Bharat Matrimony:

A Modern Approach to a Tradition as long as Time

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Abstract

This paper aims to shed light on the modern-day approach to the tradition of arranged

marriages in India facilitated by Bharat Matrimony, an online Indian Matrimony site. It explores

the motivation, functioning, success, and drawbacks of Bharat Matrimony's design through

semi-structured interviews and participant observation, under the lens of Amy Jo Kim's "Nine

Principles for Community Building." The paper draws on how the marriage culture in India has

inspired the invention of a matrimonial site that adheres to age-old traditions while drawing

inspiration from a dating site-like design. The paper focuses on the unique aspects of Bharat

Matrimony and the complications that arise because of such a design.

Keywords: matrimony, arranged marriage, constructivist community, online community

Bharat Matrimony

Bharat Matrimony is an Indian matchmaking website for marriages. It was founded in

2000 by Murugavel Janakiraman, who was working as a Software Consultant in a New Jersey

firm at the time (BBC Business, 2011). He found the motivation to create the site after noticing

that most of his web traffic consisted of matrimonial ads. As the company took off, he returned

to India and grew the business there. Serendipitously enough, Janakiraman met his wife on his own matrimonial site.

While initially the website was met with some apprehension from Indians who are used to the traditional way of finding matches – through reputed matchmakers and word of mouth from trusted relatives. However, Janakiraman did a fantastic job of building trust amongst the Indian population by adding features such as horoscope matching and modifying the algorithm to show people potential matches with common values and passions.

Bharat Matrimony earned a place in the Limca Book of World Records for having facilitated the highest number of documented marriages online in India, a number that has since reached one million marriages (Kumar, 2016). Bharat Matrimony has over 200 community-based sub-websites for people to look for matches within their communities and castes. The website further offers a feature for Assisted Matrimony, wherein a trusted relationship manager who is on a contract with the website will filter out profiles based on their client's requirements and further lessen the burden of "swiping" through profiles (Swamy, 2014).

Bharat Matrimony, however, does not qualify to be a "third place". As per Ray Oldenburg, a *third place* has the following characteristics (Goffman, 1959):

1. A third place is a neutral ground: Occupants of third places have little to no obligation to be there. They are not tied down to the area financially, politically, legally, or otherwise and are free to come and go as they please.

2. Third places put no importance on an individual's status in society.

Bharat Matrimony doesn't satisfy either of the two characteristics. The website is visited for the purpose of finding a life partner, which in India, is an ordeal tied down to financial and societal reasons. Secondly, a person's status in society is one of the most important decision factors when considering an arranged marriage. For these reasons, Bharat Matrimony can't be considered as a *third place*.

Additionally, the site is constructivist in nature. Its design is dictated by the present norms in the Indian matrimonial society, and people approach it from the perspective of finding a socially acceptable partner – thus fitting a constructivist community's definition of reality is socially constructed and is defined on the basis of social practice (Discourse & co., 2021).

Bharat Matrimony through the lens of the Nine Design Principles

This section describes how Bharat Matrimony fits into Amy Jo Kim's nine timeless principles for community building which are:

Does it have a clear purpose?

Bharat Matrimony has a crystal-clear purpose – find their clients a bride or groom in an easy and hassle-free manner. The site is made with the intention of eventual profile deletion. The tradition of arranged marriages in India is a tale as old as time. As a matter of fact, every wedding is characterized into "arranged marriages" and "love marriages" based on the family's involvement, or lack thereof, in the latter case.

Initially, matches were found via word of mouth or through trusted matchmakers, and brides and grooms were found well within the family's community. Now that civilization has spread out and communities no longer live in the same town or city, Bharat Matrimony solves the issue of struggling to find potential partners. With the site, you can find a partner halfway across the world that your family approves of in a hassle-free and easy manner.

Since getting married is such a ubiquitous thing that humans just do, Bharat Matrimony is always promised a huge user base even as time passes by and their current clients get married and delete their profiles. Furthermore, they have become a household name in most Indian Communities. If a person is looking to get married through an arranged alliance, it is implied that they are either on Bharat Matrimony or Shaadi.com.

As soon as one opens the website, it asks the user to make an account. The two options given are "Yes, I would like to find my special someone" and "No. I am not seriously looking for a life partner right now." Their mission statement, as seen on their homepage, is to make "Happy Marriages" by matching every requirement of the prospective bride and groom. This way, Bharat Matrimony maintains a clear purpose, and we will examine if they stand by it.

Does it have distinct and extensible gathering places?

While there are no places where members can gather and interact together, the site has several region-based sub-sites to allow users to look at the subset of members that they are interested in. The region-based sites are further differentiated based on community, religion, a combination of location and religion, occupation, caste, mother tongue, and horoscope. Bharat Matrimony is

divided into 18 distinct regional portals based on the state that its customers hail from (Bharat Matrimony, 2022). India has 28 states in total, some of them overlapping in culture and heritage. Bharat Matrimony redirects new users to their respective state portals based on the information they initially provide during profile creation. For example, Disha is from Karnataka and speaks Kannada. Upon profile creation, Bharat Matrimony automatically redirects her to Kannada Matrimony. Similarly, Niharika is from Telangana and speaks Telugu, and is redirected to Telugu Matrimony.

People can still find matches from across states but will look at these matches from their respective home portals since community building is much easier and more comfortable when you use your native language's portal. This is especially true when you're a new user and are confused about how to navigate through the site. People can either choose to look for matches within their home portal or expand and request to see users from other communities' home portals as well. There are also different spaces for divorcees, doctors, people in defense, people of ages greater than 40, and for people who studied at IIMs and IITs (premium educational institutions in India.)

Do member profiles evolve over time?

While creating the profile, potential members are asked to fill in a certain amount of personal information to validate their existence and to help the algorithm to show them relevant matches. Filters can be set at this stage itself or be added later as the member starts using the site. The same logic goes for photos and optional personal information such as eating and drinking habits,

hobbies, etc. This flexibility allows users to create a profile providing just the essential information quickly, and then later fine-tune the parameters as they see fit while using the site.

Member profiles evolve over time but are capped at how much they can evolve, as the eventual goal of every member is to find a partner and delete their profile. For instance, a user may not fine-tune the filters they need to find a partner, and as they talk to people who don't fit into their criteria, they revise their profile to make their stance clearer. They can also post more photos/remove some photos, include more information in their bio as they find multiple people asking them the same questions, and also change the filters to be more specific or general based on the matches they are currently getting. The site also gives the provision for users to request more data from profiles that they are interested in. As they speak to more prospective partners, they may choose to comply to some of these requests and post information that is deemed important by the other users.

Does the site provide a wide range of roles with increasing involvement?

Newcomers are tagged with a "Recently Joined" badge that helps others know that a new person has joined, and they probably haven't met them yet. Involvement is individual-dependent, though as time passes, people might spend more time if they are in a rush to get married or stop using it entirely and try different methods to find a partner. The site is not designed to provide roles with increasing engagement.

Does the site allow for user-created groups, contests, and events?

Swayamvar is an ancient Indian tradition wherein a woman would choose her groom from a group of suitors. The event would take place in a public setting, mostly seen in courtrooms with the bride being of royal descent. The suitors would take turns in introducing themselves and proposing why they're the correct match for her. The bride would then choose an auspicious time and venue to choose her husband.

This tradition got lost with time, but a modernized version is often found from time to time. Bharat Matrimony has a feature called "Matrimony Meet" where a bride can float a form for a digital Swayamvar and interested men can fill their details in the form and be up for consideration. To be considered, potential matches must also pay a fee, which is roughly around $100. Figure 1 is a screenshot of all the details men must submit to be eligible for consideration.

A physical meetup will happen with the matches the bride chooses, and Bharat Matrimony acts as a facilitator in the whole process. Thus, Bharat Matrimony holds events that are Contests in the form of a Swayamvar.

The site also has limited-time profiles for each day. These are profiles that the user can only connect with in a 24-hour window. They are refreshed daily. These profiles are usually ones that have the greatest number of preference matches and are perhaps more popular with other site users. These daily matches make sure that users are engaged and don't become inactive or lose interest.
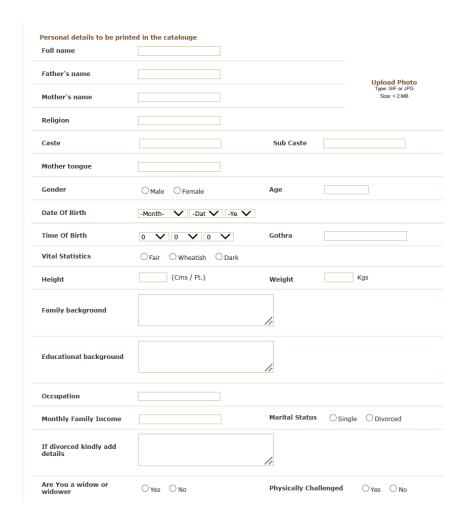
Personal details to be printed in the catalouge

Full name   [_____]

Father's name   [_____]

Upload Photo
Type: GIF or JPG
Size: < 2 MB

Mother's name   [_____]

Religion   [_____]

Caste   [_____]   Sub Caste   [_____]

Mother tongue   [_____]

Gender   ○ Male   ○ Female   Age   [_____]

Date Of Birth   [-Month- ▼] [-Dat ▼] [-Ye ▼]

Time Of Birth   [0 ▼] [0 ▼] [0 ▼]   Gothra   [_____]

Vital Statistics   ○ Fair   ○ Wheatish   ○ Dark

Height   [____] (Cms / Ft.)   Weight   [____] Kgs

Family background   [_____]

Educational background   [_____]

Occupation   [_____]

Monthly Family Income   [_____]   Marital Status   ○ Single   ○ Divorced

If divorced kindly add details   [_____]

Are You a widow or widower   ○ Yes   ○ No   Physically Challenged   ○ Yes   ○ No

Figure 2. Swayamvar form for a bride (Bharat Matrimony, 2022)

Does the site integrate online and real-world such as celebrating important personal events?

Since Bharat Matrimony is a matrimony site, the only personal event it celebrates is its clients' weddings. Bharat Matrimony shares its success stories on the website through interviews, personal articles, and videos. It also features a section for couples whose stories got posted as articles in magazines. There's an option to post your success story to be featured on their

website. The site does this as part of its extensive marketing strategy to get more people to use and trust the website.

Related Work

Srinivasan, R. (2021) in his book 'Platform Business Models', studies the business model of Bharat Matrimony and sheds light on its journey from a community site for Tamilians to a matrimonial site for all Indian communities.

He focused on the "trust" built into the site as so much information is asked for and provided. He also spoke about Muruga's ventures into employment portals, yellow pages, and property sites that ran on nearly the same business model. Lastly, the book talked about the paid packages and the related services that brought in most of the company's money. Other sites by Muruga like IndiaProperty.com were also mentioned.

Sharma, V., Nardi, B., Norton, J., Tsaasan, A.M. (2019) focused on the "safety" of matrimonial websites in their paper "Towards Safe Spaces Online: A Study of Indian Matrimonial Websites." They introduced the term "safety" in the context of familial involvement in the matrimonial process. They examined the effectiveness of the site as an alternative to dating sites, they also noted how the ample amount of information on the site facilitates easy verification.

Indian matrimonial discussions often marginalize and ignore people with disabilities, medical conditions, and divorcees. The paper explored how Bharat Matrimony and other matrimonial

sites were bringing disability into the open and normalizing discussion about topics that were usually hidden by the parents.

Methods

The authors spent over 24 hours using the website. Both authors mentioned in their bios that they are graduate students from Georgia Tech looking to interview site members for CS 7637. People's reactions were mixed in nature. Niharika found that parents were more reluctant to participate in an interview and were only interested in getting their sons married. She found better luck with men who were operating their own profiles and were more open to participating in an interview and providing their insights. Disha found that parents who operated their sons' profiles rarely ever read her bio. They were concentrating on the rest of the profile and ended up being surprised when asked to interview. While some people managing their own profiles noticed this about the profile, many still did not agree to interview after approaching her. However, both authors had their accounts blocked eventually since men reported them to be ingenuine and spam, which indicates how seriously people take the site and its purpose, and the site provides little accommodation for any deviation from this purpose.

Niharika spoke to three people – two men and a woman, referred to below as M-1, M-2, and W-1 as they requested that their real names not be used in this paper. Each of them had an interesting perspective on their experience on the site, and the author thoroughly enjoyed learning from their experiences.

M-1: M-1 is in his early thirties and has recently gotten married to a woman he met on Bharat Matrimony. He believes that in this day and age if a person is not interested in the dating scene and wants to take the traditional route of an arranged marriage, a matrimony site is the only practical way to do it.

M-2: M-2 is an active member of the site in his late twenties. He was motivated to join the site after finding that most of the people he met on dating sites wanted something casual, and he felt like he was ready for a serious relationship and marriage.

W-1: W-1 is a woman in her early twenties who is still exploring the site. She made a profile on the site after being pressured by her family to get married. She feels like Bharat Matrimony is an online community in the sense that it has a clear purpose that draws people to use it and can curate thousands of profiles and facilitate communication between users, but lacks in the aspect of bringing people together, and is designed to be deleted.

Disha spoke to two men and another woman who will be referred to as M-3, M-4, and W-2. She met M-3 and W-2 through mutual contacts but met M-4 through the site.

M-3: M-3 is in his early thirties and had used this site for a year before he stopped using it. He was an active member on the site and met many prospective partners through it. Though it has not worked out with anyone through the site, he has remained friends with many of them.

W-2: W-2 is a woman in her early thirties who joined the site a few years ago. Though she did not find someone directly through the site, she is now engaged to a man whose family found her through a WhatsApp group where her information was posted by another user of the matrimony site.

M-4: Is not a very active member on the site. He claimed to have joined the site due to pressure from his parents to get married but only interacts with the incoming requests that he gets. This interviewee mentioned that he had dated people before but decided to use the site because he preferred to marry someone Indian in a traditional way.

The success of Bharat Matrimony

The community is successful in the sense that it delivers on its intended purpose – finding someone you can marry. The odds of it all working out are like the odds of finding "the one" on a dating site. The site does, however, provide all the means necessary for one to succeed in their quest of finding a lifelong partner while also respecting Indian traditions and culture. Thus, for the purpose of facilitating arranged marriages, the site is meeting the needs of its members.

Figure 2. Statistics for the Bharat Matrimony landing page for June, July, and August 22 (Similarweb, 2022).

Bharat Matrimony enjoys a huge user base, and the figure above is indicative of it. The landing page for Bharat Matrimony only deals with registration and redirection to the user's respective regional site, which is operated by Bharat Matrimony, and still shows an impressive number of site visits consistently across months. The average time spent is lower since users browse matches on regional sites.

Bharat Matrimony earned a place in the Limca Book of World Records for having facilitated the highest number of documented marriages online in India, a number that has since reached one million marriages (Swamy, 2014). From the interviews as well, we were able to conclude that Bharat Matrimony is most people's first choice when picking a matrimonial site.

Competitor Analysis

Bharat Matrimony is trusted to be India's #1 online matchmaking service, with over 3000 employees and an estimated revenue of $50 million annually. Its top competitors are websites such as Shaadi.com, Jeevansathi.com, SimplyMarry.com, and more recently, a matrimonial website named IITIIMShaadi.com.

Table 1. Bharat Matrimony's Competitor Analysis – August 2022 (Similarweb, 2022)

Matrimony Site	Total Visits (in million)	Avg. time spent per visit (mm: ss)	Avg. pages per visit	Bounce rate (in %)
Bharat Matrimony	1.3	02:46	4.11	45.64
Tamil Matrimony	2	06:04	10.66	20.86
Telugu Matrimony	1.5	07:53	10.81	19.76
Shaadi	12.3	05:34	9.5	34.62
Jeevansathi	5.3	05:16	8.24	32.73
Brahmin Matrimony	0.7	04:14	6.57	24.46
IITIIMShaadi	0.1	04:10	6.15	34.84

The statistics are made for the landing page for Bharat Matrimony where registration takes place. After registration, Bharat Matrimony redirects users to its regional websites (which are completely new websites operated by the company) in accordance with their region. It was hard

to get an exact number of visits made as the site redirects its users to 18 regional sites operated by the parent website Bharat Matrimony.

The most popular regional sites visited were Tamil Matrimony (2M visits), followed by Telugu Matrimony (1.5M) and Kerala Matrimony (934.2K). On average, Bharat Matrimony, inclusive of all its regional sites, sees close to 14M visits, thus putting it ahead of Shaadi.com, its top competitor. To put the numbers in perspective, Bharat Matrimony's two main regional sites (Tamil Matrimony and Telugu Matrimony) are included in Table 1.

IITIIMShaadi.com is a matrimonial site for a niche segment of Indians who have attended top-tier and premier universities in the world. To register, the website will verify your institutional transcript and degree, and only upon confirmation that you attended a premier institution will you be able to complete registration and browse through matches. The website is made for people who are looking for well-educated partners, and more importantly, for people in India who strongly believe in the societal clout that comes with a premier institute's degree. We checked - Georgia Tech graduates qualify for registration (IITIIMShaadi, 2022).

Bharat Matrimony is more open and does not discriminate against registration based on education. Anyone can create a profile, and there is an option to mention that you haven't attended university or that you don't presently earn. Its target audience range is wide and caters to any Indian looking for an arranged marriage, as opposed to IITIIMShaadi.

Shaadi.com is perhaps Bharat Matrimony's biggest competitor. Its model and target audience are the same as Bharat Matrimony. Shaadi.com is safer to use, with better security measures put in place. However, the total number of profiles and userbase is higher for Bharat Matrimony. Jeevansathi shares a similar story to Shaadi.com in terms of comparison to Bharat Matrimony. While we noticed that Bharat Matrimony divides its audience based on region (though it allows cross-region interaction), and IITIIMShaadi accommodates people based on education, our last competitor Brahmin Matrimony is for people from the Brahmin caste. Brahmins in India are known to be traditional and orthodox, and the website is made so that every match you see is also from the same caste as you.

From this analysis, we can see that the matrimony site market in India caters to its audience based on what they value more – native language, caste, education, and job. There are many such niche sites – we also came across Divorcee Matrimony – a website targeted purely at divorcees in India, as divorce is a taboo topic in India, and people might not feel as comfortable using a traditional matrimonial site and tag themselves as divorcees.

Bharat Matrimony's Design and Possible Improvements

Bharat Matrimony is designed in a rather tacky and cluttered way. Interviewee W-1 mentioned that she feels that the site is designed for older generations, with its cluttered and not-so-fluid UX, and tacky colors.

Interviewee M-2 noticed how the cluttered UI could be a business strategy to get people to invest in a higher subscription tier to avoid using a bad website and have one of the site's relationship managers handle it for you.

Interviewee M-1 likes the site's design overall and believes that it provides a good ecosystem for finding your life partner. He says that it is easy and intuitive to use, and since most of the conversations occur outside of the website, a bad chat or call feature doesn't impact the user experience. However, he does believe that the site could use some AI algorithms to prevent scams and fake profiles.

M-1 mentions that the time it takes from creating the profile to finding your partner can run anywhere from a few months all the way to a few years, depending on your criteria and the other person's criteria. He feels that this process would be better if the site improved its algorithm and used a bit of ML while making recommendations.

M-2 mentioned that he likes the feature of getting a notification when someone you've expressed interest in checks your profile. He said that if after seeing your profile, they still don't respond, it's a clear indication of disinterest and it's easier to move to the next person without wasting time waiting for a reply that won't come.

W-1 has an intriguing take on Bharat Matrimony bios. She feels like it is the matrimonial variant of resume vetting, and that after a point, it's easy to forget that there exists an entire person behind the biodata and focus purely on interrogating the other person when they meet for the first

time. She mentioned that her dates started to feel like interviews, and this wouldn't have been the case if she had struck up a conversation with the guy before deciding to meet him, instead of exchanging biodatas and deciding to meet based on how compatible they are on a sheet of paper that says nothing about their personalities.

This was something that M-4 felt too. He, in many instances, had parents start their conversation by asking him to send his bio to them again. Even M-3 talked about how conversations on the site begin with a confirmation of his credentials. Furthermore, M-4 likened Bharat Matrimony to professional and job-seeking sites like LinkedIn.

While bios should talk about the user's personality, M-4 said that the bio often turns out to be a self-promotion filled with half-lies. But these bios still help users decide whether they want to connect with the other user. W-2 talked about how she usually rejected profiles in which parents used 10-20 adjectives to describe their son.

Along with the opinions they got from the interviewees, the authors noticed that the site design is very basic and is not reflective of the latest advancements in UI/UX design. The front end feels like it was designed in 2005 and hasn't been updated since. Whether this is done on purpose to make people invest in relationship managers to escape using the site themselves or is just simply a result of bad design practices on the company's side is still unclear.

Bharat Matrimony is designed so that someone who isn't very tech-savvy can also use it very easily. This is probably done since the site is primarily used by parents to find their children a

wife or a husband. The site auto-fills an "about you" section from all the details you provided. It's nothing fancy, just a compilation of your name, age, occupation, family values, and your expected qualities in the same fields from your partner. This increases convenience as parents in India wouldn't be very comfortable writing long bios. There's also an option to send your photos to their official WhatsApp number, and they'll upload your profile photos themselves. This is probably done once again for not-so-tech-comfortable parents who aren't well-versed in uploading photos, though I'm not sure how many such people could be there today.

The website can also improve its chat feature, which is very simplistic and hard to use. Users can't see if their messages have been read, and the chat feature takes up the whole page instead of having a pop-up feature the way Facebook does. Users can send someone an "interest," and you can send them a message if they accept your interest. However, there's no chat section per se, and it's pretty confusing to navigate while trying to find your chat. Most people the authors interacted with immediately suggested switching to WhatsApp or any other messaging app. The interviewees also mentioned that most conversations occur outside of the website's chat and call features.

Lastly, as M-1 mentions, AI features can make websites safer and keep scammers away. The algorithm that Bharat Matrimony uses is a black box, and people have their own interpretations of whether the website is being innovative by only providing its algorithm's true strength to its premium tier members or if good matches are a result of chance or human intervention in the form of relationship managers.

We believe that improvements to the aspects discussed above will help in improving the overall user experience and increase the matchmaking success rate of the website.

Distinctive Aspects of Bharat Matrimony

Matrimony Sites vs. Dating Sites

Apart from the noticeable difference that the matrimony site is designed to find someone to get married to, there are some noticeable yet interesting differences in comparison to dating sites such as Tinder and Bumble.

For instance, the information asked by Bharat Matrimony while setting up your profile is starkly different from any dating site. The most important fields to enter while setting up a profile are Caste, Sub-caste, Birth Star (They also have a feature that automatically maps your birth star to your sun sign), salary, and family values. Then you are required to fill in your expectations of caste, salary, etc., for your prospective partner, and the site filters out the people it shows you accordingly. These filters are reflective of traditional old-time Indian values. Indian dating sites don't use such filters, and people only consider such factors when it comes to marriage.

The UI of Bharat Matrimony is tacky, as mentioned previously, and its components aren't very fluid. Popular dating sites such as Tinder, Bumble, and Hinge all have great interfaces. The authors wonder whether Gen-Z and the later generations would consider using dating apps if they looked like Bharat Matrimony.

Another strong contrast between the UIs of the two sites is the ease of usage. Dating sites make accepting and rejecting people very easy – a single swipe allows you to decide after being exposed to as little information as a person's picture and age. Bharat Matrimony, on the other hand, shows us their profession, education, mother tongue, caste, salary, and location before the user can find the button to make the decision. The site ensures a profile is considered carefully before it is accepted or rejected.

In confirmation of the author's doubts, W-1 mentioned that the structure of Bharat Matrimony is better suited to earlier generations and that in her circle of friends, being on a matrimonial site is uncool and makes you sound like you still believe in traditional patriarchal values. For this reason, she hid the fact that she was on the site from her friends and colleagues and mentally downplayed it for herself.

W-1 also feels that the filters that they use on Bharat Matrimony are irrelevant in her quest to find a partner and that details such as astrological compatibility, caste, and language shone brightly on everyone's profiles, with the hobbies and interests section hidden away in a corner and almost always ignored. She feels the decision factors that are most looked at on the website are conservative ones that are more important to previous generations and have toxic effects that our generation is slowly unlearning.

While there is a stigma around past involvement in dating sites, involvement in a matrimonial site is not frowned upon. M-3 is still friends with many women he met through the matrimonial site. Almost all interviewees mentioned that they would drift apart when things didn't work out.

There was no dramatic break and no ill will. We were surprised to learn that some of the friends M-3 made through the site are now married and their spouses are okay with them still being friends. M-3 noted that as a couple has no physical involvement when considering an alliance through these matrimonial sites, remaining friends is harmless and not looked down upon. This would not be the case for dating websites.

New Users and their needs

While most of the site is based on traditional Indian values, some signs of modernity have been seeping in. Drinking, smoking, eating non-vegetarian food, and having dated people is taboo in Indian society. But, in their search for happy and honest relationships, users of this site have found a way to discuss it. While looking through the profile, you will see almost no mentions of drinking or smoking.

For most people, it is an open secret. People have varying amounts of honesty about these habits with their parents, but they definitely do not post this information on the site. W-2 talked about how on the first meeting, she usually mentions the fact that she drinks to make sure they are cool with it. M-3 spoke about how most of his first meets are at breweries to ensure that the prospective bride has a visual confirmation of the fact that he drinks. This is to make sure that the prospective bride is not under the impression that he will quit any of these habits after marriage.

There are instances where people have chosen not to reveal the truth. W-2 talked about a friend of hers who never bothered to tell their partner that they had dated people before and that they

smoked. But the most common attitude we noticed in the interviewees was that they expected the truth and felt like they owed the other person the truth. Both M-3 and W-2 talked about how they thought it was important to speak about past relationships and also were okay with any amount of honesty from the other person as long as the past was in the past.

M-4 mentioned that he had sometimes seen the same person's profile on the Indian dating app and the matrimony app. He noted stark differences in their portrayal in the two profiles. While on the dating site, the prospective bride said she loved to "party" and "hookah," on the matrimonial site, she would describe herself as a "simple traditional girl." The expectation of honesty is extended to the prospective partner but not their parents.

On many occasions, Disha was approached by their parents, who did not tell the prospective groom about the match until she confirmed she would be interested. M-3 mentioned that, on one occasion, when he was going to meet the prospective bride for the first time, he was surprised to find her parents, her sister, and her sister's husband waiting to meet him at the café. M-3 mentioned many instances where parents would supervise them, and prospective brides would not make any decisions or conversations without parental approval. While we acknowledge that parents play an instrumental role in the working of the site, the site could integrate their role into the site a bit better by adding user roles within each profile. In most cases, users and their parents work together to find matches. By establishing separate communication channels for the pair of users and their parents within the site, both compatibility requirements would be addressed simultaneously.

Business Model

Most of Bharat Matrimony's annual revenue of $50 million comes from its subscription plans.

Table 2 details its currently available subscription plans.

Table 2

Bharat Matrimony Subscription Plans (Bharat Matrimony, 2022)

Subscription Plan	3-month plan (in USD)	6-month plan (in USD)
Gold	$109	$192
Diamond	$131	$235
Platinum	$150	$270
Assisted Service	$475	$840
Add-on: Profile Highlighter	$44	$88

Bharat Matrimony's subscription plans are expensive. There are three categories – Gold, Diamond, and Platinum. Getting any of them allows the user to send unlimited personalized messages to prospective matches. Table 3 presents a detailed description of all the features available with each tier.

Table 3

Bharat Matrimony Feature Comparisons (Bharat Matrimony, 2022)

PACKAGES	Gold	DIAMOND	PLATINUM	Till-U-Marry[SM]	ASSISTED SERVICE	FREE
Duration Price	3 Months US$ 109 SELECT	3 Months US$ 131 SELECT	3 Months US$ 150 SELECT	Regular US$ 370 SELECT	3 Months US$ 475 SELECT	
Send Unlimited personalized messages[*]	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ***	✗
Access verified mobile numbers	40 Nos	50 Nos	80 Nos	300 Nos 25/month	✓ ***	✗
Send SMS	30 SMS	45 SMS	60 SMS	240 SMS 20/month	✓ ***	✗
Chat instantly with prospects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
View Horoscope of members	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Profile Highlighter: Makes your profile Stand Out !	✗	1 Month	3 Months	✗	1 Month	✗
AstroMatch: Match your horoscope with other members' horoscopes	✗	50 Matches	100 Matches	✗	✗	✗
Personal Relationship Manager: Searches, Shortlists and contacts matching profiles on your behalf	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
Priority in search results[**]	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Profile tagged as paid member for more responses	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Prominent display in search results	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
SMS Alerts: Get instant notifications on your mobile	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Enhanced Privacy: Photo / Horoscope / Phone	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

An intriguing takeaway from Table 3 is the package that mentions "Profile tagged as a paid member for more responses." In India, social standing is one of the most important decisions to make during a marriage proposal. A simple badge that signifies the amount of money you've invested in finding a match is an indication of wealth and social status. This can be compared to upgrading to a special edition skin in a video game that signifies to the other players that you're a seasoned player.

AstroMatch is Bharat Matrimony's astrology feature that generates a real-time astrological match between two users. This is particularly useful as arranged marriages in India place heavy importance on astrological matches. Through this feature, users can immediately decide whether they would like to initiate a conversation with a potential match or not, depending on their astrological compatibility. The price to use this feature is $35 for checking compatibility with 150 matches.

Profile Highlighter is another unique feature provided by Bharat Matrimony. By paying $44 for three months, users can highlight their profile at the top of other users' search results for added visibility. This ensures that your profile is getting maximum traction and increases the users' chances of finding the best possible match.

Assisted Matrimony is Bharat Matrimony's most elite service, which connects the user with a relationship manager. The relationship manager's job is to scour profiles daily and send the client potential matches so they don't have to deal directly with using the site.

M-1 used the Assisted Matrimony feature by Bharat Matrimony, where for a fee, he was paired with a relationship manager, who serves as a matchmaker. The relationship manager would comb through profiles of girls and send M-1's family the ones they think will match their requirements. This saves the family a lot of time and hassle to individually see profiles, initiate conversations and check for genuineness.

M-2 doesn't like the subscription plans that Bharat Matrimony offers and believes that a monthly plan that costs less would be preferable rather than paying a huge one-time fee. W-2 agrees with this opinion and believes Bharat Matrimony charges an excessive one-time fee for a higher-tier subscription.

M-2 believes that the website's algorithm has some good features and that paying more money for a higher subscription gets you access to this algorithm. He feels like the profiles you're shown when you're on a free account are more random in nature, and profiles that don't meet your filters are also commonly shown. Once you upgrade to a higher tier, you suddenly start mainly seeing relevant profiles and start getting good matches along with great customer service. W-1 disagrees and believes that it is just a sales strategy and that you don't have to pay that much to find a potential partner. She feels that the algorithm is a simple filter-matching process, and access to more human resources support is the only thing that gets better with paying more money.

However, the authors found that a paid subscription offers many helpful benefits. It's interesting to note that free users get almost none of the benefits of the site, and people must almost always pay for subscriptions to benefit from the website's good features. Another major problem that Bharat Matrimony's subscription tier system introduces is that if someone makes a profile and pays for a subscription tier - the free user's personal details, such as their phone number, email address, and some other profile data, are directly visible to them even if the free user hasn't sent them an interest. This leads to free users ending up with creepy messages on their phones and email, with the authors experiencing such behavior firsthand. People who pay for a higher tier

sometimes just assume that they have the right to your privacy and time just because they paid more for a matrimony subscription. This is particularly troubling as the site indirectly says that paid members get access to free members' personal details and that wealth can, indeed, buy power in a matrimonial situation in India.

Parent Users and Intrusive Questions

It was observed from both the author's experience and the interviews that profiles are almost always operated by the parents and not the prospective brides and grooms themselves. Interviewee M-1 believes that the most important deciding factor when getting married is ensuring that the families are like-minded and get along well. His parents operated his profile for him and passed on the profiles of potential partners to him once they had verified the profile and spoken to the girl'. These steps are taken to gauge the other family's vibe, ensure that they are real people with genuine intentions, and get an initial idea of whether this match can work out. Once these background checks are okayed from both parents' sides, M-1 would talk to the girl and get to know her better.

M-2 had a similar experience. His parents mainly operated his profile, and he felt like his role was more in line with that of a spectator, only watching around till his parents shortlisted some matches and forwarded contact details to him. He mentioned that the profiles he saw were mostly generic in nature and thinks that profiles are created just to give the other family a general idea of the person's background and that the profile prompts and bios are significantly general in nature as opposed to the quirky and personalized ones you find on dating sites.

When the author asked about the truthfulness of profiles on the site, M-2 mentioned that most women's profiles are very traditional and family-oriented in nature. Their actual interests and habits are masked completely since traits such as smoking, drinking, and partying are frowned upon by elders, especially if it is a girl engaging in such activities. He believes that the profile is more reflective of what her family is like and that it makes sense for the profiles to be designed such that families check for compatibility instead of the people looking to get married themselves and that they talk about their true natures once their parents give them the green light.

W-1 also mentioned that her parents primarily operated her profile. They would take printouts of guys' biodatas and sit down to verify the profiles and find potential matches, which they would then forward to W-1. W-2, too, mentioned that her profile was handled by her parents. Though she would meet the prospective match later, without supervision, the prospective groom would only be introduced to her after her parents had spoken to him.

Both M-3 and M-4 handled their own profiles on Bharat Matrimony. They both mentioned that they often disliked being connected to profiles being handled by parents, as these conversations often turn into interrogations. But there is no escape from this situation. It is accepted by most users that parental interaction is going to happen. It is not uncommon for parents to supervise every aspect of the interaction. And every decision is often made with the approval of everyone involved. But most users have come to be understanding of parental behavior on the site.

Parents often do not ask before calling and jump right into asking personal questions. But as they have not been exposed to the internet for very long and the site does not explicitly mention a code of conduct, most users eventually accommodate this behavior.

W-2, M-3, and M-4 all agreed that these questions, though intrusive, were also necessary. In the sub-site for Indians in the US, it was common for profiles to mention their current visa status and the expected status of their future spouse. M-4 mentioned that it was usual for parents to ask about his visa status as they would want to know their daughter's status if they got married. Users of the site are okay with the extensive amount of information expected of them. The expectation of this information is considered pragmatic – this information lets people plan their futures with each other.

Caste is one of the many pieces of private information that the site expects its users to reveal. When asked how they feel about this, W-2 said that people usually prefer someone from their own community because it is easier to find common ground with them. Furthermore, as they belong to the same community, it is also easier to verify their identity through mutual contacts. W-2 also talked about how they usually kept her horoscope ready in case a family wanted to check it. While these questions were surprisingly considered unintrusive, most users experience intrusive interrogations at the hands of parents. W-2 talked about how men will mention their preference for a certain body type or skin tone. It is not uncommon to see "looking for a thin, fair, traditional bride for my son" on the site. There are also people who asked questions about whether she would work after marriage. Without a clear code of conduct, the users are never made aware of the fact that they are being rude or intrusive.

Scams and Frauds

There have been reports of people getting defrauded on matrimony sites by potential matches who ask for help since an unforeseen emergency has occurred or as a part of the dowry culture that's still prevalent in many parts of India.

M-1 shared some instances of his friends meeting suspicious people on the site who were scammers looking to engage in fraudulent activities. He told the author a story he heard about a group of con artists who pretended to be a family and demanded a huge dowry (money brought by a bride to her husband on their marriage). Upon receiving the money, they all disappeared. Turns out, they rented a house on sale and pretended to be genuine to scam some money from the bride. M-1 believes that the website needs to improve on the checks it performs to ensure that its users are real and genuine. M-3 also mentioned instances where potential matches have demanded money or gifts from people they have matched with and attempted to scam them.

Unlike M-1, M-2 doesn't believe that there will be any significant impact of the website performing more thorough background checks since Indian parents will not trust it anyway and conduct a full check themselves anyway but does believe that it will be a nice feature to have.

W-1 told the author about a personal incident where a guy she met on the site tried to scam her out of approximately 100$. His unwillingness to get on a video call and provide some form of proof set off red flags for her, and she refused to transfer the money and subsequently reported

the guy on Bharat Matrimony. Post this incident, her family started looking only at verified profiles and hasn't had any such experience ever since.

Privacy Concerns

Bharat Matrimony has also introduced a feature called "Secure Connect," which is a safety feature for women. Though not widely used, this feature allows women to choose whether to reveal their phone numbers to premium members they match with. But in most cases, the prospective match's phone number and personal details are revealed to the premium member they are matched with. It is common for women to be stalked because of their involvement in the site. Many prefer to let their parents handle their profiles for this reason.

M-4 mentioned that one of the things that he liked about the site is that they have a good background-check system. This sentiment was not expressed by any other user. In fact, M-3 had once been catfished by a prospective match. We investigated their Terms & Conditions to see how they verify their users.

The website says it offers "100% mobile verified profiles" by checking and releasing a profile 1 hour after the user creates it. "Mobile verified" means that they ensure that a phone number is connected to the account. This was added due to the Indian government's requirement that matrimonial websites do not allow users with unverified mobile numbers and email addresses.

To get a "Verified" account on the site, you must upload a Government ID, get your pictures validated, and answer a phone call from a Bharat Matrimony agent who will try to verify your existence. W-1 is unsure how this phone call verification works.

The T&C explicitly asks users to verify the credentials of the prospect and exercise due caution. As most offline matchmaking sites require users to submit some proof of their age, qualification, and salary, Bharat Matrimony could also ask users to upload this information. Even if stringent checking is not done, it would deter dishonest behavior on the site.

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