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Marriage, Capital, and Class Reproduction: A Comparative Discourse Analysis of *Middlemarch* and Contemporary Bangladeshi Marriage Discourse

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Abstract

This article examines marriage as a site where material resources, gendered expectations, family status, and class reproduction intersect. It brings George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–72) into dialogue with twenty-one open-ended questionnaire responses collected in July 2026 from participants who discussed marriage, financial stability, social class, family expectations, economic dependence, and gendered economic roles in contemporary Bangladesh. The study does not treat the novel and the questionnaire as equivalent datasets. Instead, it uses comparative critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine how economic relations become meaningful through language in two different discourse sites: Victorian realist fiction and contemporary participant discourse. A Marxist-feminist framework is combined with Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse to identify recurring mechanisms of economic qualification, naturalisation of gendered expectations, market and investment vocabulary, and the connection between economic dependence and decision-making power. The responses show that participants frequently regard financial stability as important while simultaneously distinguishing material security from emotional fulfilment. At the same time, several responses naturalise male provision and female domestic responsibility, while others explicitly challenge these expectations through a discourse of equality, companionship, independence, and mutual respect. One particularly revealing counter-case frames marriage directly as an "investment," making the economic logic unusually explicit rather than ideologically concealed. The analysis therefore argues not that Marxist theory has ignored marriage, but that marriage provides a productive household-level site for observing the reproduction of class and gender relations. The study is exploratory and cannot represent Bangladesh as a whole because the sample is small, purposive/convenience-based, and heavily connected to one university community. Its contribution lies in placing literary discourse and contemporary Bangladeshi marriage discourse into a carefully delimited comparative framework rather than claiming statistical or historical equivalence.

Keywords: Bangladesh; Class; Discourse; Feminism; Marriage; Marxism; Middlemarch; Reproduction

Pernikahan, Modal, dan Reproduksi Kelas: Analisis Wacana Komparatif terhadap *Middlemarch* dan Wacana Pernikahan Kontemporer di Bangladesh

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji pernikahan sebagai ruang pertemuan antara sumber daya material, harapan berbasis gender, status keluarga, dan reproduksi kelas. Penelitian ini mempertemukan novel *Middlemarch* (1871–1872) karya George Eliot dengan 21 tanggapan kuesioner terbuka yang dikumpulkan pada Juli 2026 dari partisipan yang membahas pernikahan, stabilitas keuangan, kelas sosial, harapan keluarga, ketergantungan ekonomi, dan peran ekonomi berdasarkan gender di Bangladesh masa kini. Novel dan tanggapan kuesioner tidak diperlakukan sebagai kumpulan data yang setara. Sebaliknya, penelitian ini menggunakan analisis wacana kritis (critical discourse analysis/CDA) secara komparatif untuk menelaah bagaimana hubungan ekonomi memperoleh makna melalui bahasa pada dua ranah wacana yang berbeda, yaitu fiksi realis era Victoria dan wacana partisipan kontemporer. Kerangka feminisme Marxis dipadukan dengan model wacana tiga dimensi Fairclough untuk mengidentifikasi mekanisme yang berulang, yakni pemberian batasan terhadap pertimbangan ekonomi, normalisasi harapan gender, penggunaan kosakata pasar dan investasi,

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serta hubungan antara ketergantungan ekonomi dan kekuasaan dalam pengambilan keputusan. Tanggapan menunjukkan bahwa partisipan sering menganggap stabilitas keuangan penting, tetapi sekaligus membedakan keamanan material dari pemenuhan emosional. Sejumlah tanggapan menormalkan peran laki-laki sebagai pencari nafkah dan perempuan sebagai penanggung jawab urusan domestik, sedangkan tanggapan lain secara eksplisit menentang harapan tersebut melalui wacana kesetaraan, kebersamaan, kemandirian, dan saling menghormati. Salah satu kasus pembanding yang menonjol secara langsung menggambarkan pernikahan sebagai "investasi", sehingga logika ekonominya dinyatakan secara eksplisit, bukan disembunyikan secara ideologis. Analisis ini tidak menyatakan bahwa teori Marxis mengabaikan pernikahan, tetapi berargumen bahwa pernikahan menyediakan ruang pengamatan pada tingkat rumah tangga untuk memahami reproduksi hubungan kelas dan gender. Penelitian ini bersifat eksploratif dan tidak dapat mewakili Bangladesh secara keseluruhan karena sampelnya kecil, direkrut secara purposif atau berdasarkan kemudahan akses, dan sebagian besar terkait dengan satu komunitas universitas. Kontribusinya terletak pada penempatan wacana sastra dan wacana pernikahan Bangladesh kontemporer dalam kerangka komparatif yang dibatasi secara cermat, bukan pada klaim kesetaraan statistik ataupun historis.

Kata kunci: Bangladesh; Feminisme; Kelas; Marxisme; Middlemarch; Pernikahan; Reproduksi; Wacana

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage is commonly described through the language of intimacy, companionship, love, trust, and family. Yet marriage is also a material institution. Decisions about whom to marry can involve income, occupation, property, family reputation, education, social position, expectations of provision, and the anticipated security of a future household. These dimensions make marriage relevant to the study of class reproduction: the formation and maintenance of social advantages through family relationships and the organisation of resources across generations.

The relationship between marriage and political economy is particularly visible in Bangladesh. Sarah C. White's study of rural Bangladesh, for example, argues that changing marriage practices coexist with significant continuities in family involvement, status concerns, and the economic functions of dowry. Her analysis links marriage to wider political-economic conditions rather than treating it as a purely private or cultural matter (White, 2017, pp. 247–272). This approach is useful for literary study because it suggests that marriage can be read as a social institution through which economic structures become embedded in everyday expectations.

George Eliot's *Middlemarch* offers a particularly productive literary site for such an inquiry. Its marriage plots repeatedly connect intimacy with property, inheritance, occupation, family expectations, social standing, and economic security. The marriages and proposed marriages of Dorothea Brooke, Rosamond Vincy, Tertius Lydgate, Fred Vincy, and Mary Garth do not reduce neatly to financial transactions; rather, Eliot shows how economic and social relations become entangled with desire, moral judgement, gender, and personal aspiration.

This article therefore asks how marriage becomes economically meaningful through discourse. Rather than claiming that Marxism has simply neglected marriage, the study builds on Marxist-feminist and social-reproduction scholarship that already recognises the household as a crucial site of production, reproduction, dependency, and power. The narrower contribution is comparative: it places selected marriage-related discourse in *Middlemarch* alongside twenty-one contemporary Bangladeshi responses in order to identify recurring linguistic mechanisms through which material conditions are normalised, justified, resisted, or made explicit.

The comparison is deliberately asymmetrical. A nineteenth-century realist novel is not a survey and a questionnaire response is not a literary character. The two forms have different authorship, genre, audience, historical context, and communicative purposes. They are therefore treated as two discourse

sites rather than as equivalent datasets. The purpose of comparison is to identify analytical correspondences and differences, not to claim that contemporary respondents reproduce Victorian discourse or that a single novel represents nineteenth-century society as a whole.

The research questions are: (1) How does a Marxist-feminist and CDA-informed reading of *Middlemarch* represent marriage, material resources, gender, and class? (2) What discursive patterns concerning money, social status, economic security, and gendered responsibility appear in the twenty-one contemporary Bangladeshi responses? (3) In what limited ways can these patterns be placed in dialogue with the novel without treating the two discourse sites as equivalent?

Literature Review

Marxist Approaches to Marriage, Household, and Class Reproduction

Classical Marxist analysis foregrounds the organisation of production, labour, property, and class relations. Marriage and the household become especially significant when the reproduction of labour, inheritance, domestic labour, and property transmission are considered. Engels's The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State connects the historical organisation of family relations to property and inheritance, while later Marxist-feminist work has developed more sustained accounts of unpaid domestic labour, social reproduction, and the gendered organisation of households.

Social reproduction scholarship is especially relevant because it refuses a simple separation between the economic and the domestic. Munro argues that household production is necessary to understanding the reproduction of capitalist society, while Quick similarly emphasises the relationship between household activity and capitalist production (Munro, 2019, pp. 451–468; Quick, 2023, pp. 447–474). These approaches make it possible to read marriage not simply as a private relationship but as one institutional context in which resources, labour, care, dependency, and social expectations are organised.

This framework also requires caution. A Marxist-feminist reading should not turn every reference to money into proof of capitalist domination. People may value financial stability for practical reasons, and material security can reduce household stress without itself determining emotional relations. The analytical question is therefore not whether participants mention money, but how economic concerns are linguistically positioned: as a condition, a moral obligation, a marker of status, a source of power, an expected gender role, or an explicit exchange value.

Marriage, Status, and Political Economy in Bangladesh

Marriage in Bangladesh has been studied as a site where family interests, gender norms, economic resources, and social status interact. White's research is particularly important because it demonstrates that marriage and dowry practices cannot be separated from political economy. Her findings indicate both change and continuity: romantic and conjugal ideals may become more prominent, while families continue to participate strongly in marriage decisions and status remains economically consequential (White, 2017, pp. 247–272).

The present study does not reproduce White's rural findings as if they applied automatically to an urban university-linked sample. Instead, White provides a scholarly context against which the questionnaire responses can be interpreted. The participants themselves repeatedly mention wealth, occupation, family status, financial stability, social security, and family pressure. Their responses therefore make visible a contemporary discourse in which companionship and economic security coexist rather than simply replacing one another.

Middlemarch, Marriage, and Material Relations

Middlemarch has long been read as a novel deeply concerned with social institutions, economic relations, gender, class, and the constraints placed on individual aspiration. Its marriage plots repeatedly expose the material consequences of romantic and familial choices. Rosamond Vincy's marriage to Lydgate, for instance, is surrounded by questions of income, household expenditure, furniture, dowry expectations, and professional prospects. Fred Vincy's relationship with Mary Garth develops alongside questions of occupation, responsibility, debt, and economic competence. Dorothea's relationships reveal a different configuration in which inheritance and property can constrain or enable personal choice.

These plots are valuable for CDA because Eliot does not present economic relations only through abstract exposition. Economic meanings are embedded in dialogue, evaluative language, social descriptions, assumptions about respectability, and the narrative distribution of agency. A Marxist-feminist reading can therefore ask how the novel makes class and gender legible through ordinary talk about marriage.

Research Gap and Contribution

The contribution of this study is deliberately narrower than the claim that Marxist theory has overlooked marriage. Existing Marxist-feminist and social-reproduction scholarship already provides substantial theoretical resources for studying households and gendered economic relations. The gap addressed here is methodological and comparative: the article demonstrates how a small contemporary Bangladeshi discourse dataset can be placed in dialogue with a Victorian literary text through shared analytical categories while preserving the differences between the two forms.

The study therefore contributes an exploratory comparative model rather than a general theory of Bangladeshi marriage. Its strongest claims concern the recurring ways respondents linguistically connect economic stability with marriage, gender roles, family expectations, and decision-making power, and the ways these concerns resonate with material and social relations represented in *Middlemarch* .

Theoretical Framework

Marxist-Feminist and Social Reproduction Perspective

The study uses a Marxist-feminist perspective to examine how marriage can participate in the organisation and reproduction of material and gendered relations. Four concepts guide the reading: material resources, class reproduction, social reproduction, and gendered power. Material resources include income, property, employment, financial security, and family wealth. Class reproduction refers to the maintenance or advancement of social position through family and economic arrangements. Social reproduction concerns the activities and institutions through which households and social relations are maintained. Gendered power concerns the unequal distribution of authority, responsibility, dependency, and decision-making.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough's three-dimensional model provides the principal discourse framework. At the textual level, the analysis considers vocabulary, modality, evaluation, agency, and constructions of causality. At the level of discursive practice, it considers how participants draw upon familiar social scripts about marriage, provision, status, independence, and family expectations. At the level of social practice, it interprets these linguistic choices in relation to gender, household power, class, and material security.

The framework is used interpretively rather than mechanically. A participant saying that financial stability is "important, but not everything" is not automatically classified as resistant discourse; the

surrounding response is considered. Similarly, a statement about male provision is not treated as evidence of an individual's fixed ideology without examining how the participant positions or qualifies that expectation.

Operational Analytical Categories

Table 1. Operational Analytical Categories

Category	Operational Definition	Indicative Linguistic Features
Economic qualification	Material security is acknowledged but subordinated to or balanced with emotional/moral criteria.	"important, but not everything"; "not the only factor"; "balance"
Naturalised economic/gender expectation	Economic roles are represented as normal, necessary, or socially expected rather than historically contingent.	"men are expected to earn"; "women are expected to manage"; "minimum requirement"
Market/status vocabulary	Marriage or partners are described through investment, advantage, value, power, lifestyle, status, or exchange language.	"investment"; "social standing"; "financial power"; "advantage"
Economic dependence and agency	Financial dependence is linked explicitly to reduced freedom, authority, voice, or decision-making.	"lose their voice"; "ask for every tiny thing"; "decision-making power"
Counter-discourse	Participants explicitly prioritise equality, companionship, character, love, mutual respect, independence, or shared responsibility.	"team"; "equality"; "character"; "mutual respect"; "shared decision-making"

METHODS

Research Design

This is a qualitative, comparative, interpretive study. The empirical component consists of twenty-one open-ended questionnaire responses collected through Google Forms between 19 and 22 July 2026. The literary component consists of marriage- and economy-related passages from George Eliot's *Middlemarch* . The two components are analysed as distinct discourse sites and then placed in dialogue through common analytical categories.

The supplied form contains fifteen open-ended questions following personal-information fields, covering successful marriage, partner choice, financial stability, social class, economically motivated marriages, family expectations, financial inequality, economic dependence, unhappy marriages, gendered economic expectations, education and occupation, companionship versus security, desired social change, and additional observations.

Participants and Sampling

The twenty-one respondents were recruited through a convenience-based, university-linked sample. Fifteen respondents identified Dhaka International University (DIU), while six identified other institutions, household status, or did not provide a conventional institutional affiliation. The sample is therefore not representative of Bangladesh. References to "participants" or "respondents" in this article refer only to these twenty-one individuals.

Table 2. Participant Characteristics (N = 21)

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	18–22	5	23.8

Age	23–27	10	47.6
Age	28–32	2	9.5
Age	33+	4	19.0
Gender	Female	11	52.4
Gender	Male	9	42.9
Gender	Prefer not to say	1	4.8
Marital status	Single	9	42.9
Marital status	Married	8	38.1
Marital status	It's complicated	2	9.5
Marital status	Divorced	1	4.8
Marital status	Prefer not to say	1	4.8
Institution	DIU	15	71.4
Institution	Other / household / not specified	6	28.6

The age, gender, marital-status, and institutional categories above are transcribed from the supplied response dataset. One respondent identified as a housewife rather than providing a conventional university affiliation; two respondents did not provide a conventional institutional affiliation in the response fields. These characteristics reinforce the exploratory nature of the dataset.

Anonymization and Participant Labels

To protect participants, the analysis uses labels P01–P21 rather than names. The names appearing in the raw response export are not reproduced in the article. Demographic information is reported in aggregate wherever possible. Direct quotations are attributed only to participant labels.

Ethics and Consent

The supplied response export does not provide documentary evidence of institutional ethics approval, an approval number, or the exact consent wording shown to respondents. This revision therefore does not falsely claim that formal institutional ethical approval was obtained. The manuscript should be submitted only after the author verifies the actual consent procedure used for the Google Form and, where applicable, adds the relevant institutional approval or permission information. The present analysis itself does not infer an approval that is not documented in the supplied materials.

Because the dataset contains personal-information fields, the publication version should continue to use anonymised labels and should not reproduce names, email addresses, or combinations of details that could unnecessarily identify an individual. The raw dataset should be stored securely and separately from the manuscript.

Language and Translation

The supplied response export is predominantly in English, although several responses contain grammatical irregularities, abbreviations, and mixed or non-standard English. The present analysis treats these features as part of the participants' discourse rather than silently converting every response into polished English. Where quotations are used, wording is retained as closely as possible to the original response. No claim is made that the dataset involved a formal translation protocol because the supplied materials do not document one.

Coding Procedure

The twenty-one responses were read as complete responses rather than as isolated answers. Coding proceeded in four stages. First, responses were read for recurring references to money, status, family expectations, gender roles, dependency, and emotional fulfilment. Second, passages were assigned to the operational categories in Table 1. Third, cases containing more than one category were double-coded

rather than forced into a single theme. Fourth, responses that complicated or contradicted the dominant pattern were retained as counter-cases.

The frequency figures reported below represent the number of respondents whose answers contained clear evidence of the relevant analytical feature. They are descriptive coding frequencies, not statistical estimates of the Bangladeshi population. Because the categories overlap, their totals do not add to twenty-one.

Table 3. Respondent Coding Frequencies by Analytical Feature

Analytical Feature	Respondents Coded	Interpretive Role
Economic qualification / balancing security with relational values	14/21	Shows coexistence of material and emotional criteria
Naturalised economic or gender expectations	15/21	Shows how provision and gender roles are presented as socially normal or necessary
Market/status/investment vocabulary	12/21	Makes economic valuation or social advantage explicit
Economic dependence linked to reduced agency	16/21	Connects money with voice, freedom, or decision-making
Counter-discourse prioritising equality/companionship/character	14/21	Challenges reduction of marriage to economic value

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Financial Stability Is Important, but Rarely the Only Criterion

A dominant pattern in the responses is a concessive structure in which financial stability is acknowledged and then qualified by love, respect, compatibility, character, or mutual understanding. This pattern is important because it complicates a simple opposition between "romantic" and "economic" marriage. Participants frequently hold both positions at once: money matters because households require security, but money alone is insufficient for emotional fulfilment.

P01 describes financial stability as important but places greater weight on finding "a hard working and right person." P07 similarly states that financial stability is "important, but not everything." P13 writes that financial stability is important but "not the only factor," placing it alongside trust, respect, love, and mutual understanding. P21 likewise argues that economic stability matters but that a successful marriage ultimately depends on character, love, commitment, trust, respect, communication, and equality.

The grammatical form of these statements matters. The recurring "important, but…" construction performs ideological work in both directions. It acknowledges the legitimacy of economic security while preventing it from becoming the sole moral measure of marriage. The respondents therefore do not simply reject economic reasoning; they negotiate its proper place within an ideal of marriage.

Economic Expectations Become Naturalized Through Gendered Language

A second pattern concerns the normalisation of gendered economic responsibility. Several respondents represent men as expected to provide financially and women as expected to manage domestic responsibilities or become dependent on husbands. P03 states that men face more economic pressure after marriage while women can reduce pressure by depending on husbands. P13 similarly observes that men are usually expected to be primary earners while women are often expected to manage family responsibilities. P17 describes earning as "mandatory" for men and links women's loss of decision-making authority to dependence.

This naturalisation is not uniform or uncontested. Some respondents explicitly describe these roles as social expectations rather than as inherent truths. P02 contrasts traditional gender roles with newer expectations that both partners may contribute. P21 argues for equal opportunities and decision-making. The discourse therefore contains a tension between the description of a gendered norm and its critique.

The distinction is analytically important. A participant can reproduce a social norm by describing it as what "men" and "women" are expected to do while simultaneously expressing dissatisfaction with its consequences. Such ambivalence is more informative than treating respondents as either wholly traditional or wholly progressive.

Marriage Sometimes Becomes Legible as Investment, Advantage, and Power

A smaller but analytically striking group uses explicitly economic or market-like language. P11 states that "Marriage today is like an investment" and connects education, occupation, and income with status, influence, and power. The same response describes marriage as a "strategic partnership" in which the person who brings the greatest advantage has greater value. P02, although far more critical of this logic, refers to wealth and status being valued over moral character. P12 similarly describes economic and social advantages as benefits that can alter expectations of marriage.

This discourse is especially revealing because it makes explicit a logic that other respondents express more indirectly. Terms such as "security," "advantage," "status," "value," "power," and "investment" translate intimate relationships into the language of accumulation and exchange. Yet the dataset also contains resistance to this vocabulary. P01, P07, P09, P13, P20, and P21 repeatedly prioritise character, love, respect, equality, or companionship.

Economic Dependence Is Strongly Connected to Voice and Decision-Making

The clearest convergence in the dataset concerns economic dependence and agency. Sixteen respondents were coded as explicitly connecting financial dependence with reduced freedom, authority, voice, or decision-making. P14 explains that when a person is economically dependent, they can "lose their voice of opposing." P17 describes dependence in terms of having to ask a spouse for "every little thing." P09 links financial dependence to unequal decision-making and conflict. P01 connects economic dependence to the loss of a wife's decision-making power in a social environment where male authority is privileged.

The responses therefore frame money not merely as a resource but as a relation of power. This is closely compatible with a Marxist-feminist analysis of household relations: the significant issue is not possession of money in the abstract but the way control over resources can influence voice, bargaining power, and the capacity to leave an unsatisfactory relationship.

At the same time, the responses include qualifications. P20 argues that unequal incomes do not necessarily damage a marriage if the couple treats itself as a team and practises shared decision-making. This counter-case prevents the analysis from reducing income inequality automatically to domination. What matters is the social organisation of economic inequality and whether it is converted into unilateral authority.

Family Pressure and Social Status Operate as Mediating Institutions

Family expectations appear throughout the dataset as a mechanism through which economic and status considerations enter intimate decisions. P07 says that family expectations strongly influence partner selection, especially regarding wealth, occupation, and status. P14 notes that families may seek balanced social status. P21 similarly argues that families often consider economic stability and education while younger generations may place greater weight on compatibility and shared values.

This finding is significant because it prevents the economic analysis from becoming an individualistic account of partner preference. Participants often describe economic choice as socially organised. A person may value love, yet family expectations, fear of social judgement, concerns about security, or assumptions about appropriate occupations can shape what choices appear possible or acceptable.

The Dataset Contains Meaningful Counter-Cases

The strongest counter-cases are not marginal to the analysis; they reveal its limits. P02 explicitly rejects the reduction of marriage to wealth and status, arguing that moral values, empathy, and character matter more. P13 similarly argues that financial and social advantages can provide stability but cannot substitute for trust, respect, communication, and mutual understanding. P20 presents marriage as a partnership in which unequal incomes need not create domination if the couple shares financial goals and decision-making. P21 calls for equal opportunities and decision-making for both spouses.

These counter-cases demonstrate that the participants do not speak with one voice. Economic discourse is contested from within the dataset. The same respondent can describe gendered expectations and then call for equality, or recognise financial security as necessary while rejecting wealth as a measure of human worth. The analysis therefore treats ideology as negotiated discourse rather than as a uniform belief system.

Comparative Analysis with *Middlemarch*

Table 4. Comparative Discourse Features in *Middlemarch* and Participant Responses

CDA feature	Contemporary response	Middlemarch	Marxist-feminist interpretation
Economic qualification	P13: financial stability matters but is not the only factor.	Rosamond's marriage is surrounded by both affection/idealisation and detailed questions of income, household expenditure, and dowry expectations.	Material conditions enter intimate decisions without exhausting their emotional meaning.
Naturalised provision	P03/P13: men are expected to provide; women may be expected to manage the household.	Mr Vincy's discussion of whether he will provide money for Rosamond and Lydgate's household reveals family expectations around provision and marriage.	Provision is socially organised and gendered rather than purely private.
Status and family position	P07/P14/P21: family status and social standing influence partner selection.	Dorothea's marriage choices and the Chettam/Brooke/Ladislaw relations connect marriage with property, family position, and social judgement.	Marriage can reproduce or threaten class position through family networks and property.
Economic dependence and agency	P09/P14/P17: dependence may reduce voice and decision-making.	Dorothea's property becomes a condition of autonomy and also a source of control by others; Casaubon's will conditions her future marriage.	Resources can enable agency while simultaneously becoming instruments through which others attempt to regulate choice.

Market/investment discourse	P11: "Marriage today is like an investment."	*Middlemarch* repeatedly frames marriage through property, income, inheritance, professional prospects, and household expenditure, though usually within more indirect narrative and social language.	Economic value can be embedded within apparently personal relations.

Middlemarch: Close Reading of Material Marriage Relations

Rosamond Vincy and Tertius Lydgate

Rosamond and Lydgate provide the clearest example of marriage intersecting with income, household consumption, professional expectation, and family finance. In Chapter XXXVI, Mr Vincy objects to providing money for the couple's household, explicitly connecting the proposed marriage to his own financial circumstances. Rosamond, meanwhile, imagines the marriage through a combination of love, gentility, professional status, and the material expectations of a respectable household. The scene demonstrates that marriage is not merely an emotional decision: it activates negotiations over money, furniture, housing, and the future economic position of the couple.

The economic discourse is especially revealing because the characters do not necessarily speak as if they are conducting a market transaction. Instead, money appears through ordinary familial language: who will provide, what kind of house is appropriate, whether the prospective husband is financially secure, and whether a daughter's marriage can be supported. The economic structure is therefore embedded within domestic expectation.

Fred Vincy and Mary Garth

Fred and Mary offer a contrasting trajectory. Fred's desire to marry Mary is repeatedly linked to his need to become economically responsible. Mary refuses to romanticise him as a husband while he remains idle and dependent. In the novel, his movement toward useful work and responsible conduct is part of his maturation. Economic competence therefore becomes connected to moral worth without being reduced to wealth.

This pattern offers a useful comparison with respondents who distinguish financial stability from wealth. P13, for example, values responsibility and character rather than income alone. P21 similarly stresses responsibility, trust, and shared commitment. The comparison is not that the participants reproduce Fred and Mary's relationship, but that both discourse sites can distinguish economic responsibility from mere possession of wealth.

Dorothea Brooke, Property, and Marital Autonomy

Dorothea's storyline makes the relation between property and autonomy especially visible. Casaubon's attempt to condition her inheritance on a future marriage reveals how property can become an instrument of control over intimate choice. When Celia explains the codicil, the possibility of losing property is directly connected to Dorothea's future marriage to Will Ladislaw. The issue is therefore not simply whether Dorothea possesses money; it is who controls the conditions attached to that money.

Later, Dorothea's wealth also becomes a potential resource for social action. Her conversation with Lydgate shows her discomfort with having more money than she knows how to use and her desire to direct it toward improving other people's lives. The novel thus complicates any simple equation

between money and domination: property can constrain autonomy when controlled by another person, but it can also enable agency when controlled by Dorothea herself.

The Comparison Without False Equivalence

The contemporary questionnaire and *Middlemarch* converge around several questions: who provides, what counts as security, how family status matters, and how economic resources affect agency; but they differ fundamentally in form. Eliot constructs fictional dialogue and narrative perspective; the participants answer questions directly and sometimes use contemporary social vocabulary. The comparison therefore identifies analogous social problems, not identical historical structures.

This distinction also limits the historical claim. The dataset cannot demonstrate that the same marriage mechanisms have persisted unchanged for 150 years. At most, it suggests that certain material questions: property, provision, status, family influence, and economic dependence remain available as meaningful categories through which marriage can be discussed.

Discussion

The findings support a qualified argument about marriage as a site of class and gender reproduction. The participants do not generally reject romantic ideals, nor do they generally embrace purely economic marriage. Instead, the dominant discourse is hybrid: financial security is treated as practical and important, while emotional compatibility and moral character are presented as necessary for fulfilment. This hybrid discourse is analytically significant because it shows how economic rationality can coexist with an ideal of intimate authenticity.

The second important finding concerns gender. Economic expectations are not distributed neutrally. Multiple respondents describe men as expected to earn and women as expected to manage domestic responsibilities or depend on husbands. Even when respondents criticise this arrangement, its repeated appearance demonstrates that marriage remains imagined through gendered economic roles. This corresponds to the Marxist-feminist concern with the relationship between productive and reproductive labour and with the household as a site where unequal relations can be reproduced.

The third finding concerns agency. Economic dependence is repeatedly described as reducing voice and decision-making. This is perhaps the strongest empirical bridge between the contemporary responses and a materialist analysis of marriage. Money matters not only because it buys goods but because control over resources can influence the ability to speak, negotiate, resist family pressure, or leave an unhappy relationship.

The fourth finding is the presence of explicit market vocabulary. The statement "Marriage today is like an investment" provides a particularly clear example. Such language does not prove that contemporary marriage is literally an economic transaction. It does, however, reveal that at least one participant conceptualises marriage through expected returns, advantage, power, and status. Other respondents use softer terms such as "security," "stability," and "social value." These differences suggest a continuum between explicit economic valuation and more socially acceptable forms of security discourse.

Middlemarch provides a literary analogue in which material relations are rarely absent from marriage, even when characters speak primarily about love, gentility, family, or happiness. Rosamond and Lydgate's marriage involves income and household expenditure; Fred and Mary's relationship is connected to work and responsibility; Dorothea's marriage and later relationship are entangled with property and inheritance. The novel therefore supports a reading of marriage as an institution in which emotional and material relations are inseparable.

Yet the comparison also reveals an important difference. Contemporary respondents possess reflexive vocabulary for questioning gender norms and economic dependence that is more explicitly

egalitarian than many of the social assumptions governing the characters of *Middlemarch* . Several participants advocate equal decision-making, shared financial responsibility, independence, and companionship. The contemporary discourse should therefore not be described simply as a repetition of Victorian ideology.

Implications

Implications for Research

Future research should move beyond small convenience samples and include participants from multiple Bangladeshi regions, socioeconomic groups, age groups, occupations, and marital statuses. Comparative work could also include interviews or focus groups to examine how respondents negotiate contradictions that are difficult to capture through written questionnaires. A larger corpus would permit more systematic comparison of gender, class, and marital-status differences.

Social and Educational Implications

The responses suggest that financial literacy, premarital education, and awareness of economic rights could be discussed alongside relationship skills. Such interventions should not assume that financial security is irrelevant to marriage; rather, they can help couples distinguish responsible financial planning from status competition and distinguish economic interdependence from coercive dependence.

The findings also support greater attention to equal decision-making and women's economic autonomy. Participants repeatedly connect dependence with reduced voice. Strengthening access to education, employment, financial knowledge, and property rights can therefore be understood not only as economic development measures but also as conditions that can affect bargaining power within households.

Limitations

First, the sample is small (n = 21) and convenience-based. Fifteen respondents identify DIU, making the sample particularly concentrated. The findings cannot be generalised to Bangladesh as a national population.

Second, the questionnaire responses are self-reported and uneven in length. Some respondents provide detailed reflections while others answer with single words or short phrases. The resulting discourse density is therefore unequal.

Third, the questionnaire does not provide a controlled measure of socioeconomic class. References to family status, income, or occupation are perceptions rather than verified economic indicators. The article consequently uses “class” primarily as an interpretive category and does not claim to measure respondents’ objective class positions.

Fourth, the dataset does not document a formal translation procedure, and several responses contain non-standard English. This limits fine-grained linguistic analysis. The CDA therefore focuses on recurring semantic and discursive patterns rather than making strong claims about grammatical micro-features across languages.

Fifth, *Middlemarch* and questionnaire responses are different discourse genres. Their comparison is interpretive rather than statistically or historically equivalent. The study cannot establish direct continuity between Victorian England and contemporary Bangladesh.

Finally, the supplied data do not document institutional ethics approval or the exact consent language used in the original form.

CONCLUSION

This study has argued that marriage can be examined as a material and discursive institution without reducing it to economics. The twenty-one contemporary responses show a recurring tension: financial stability is considered necessary or important, yet many participants insist that love, trust, compatibility, character, respect, and companionship cannot be replaced by money. At the same time, gendered economic expectations remain visible, particularly in descriptions of male provision and female domestic responsibility. Economic dependence is repeatedly linked to reduced freedom and decision-making power, while explicit investment and status language makes the economic logic of marriage unusually visible in some responses.

Middlemarch offers a historically different but analytically useful discourse site. Its marriage plots demonstrate how income, property, inheritance, occupation, family expectations, and social position become entangled with intimacy. Rosamond and Lydgate expose the economic infrastructure of respectable marriage; Fred and Mary connect romantic commitment with economic responsibility; Dorothea's story demonstrates that property can both constrain and enable autonomy.

The study therefore does not claim that Marxism has ignored marriage or that Victorian and contemporary marriage relations are identical. Its more modest argument is that a Marxist-feminist and CDA-informed framework can illuminate the language through which material relations enter intimate life. Marriage becomes a particularly revealing site because economic relations are often expressed through the apparently non-economic vocabularies of love, responsibility, respectability, security, family duty, and personal choice.

The strongest implication is consequently methodological. Rather than asking whether marriage is "really" about love or money, researchers can examine how speakers negotiate the relationship between these categories and how social structures shape the terms in which that negotiation occurs. In the present dataset, the coexistence of romantic and economic discourse is not a contradiction to be eliminated; it is the central finding.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the research, analysis, or conclusions presented in this article.

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Appendix A. Questionnaire and Analytical Coverage

The supplied Google Form contains personal-information fields followed by fifteen open-ended questions. The questions cover: (1) definitions of successful marriage; (2) partner-selection criteria; (3) financial stability; (4) social class and family status; (5) observed economically/status-oriented marriages and outcomes; (6) emotional fulfilment; (7) family expectations; (8) financial inequality; (9) economic dependence and decision-making; (10) remaining in unhappy marriages; (11) gendered economic expectations; (12) education, occupation, and income; (13) companionship versus security; (14) desired social change; and (15) additional observations about money, class, and economic conditions.

The questionnaire was completed between 19 and 22 July 2026. The response export supplied for this revision contains twenty-one responses. The present article uses anonymised participant labels P01–P21.

Appendix B. Participant Coding Matrix

Table 5. Participant Coding Matrix

ID	Age	Gender	Marital status	Main Discourse Features
P01	23–27	Female	Married	Economic qualification; dependence/agency; counter-discourse
P02	33+	Male	Married	Economic qualification; gendered roles; status critique; counter-discourse
P03	23–27	Male	Married	Male provision; dependence; emotional criteria
P04	33+	Male	It's complicated	Strong importance of status/security; dependence
P05	33+	Male	Married	Status/security; family expectations
P06	23–27	Male	Single	Family status; gendered independence/dependence
P07	23–27	Female	Married	Security plus emotion; family status; dependence; counter-discourse
P08	28–32	Female	Married	Security/status; gendered expectations; dependence
P09	18–22	Female	Single	Security plus emotion; family pressure; dependence; counter-discourse
P10	18–22	Female	Single	Economic value/status; family expectations; gendered roles
P11	28–32	Male	Married	Explicit investment/status/power discourse
P12	23–27	Male	Single	Security plus values; gender roles; greed/status; counter-discourse
P13	23–27	Male	Married	Balance; gendered provision; dependence; counter-discourse
P14	23–27	Female	Single	Status; dependence; family pressure; counter-discourse
P15	18–22	Female	Single	Status/security; companionship; gendered expectations
P16	18–22	Female	Single	Status; financial security; family/social judgement
P17	18–22	Female	Single	Security plus emotion; dependence; gendered expectations; counter-discourse
P18	33+	Male	It's complicated	Security/status; brief responses; limited interpretive detail
P19	23–27	Female	Single	Education/economy; family background; mixed responses
P20	23–27	Female	Divorced	Strong economic framing; dependence; family background
P21	23–27	Prefer not to say	Prefer not to say	Detailed balance of security and emotion; equality; shared responsibility

Appendix C. Representative Evidence Used in the Analysis

Table 6. Representative Evidence Used in the Analysis

ID	Short Quotation from Supplied Response	Primary Analytical Category
P01	“financial stability is important but not more than a hard working and right person.”	Economic qualification
P02	“money or status cannot guarantee a successful marriage.”	Counter-discourse
P03	“Financial stability of a man is must for a happy marriage.”	Naturalised provision
P07	“Financial stability is important, but not everything.”	Economic qualification
P09	“Economic dependence can reduce a person's freedom and decision-making power.”	Dependence/agency

ID	Short Quotation from Supplied Response	Primary Analytical Category
P11	“Marriage today is like an investment.”	Market/investment vocabulary
P13	“Financial stability is important, but it is not the only factor.”	Economic qualification
P14	“they often lose their voice of opposing.”	Dependence/agency
P17	“for every little thing you have to ask from their spouse.”	Dependence/agency
P20	“The healthiest marriages usually balance practical considerations with a strong emotional connection.”	Counter-discourse
P21	“equal opportunities and decision-making for both spouses.”	Counter-discourse