



Rishta Culture





Rishta Culture

We live in a diverse society. There are many different cultures here. Some of them are good. Others?

Well, they may be outright toxic.

Among these, there is one culture that takes the lead.

This is the *Rishta Culture*



If you have reached The Shadi Age,

you may have had an unfortunate exposure to this culture.

Rishta Culture has prevailed in our society for ages.

It has evolved with time. Sure. And there's no denying that some of its toxicity has gone down as well. But many of its aspects continue to negatively impact everyone who has to experience it.

If you are currently trying to bear the negative aspects of our dystopian Rishta Culture, this ebook is for you.



Before you roll your eyes thinking this is another pretentious, good-for-nothing self-help book,

let us tell you—this is a fast-paced, no-fluff ebook with real, practical strategies to help you tackle the challenges of the modern-day Rishta Culture.

This ebook will:

Call out all those toxic traits of the Rishta Culture that have been normalised and help you avoid being gaslit.

Share practical strategies about how you can build and maintain your self-esteem and sense of self-worth as you go through the inevitably brutal Rishta Cycle.

Give you realistic advice on how you can preserve your values and stay firm as the Rishta pressure builds up.

Let's get right into it.

Part: 1

*Unfortunate but Real:
The Toxic Rishṭā Culture*



*The modern
Rishṭā Culture
is not all bad.*

It has some good traits and
has actually helped people
find their life partners.

It becomes toxic when the people involved start
making subtle or not-so-subtle personal attacks
on the poor individuals for whom the rishta is
being sought.

And that's where all the problems come in.

Unfortunately, these practices are so common, and people do them so casually, without sparing as much as a second thought, you may think all of it is normal.

A voice in your head may raise a red flag prompting you to question a certain practice. Another voice may hammer it down saying,

*“Is tarah tou hotā hai is
Tarah k kamon mein”*

[This is common in things like this]

This normalisation of toxic traits is what we aim to change with the first chapter.

Why?

To help you avoid gaslighting and give you a real sense of what is truly right and what is simply dysfunctional.



Here are some aspects of the Rishta Culture that have been normalised but are, in reality, atrocious:

1 Rishta Aunties and other people pass rude remarks about a person's height, weight, appearance, complexion, etc. in a way that these comments get to the person and hurt their self-esteem.

2 Rishta Aunties circulate profiles and sell proposals as if those people are not humans looking for a suitable spouse but rather cattle being sold in the maveshi mandi [cattle market].

3 People are explicitly cynical about a person's earnings, career aspects, whether they live on rent, etc. This is especially relevant for the guys.

4 Families frequenting girls' homes more for the sake of having tea parties and then disappearing into the thin air for the pettiest of reasons.

5

Parents secretly sneaking into their children's phones or secretly picking their pictures from different places and sending them to random families without even informing them.

6

Parents emotionally blackmailing to coerce their children, especially girls, into saying yes to a proposal or consenting to partake in the borderline-abusive processes of the Rishta Cycle.

7

Families ghosting one another if either party is not interested.

8

Not letting the girl and the guy meet once and talk to each other before

9

Rishta aunties demanding exorbitant amounts just for starting the search or registering a profile. Demands for more money are made once the rishta is finalised.

These are just a few of the many things that make the Rishta Cycle so toxic, demeaning, and harsh for the people who are going through it.

While we may not be able to change or eliminate the practices any time soon, what we can do now is take the first step towards a less mentally taxing Rishta culture.

And one of the first steps you can take right now is to de-normalise these things in your head at least.

If a rishta aunty leaves a rude remark, don't dismiss it by saying

“Ye to hota hai”.

No. The Rishta aunty is wrong for doing that.

Similarly, if parents try to coerce you into saying yes to a proposal that is so obviously wrong, don't think

“Maa baap hein, unka farz hai”.

Parents have the responsibility to marry their kids to the right people. They can't and shouldn't force you to go with anyone who says yes.

It is important to note here that parents' emotional blackmail or use of your pictures without consent is not a cue for you to misbehave with them.

Respecting your parents and being good to them is an obligation on you, no matter what they do.

Try to have a respectful conversation and back out if things start to spiral out of control.

The image features a warm, intimate setting. In the foreground, a lit candle sits on a small, ornate wooden stand. To its right, a shallow, patterned bowl is filled with vibrant red petals, with some petals scattered on the floor around it. The background is dominated by heavy, draped brown curtains, which are adorned with vertical garlands of red flowers. The lighting is soft and focused, creating a serene and contemplative atmosphere.

Part:2

*Protecting Your
Self-Esteem and
Mental Health*

The prevailing Rishta Culture has the potential to shatter your self-esteem and, consequently, your mental health.

People ghosting or outright rejecting you for petty reasons like the size of your house or your family's bank account can eventually take a toll on your sense of self-worth and confidence.

Parents can also change completely when you are struggling with the Rishta Culture. They may be nice people in general, but going through the Rishta Culture, you may see a new, more cynical side of them.

All of this can give a massive and compounding blow to your self-esteem. Broken self-esteem can eventually lead to mental health issues like anxiety and depression.



What's worse is,

with broken self-esteem and a reduced sense of self-worth, you are more likely to lower your standards and settle for someone who may not be worth spending the rest of your life with.

Therefore, it is important that you work on improving your self-esteem and then preserve it as you go through the various dysfunctional phases of the Rishta Cycle.

Below are a few practical tools and strategies to help you cope with the negative effects of the ***Rishta Culture***.

Change How You Look at Rejection

Rejections are the number one reason why most people suffer so much as they go through the Rishta Cycle. And understandably so.

Rejection hurts.

But it is an indelible part of the process of searching for a spouse. Therefore, hoping to eliminate it is not an option.

What you can do, however, is change the way you look at rejection.

A rejection does not always mean that you are not good enough. It just means you may not be compatible with the other person or that you may have some great features but the other person may be looking for or prioritising something else at that moment.

Remember, rejection almost always is a compatibility issue and not because of a flaw you have within yourself.

Build and Maintain Confidence

Having a strong, unwavering sense of confidence can help you prevent the Rishta Culture from harming your self-esteem. When you are confident about who you are, other people's opinions won't harm your sense of self-worth and it would get easier to overcome the hurt that may come from a rejection.

Here are a few ways you can build confidence:



Focus on building healthy habits and taking care of your body.



Stop comparing yourself to other people.



Identify your strengths and focus on them.



Practice positive self-talk.

Identify Your Negative Thoughts

The way we perceive ourselves usually contributes to our self-esteem.

Unfortunately, other people's opinions influence the perception we have of ourselves. This is why, going through the Rishta Culture can lead to you developing a negative image of yourself.

You need to get rid of this negative self-perception to make sure you can live a peaceful life, even amid the toxicity of the Rishta Culture.

What do you feel are your weaknesses?

Take a minute and write them down. You can also make a mental note. Think. What negative things do you think other people think about you?

Now that you know what this negative self-perception is, once again, think: ***where is it coming from?***

If you have identified a source, it's time to challenge the assumption by noting down the evidence against it. Below are two examples.

Negative Assumptions	Source	Evidence to Challenge it
I am not good enough to find a decent proposal.	People keep ghosting or rejecting me without any evident reason	Your friends love your company. Your siblings come to you for advice. People in your life value your presence. All of these are evidence that you are good enough and the rejections may simply be because of compatibility problems discussed above.
I don't have a nice career, which is why I get rejected	People ask you about your work and then either ghost you or give an impression that makes you feel as if they are judging you for being in a worthless, unproductive career.	You are happy with what you do, your bills are paid, and you feel ready to support your wife financially. All of these are signs your career is good enough for you to pursue a spouse and think about getting married.

Remember, these are just examples. You can make a similar table for your negative assumptions, where they come from, and evidence to challenge them.

Practice Positive Thinking

As you root out the negative beliefs you have of yourself, it is also important to replace those negative thoughts with positive ones.

Make a list of things you like about yourself. It could be anything. Your smile, your friendly nature, your willingness for public welfare, your skills.

This list will help you see yourself in a new light. It will reinforce your sense of self-worth and may help heal your bruised self-esteem.

Try to Be Assertive

First things first, assertive does not mean aggressive. You don't have to misbehave with people when trying to be assertive. Instead, set your boundaries and respect them. Don't let anyone push you outside of your boundaries and don't compromise on them yourself either.

Learn to say no when someone makes an uncomfortable request. But, don't forget the general rules of respect as you do all of that.

Boundaries help prevent people from walking all over you, demeaning you, and hurting your self-respect and self-esteem in the process.

If not tolerating rude remarks about yourself is a boundary, learn to say no to interacting with people who pass such comments.

Limit the time you spend with people who bring you down, demoralise you, or try to ruin your self-esteem.

Find Work and Hobbies

Staying busy can take your mind off things. If you can find a paying job, that's great! If not, try to figure out what you enjoy doing the most and then pick that up as a hobby.

Enjoy reading? Consider starting a book club or joining online groups to share your reading experiences. Love painting? Invest in a canvas, buy some paints, and let your creativity run wild.

Being able to achieve something by working or practising a hobby will keep you busy and help reinforce your sense of self-worth. It will make you more confident and allow you to challenge the negative assumptions you may have of yourself.



Build Healthy Habits

Building healthy habits like clean eating and exercising can help you feel good about yourself, boost your confidence and make getting through the Rishta Cycle less of a pain.

Here are a few things you can start working on to improve your lifestyle:

- Try to exercise regularly
- Improve your diet
- Drink plenty of water
- Fix your sleep schedule
- Have regular social media detox days
- Find good company and spend time with them

Seek Social Support

Staying stuck in the rut of the Rishta Culture can make you feel isolated. In this situation, being able to connect with friends who can understand your situation and make you feel better can be a huge blessing.

Try to be more social. Make hangout plans with friends. And don't ditch them last minute!

Hanging out with friends will help fulfil your need for belonging and make you feel important. It will also make you realise that you are good enough and the problems you face during the Rishta Cycle may be due to reasons that are outside of your being.

Part:2

*Protecting Your
Self-Esteem and Mental Health*



Let's face it.

It is difficult to find a spouse these days.
And someone who has the same values as
yours?

Even harder.

But does that mean you should compromise
on your values?

Of course not.



You may come across situations where there is a great proposal.

Everything is set. The only hurdle is... your values. This is especially true for girls who practice the Islamic hijab. It is very common for them to find proposals that would agree to take things further if the girl went a bit lower on her level of hijab.

Parents are often also of no help in such situations. Sometimes, they may happily force you to go by whatever the *larky walay* [the guy's family] are asking you to do, just so they would say yes.

But is compromising on your religious values just so some random family would agree to accept you into their home a good idea? Definitely not.



It can get very difficult to hold on to your religious values when you are being pressured from all sides. Letting go and compromising may seem enticing, especially when you are SO DONE with the unending rejections. But, you have to hold on. Anas bin Malik narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

“There shall come upon the people a time in which the one who is patient upon his religion will be like the one holding onto a burning ember.” [Tirmidhi - 2260]

Below are a few ways you can make holding on to your values a bit easier for yourself.

Stay Connected To The Quran

The Quran is a mercy, guidance, and healing for those who believe in it. When you build a relationship with the Book of Allah (SWT), it guides you. It gives prompt reminders to help you avoid mistakes that may cost you your dunya [this world] and akhirah [the life after death].

Therefore, as you navigate the toxic Rishta Cycle, work on building a relationship with the Quran.

And how exactly does one do that?

Read the Quran regularly. Every single day. And try to understand what it is telling you. This does not mean simply reading the translation. No. This means reading the translation, understanding the tafsir (explanation) and then doing taddabbur (reflection) or thinking how this ayah applies to your life.

Find Good Company

Abu Musa reported Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as saying:

The similitude of good company and that of bad company is that of the owner of musk and of the one (iron-smith) blowing bellows, and the owner of musk would either offer you free of charge or you would buy it from him or you would smell its pleasant odour, and so far as one who blows the bellows is concerned, he would either burn your clothes or you shall have to smell its repugnant smell.

[Sahih Muslim - 2628]

Having good, practising friends can help you stay firm on your values as you battle the headwinds of the Rishta Culture. They can offer reminders, give suggestions, and help you get closer to Allah (SWT) during difficult times.

If you don't have one already, consider building a good, pious company. You can attend halaqas in your area or join online groups to connect with other religiously inclined people who can uplift you while helping you stay rooted in your values.

Find A Mentor

“And that which is with Allah is much better, and much more durable for those who believe and place their trust in Allah, and (for) those who abstain from the major sins and from shameful acts; and (for those who) when they get angry, they forgive, and those who have responded to their Lord (in submission to Him), and have established Salāh, and whose affairs are (settled) with mutual consultation between them, and who spend out of what We have given to them.”

[Quran 42:36-38]

The phase where you go through the Rishta Process can be very isolating. It can strip you of close relations and make you lose trust in some of your closest people.

In this situation, it is important to have a mentor who is unbiased and can give honest, sincere advice.

Try to attend Islamic lectures, classes, and halaqas, and see if you can find someone knowledgeable to trust as a mentor. Make dua to Allah (SWT) to guide you to the right mentor. And once you have someone you can look up to, seek their advice in difficult matters and spend time in their company as much as you can.

Rejection is part of the process that leads us towards what we're looking for.

Finding the right life partner is not easy. And it shouldn't be. You are, after all, searching for someone you want to spend the rest of your life with.

But unfortunately, besides being inherently difficult, the process of finding a good Rishta has been made excessively toxic, so much so that it has started to take a toll on the self-esteem and mental health of anyone who has to go through it.

This needs to change.

And change starts with you.

Start to de-normalise some of the toxic traits of the Rishta Culture. And while you do that and as you go through the Rishta Cycle, work on preserving your self-esteem to protect your mental health and prevent yourself from lowering your standards.

Make sure to stay firm on your values. Connect with the Quran, find good friends, and seek the company of a noble mentor. Finally, and MOST importantly, make dua to Allah (SWT) to open this door for you. Engage in constant istighfar as we learn from a hadith that:

The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

“If anyone continually asks pardon, Allah will appoint for him a way out of every distress, and a relief from every anxiety, and will provide for him from where he did not reckon.”

[Riyad as-Salihin - 1873]


Try making these Quranic duas a part of your everyday supplication:

رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ
وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا

Our Lord, Give us, from our spouses and our children, comfort of eyes, and make us heads of the God-fearing.
[Quran 25:74]

فَسَقِيَ لَهُمَ تَمَّ تَوَلَّى إِلَى الظِّلِّ فَقَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي لِمَا
أَنْزَلْتَ إِلَيَّ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَقِيرٌ

My Lord, I am in need of whatever good you send down to me. [Quran 28:24]



Ask Allah (SWT) with humility and patience. Seek the times of acceptance like the last third of the night, when it rains, and between adhaan and iqamah to make dua.

These things will not take the toxicity of the Rishta Culture away. But if you implement the strategies shared above, you might be able to get through it with more peace of mind and confidence.

In Sha Allah