions include more effective Premarital Counseling to ensure fair negotiation of labour within the contemporary context of Kerala; cognitive behaviour therapy to enhance empowerment and self actualization of women, with special focus on women experiencing high levels of anxiety to help them identify attachment patterns and help them seek secure choices and partnerships.



REFERENCES

- Arshad, T. (2025, December 5). “Joliyo Kalyanamno Enthanu Penkuttikalude First Choice?” . Madhyamam Daily.
- Arya, A. J. (2023 August 3). Fear of marriage among young girls in Kerala: Fear or Choice?. Mathrubhumi.
<https://english.mathrubhumi.com/features/specials/gamophobia-among-young-girls-in-kerala-fear-of-marriage-commitment-672392bd>
- Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (2015). The seven principles for making marriage work: A practical guide from the country’s foremost relationship expert (2nd ed.). Harmony.
- Levine, A., & Heller, R. (2010). Attached: The new science of adult attachment and how it can help you find—and keep—love. TarcherPerigee.
- Miller, R. S. (2021). Intimate relationships (9th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Muhammad, N. (2025, December 19) . “Kalyanavum Joliyum Nammal Kaanaan Madikkunnath “. Madhyamam Daily.
- Najiya, P. P . (2025, December 11) . “Penkuttikalkk Thalpariyavum Nishchayadaardiyavum Mathiyo?” . Madhyamam Daily.
- Roselin, J. (2024, August 4). Being single and happy. The Hindu.
<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page/being-single-and-happy/article68454778.ece>
- Weisfeld, C. C., Weisfeld, G. E., & Dillon, L. (Eds.). (2017). The psychology of marriage: An evolutionary and cross-cultural view. Lexington Books.