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ROMANCE NOVELS AND THEIR POSITIVE NEXUS WITH FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Rabia Latif
M.Phil, Department of English, Minhaj University Lahore, Lahore
Dr. Nabila Rehman
Principal, Oriental College, University of the Punjab, Lahore
Dr. Rizwan Ali
Lecturer of Punjabi, Department of Punjabi, Baba Guru Nanak University, Nankana Sahib
Muhammad Imran
M.Phil, Department of Islamic Studies, National College of Business Administration and Economics (NCBA&E) Lahore, Sub Campus Multan

1. Abstract

Marriage serves as the significant social structure that has a vital role in individual and societal life. Despite this, the institution of marriage appears to be experiencing a decline in its stability and continuity within contemporary society. Although, numerous studies have examined marriage from multiple perspectives, the present study specifically focuses on the sustainability of marriage in connection with reading romance novels. For this purpose, this article proposes the potential relationship between romance novels and marital sustainability, with particular attention to how literary representations of romance accompanied with inculcating romance novels may shape perceptions and expectations of marriage.

The former part of the discussion sheds light on the latest marriage expectancy worldwide along with possible underlying factors that drive divorce rates. Furthermore, the rationale of this very study is to suggest fostering sustainability of marriage while taking into consideration the significant correlation between romance novels and marital relationships.

Moreover, this study employs a qualitative research methodology, primarily using narrative and thematic analysis of romance novels to examine representations of romantic relationships, commitment, and marriage. It further considers how such literary representations may contribute to discourses surrounding marriage and marital sustainability in the social context. Furthermore, it discusses how the narratives can be positively attributed to understand the institution of marriage in the real world. Henceforth, it would be a significant contribution to secure sustainable marriage.

2. Keywords

Sustainable marital relationships, romance novels, divorce rate, narrative analysis, thematic analysis

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3. Introduction

Marriage is one of the most crucial social institutions necessary to build robust social structure. Undoubtedly, Joseph Daniel Unwin's, social anthropologist, confines it to heterosexual monogamy in his book *"Sex and Culture"* [1]. However, marriage is prone to decline for the last few decades. Here, the decline is also apparent in the last 5 years as evident from the reports that 64% women aged 15-49 were married globally in 2024 in comparison to the 69% married women in 1970 [2] [3]. Moreover, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Family Database reveals that divorce rates have been higher today than that of in 1970s [4]. Additionally, another change concerns an increase in the age for the first marriage by 6 years. Across OCED countries, the average age at first marriage irrespective of gender has increased by 6 years between 1990 and 2021 [4].

To summarize, fostering of lifelong commitments is prone to multiple socio-economic factors that have been deliberated in this article. Notably, extended family is the need of the hour in the contemporary society because a noticeable mistrust in marriage has been observed over the past few decades. Likewise, people are rejecting the perceived importance of marriage.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to critically evaluate the pivotal role of romance novels in fostering robust marital bonds while taking into consideration the qualitative (narrative and thematic) analysis. However, to empirically examine the propositions developed through the narrative analysis, future research could employ surveys, interviews, or other empirical methods to investigate whether and how the romance novels contribute to positive attitude towards marriage, where analysis of couples' experiences would provide insights. In relation to this, the suggested study is limited to people having at least 20 years of marital relationship. The proposed research may point out the valuable findings to restore trust in marriage amongst young adults over the age of 18 to 29 years.

Hence, this suggests that positive literary representations of romantic commitment and enduring relationships in romance fiction may contribute to more favorable attitudes towards marriage and marital sustainability in contemporary society. Simultaneously, an apt interpretation is also the essential of sustaining marriage while reading romance fiction. Nevertheless, the significance of this study is to foster sustainable marriages amongst people that assure thriving extended families.

4. Rationale and Significance of the Study

Romance novels give influential example to sustain marital relationships. Ultimately, this assists to curb divorce rates, and structure

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extended family in the world. Thus, the significance of the study is to nurture strong society.

5. **Aims and Objectives**
   - To ascertain the nexus of romance novels with sustainable marital relationships in the world
6. **Research Questions**
   - What potential role can romance fiction play in sustaining long-lasting marital relationships and building trusts in marriage within the contemporary society?
   - To what extent can representations of love, commitment, and intimacy in romance novels contribute to positive attitudes toward marriage and marital relationships?
   - How the romance narratives be construed to comprehend the fluctuations in the institution of marriage?
7. **Literature Review**

Here is an accomplished literature review taking into account romance novel, and its nexus with nurturing successful marital bonds in the world. Initially, the article has analyzed the world-wide possible factors that hinder sustainable marriage. At first, the review outlines the definite rise in divorce in the United States (U.S.) at the end of 1960, particularly due to amendments in divorce laws. These amendments provide more financial security to the couples out of divorce, thus increasing divorce risk [5]. On the other hand, Chang, Y., & Lee, K. Y. (2006) demonstrate that household financial strain has not been a catalyst to divorce rates [11]. It is the relational factor that is more dominant. However, the key findings of Kridahl et al. (2025) do not advocate this conception, particularly for late-life divorce in Sweden [12]. Aside from amendments in divorce laws, critiques have referred to another possible factor in this matter. Whereas, the extensive analysis of divorce trends in Europe (between 1960 and 2002) claims the unilateral laws to be an insignificant determinant [13]. Whilst research by Raul, I. (2003) asserts unilateral divorce laws and divorce risks have a causal relationship in the U.S. [14]. Apart from that, the clear correlation between divorce and cohabitation embodies an escape plan to couples in most of the Europe. Thus, married couples encountering marital challenges are finding deliverance in cohabitation rather than in resolving their mutual conflicts [20].

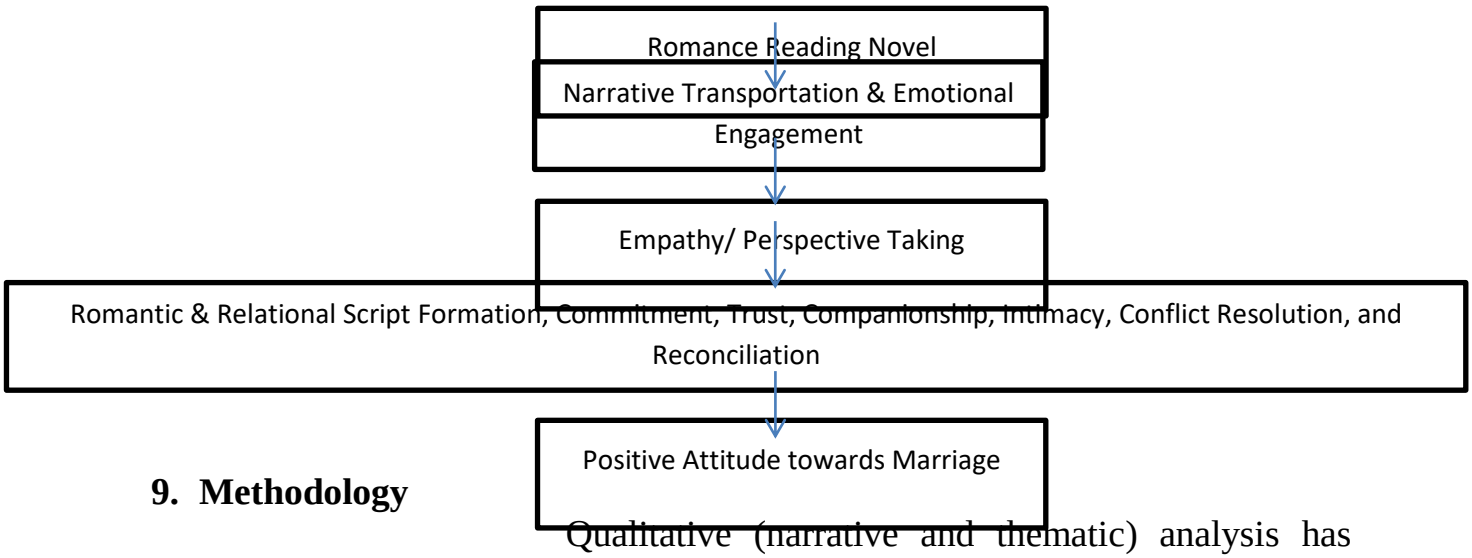
Additionally, reciprocal utility (both economic and emotional) is the core of a sustainable marriage [16]. Hence, all of this discussion portrays that amendment in divorce laws, or implementation of unilateral divorce laws cannot be considered driving factors in all divorce cases. Likewise, monetary aspect is also irrelevant in

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this concern. Concurrently, emotional connection, and mutual understanding proved out to be the ultimate solution to build strong marital relationships. For this reason, the second part of this review deals with in-depth examination of narratives of romance novels, and its impact on marital relationships considering opinion of some critiques.

Therefore, the analysis of romance novels portrays the positive attitude readers develop through reading romance-fiction. Beyond that, Holmes, L. (2011) argues although, romance fiction provides escapism to couples, yet it is not a decisive factor in influencing couples' behavior [19]. Couples have liberty to employ novel in order to strengthen their relationship. Moreover, the romance fiction has sometimes unrealistic context. At the same time, the interpretation of the contextual analysis is subjective. However, this study is designed to investigate the linkage of stable marital relationship to reading romance novels amongst couples. Finally, the qualitative (narrative and thematic) analysis will facilitate young adults to bolster marital relationships in future. Nevertheless, long-lasting relationships are pressing necessity to preserve extended family in the world.

8. Conceptual Framework



9. Methodology

Qualitative (narrative and thematic) analysis has been implied for this study while, the future empirical examination can be carried out via questionnaires, surveys, interviews, and other empirical methods.

10. Discussion

The study pertaining to the positive relation between romance novels and responses toward marriage can be comprehended within the more extensive literature on fiction reading, romantic beliefs, emotional engagement, and interpersonal relationships. Here, it is to be noted that romance fiction is specifically relevant in this context owing to intimate relationships, emotional

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commitment, companionship, conflict resolution, and the establishment of durable romantic ties- constituting chief attributes of the genre. Resultantly, recurrent engagement narratives where characters seek, negotiate, and finally furnish meaningful intimate relations may flourishes reader's perceptions of romantic commitment and wedlock as desirable and emotionally rewarding. Instead of categorizing novels as a source of entertainment, the current study suggests that readings such fiction may comprise a significant cultural and psychological experience through which individuals furnish meanings: encompassing love, partnership, commitment, and marriage [22] [23] [25] [28] [30].

One description for this relationship can be cultivated from cultivation theory that advocates gradual change in individuals' belief and perception about reality on account of recurrent encounter of particular representations in media. First, the earlier findings imply that romantic–media consumption forecasts stronger endorsement of romantic beliefs. These findings provide an important theoretical basis for interpreting the positive relationships between romance-novel reading and attitudes toward marriage. However, if the readers are repeatedly exposed to interrelationships as valuable goals, intimacy, and enduring relationships, they may develop a healthy marital relation [26] [27] [29].

This interpretation is specifically relatable due to the conventional structure of romance fiction commonly places the formation and successful maintenance of an intimate relationship at the pivotal of the narrative [25] [28] [30]. Impediments may transiently separate the protagonists, but the narrative commonly moves toward emotional reunion, commitment, and a favorable resolution [25] [30]. Marriage has been historically given a significant niche in the romance fiction [28] [30]. Notably, contemporary romance fiction has become more varied in its representations of relationships, gender roles, and sexuality, but dedication and contented partnership continue to be defining necessity of the genre [25] [30]. Hence, romance narratives symbolize commitment with emotional safety, mutual affection, company, and personal satisfaction [25] [28] [30]. These recurrent themes portray marriage as a voluntarily chosen relationship rather than socially enforced obligation [25] [30].

In the context of this, Radway (1991) provides a significant basis for comprehending this scenario from the audience's own perspectives; she pays attention to reader's own interpretation from the reading experience rather than just common reading [28]. Meanwhile, Radway's women find emotional revival, pleasure, escapism, and reflection on relationships through romance reading [28]. Therefore, romance reading is a source of an imaginary space to encounter and evaluate desirable attributes in intimate relationships [22] [28]. Thus, the present

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study envisages that this process may aid in developing positive attitudes toward marriage [22].

Moreover, the broader psychological effects of fiction reading strengthen this perspective. Bal and Veltkamp (2013) emphasizes after their experimental inquiry that fiction reading could inculcate empathy within marital couples [21]. More widely, Dodell-Feder and Tamir's (2018) meta-analysis showcase similar effect of fiction reading on cognitive-social competence [24]. Similarly, recent research evidences the empathy and mentalizing has encountered improvements associated with fiction reading [32]. Thus, these results have significant impacts on attitudes toward marriage. The narratives of relationship conflicts, vulnerabilities, intricacy in relationships, and accompanied with reunion, mutual understanding, and negotiations between the partners boots reader's perception about relationships [22] [25] [28] [30]. Consequently, readers finally understand that marital relation is a dynamic process rather than a static one [22] [25].

Likewise, narrative transportation is also another vital aspect of fiction reading that promotes positive attitude towards marriage. Bal and Veltkamp (2013) substantiated the significance of narrative transportation in pinpointing fiction's nexus with empathy [21]. The reading of fiction allows reader to imaginatively experience complexities in relationship, fluctuations in marital relationship, and interpersonal conflicts followed by resolution of conflicts, reunion, building trust and commitment [22] [25] [28] [30]. Thus, in the light of such simulated imaginative experiences, reader develops positive attitude towards marriage [22] [25].

Another contribution of fiction reading is that it is the source of relational scripts for its reader. Fictional narratives showcase the scenarios of relationship vulnerabilities, response to disputes, and refurbish the marital relationship [22] [25] [28] [30]. Burnett and Beto (2000), uncovered through their investigation of romance-novel reading that readers create parasocial connections with the fictional protagonists and relate their situation with novel's context [23]. Thus, this emphasizes that fictional relationships may function as symbolic environments in which readers reflect upon their marital affairs [23] [28].

Moreover, Radway's (1991) findings shed light on the fact that romance readers seek emotional maturity along with romantic relationships by reading romance novels where readers involve expectation of companionship and equality rather than dependence [28]. As a result, marriage becomes more important than a mere social contract. Similarly, Roach (2010) accords another lens through which romance narratives are dealt as psychological and cultural work for readers via addressing conflicts in marital relationships [30]. These narratives optimize intimate partnerships even when readers are aware of complexities of the real-

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world relationships. That ultimately aids- building of strong marital relations among partners.

Over and above that, the positive association between romance reading and marital behaviors may also be understood via the conception of hopeful relational expectations [22] [25] [30]. The narratives of romance novels chiefly involve a protagonist who overcomes all barriers to achieve emotional resolution [25] [30]. Hence, conflict not always implies relationship failure; it sets the stage for fostering mutual understanding, resolving conflicts, and sustaining relationships [25] [30]. Thus, this helps readers to address marital conflicts and relationship insecurities through which greater understanding and commitment are achieved [22] [25] [30]. These finally contribute a positive orientation toward marriage [22] [25].

However, these findings require proper comprehension. An affirmative association between romance reading and attitudes toward marriage is not always deemed as determinant of producing healthy marital relationship. Some romantic narratives may present unrealistic and idealized versions of love such as “love at first sight”, “destiny”, “coincidences”, and “the assumption of eternal love that overcomes all obstacles” [27] [29]. Hence, the research of Lippman et al., (2014) on these idealized narratives endorses the same notion that romance narratives should not always be inculcated as standards [27]. Hefner and Kahn (2014) have accorded similar romantic-media narratives in this concern [26]. Likewise, Tukachinsky and Dorros (2018) explains that extreme believe into parasocial romantic relationship impregnates readers’ minds with an idealism in their partners [31]. In the similar fashion, Rios et al., (2026) examine idealized romanticism in fiction that posits romance fiction should be consumed discriminately. Therefore, the romantic fiction contains both determinants to sustain marriage as well as unrealistic standards [29].

Moreover, when readers engage in reading romance novels, then the interpretation and inculcation of narratives vis-à-vis the parasocial relationships need critical discussion. This perspective is consistent with the study of romance-novel readership, romantic ideals, and relational satisfaction by Bun’s (2007) [22]. The findings envisage that high standards and expectations in women related to their partners are at high levels. This is contributing dysfunctional relationship beliefs. This means the findings of the present study have extensive educational and social effects.

In short, the romance fiction can contribute to a more positive attitude toward marriage, specifically when the novels showcase mutually committed, respectful, healthy, and trustful relation [22] [25] [28] [30]. Simultaneously, the critiques posit to be cautious while interpreting the narratives of romance novels as

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parasocial relationships may involve unrealistic romance scripts [23] [26] [27] [29] [31]. Thus, romance-novel reading may be deemed subjective. Other than this, romance novels are not merely source of recreation. The gist of the discussion opines that romance novels are repository of sustainable marital relationships.

11.Limitations of the Study

The research is conceptual and propositional in nature rather than based on surveys, interviews, or other empirical-based methods. The findings of this study are deduced from narrative and thematic analysis. Consequently, the proposed relationship between the reading of romance literature and attitudes towards marriage should be understood as a theoretical proposition rather than an empirically established causal relationship.

12. Conclusion

Robust social structure is directly coupled with sustainable marriages. However, apart from amendments in divorce laws, enactment of unilateral divorce laws, and financial strain, the emotional disconnect between spouses appears to be a certain reason for divorce risks globally. Nevertheless, this study will evaluate the notable positive nexus of reading romance novels, and sustainable marital relationship amongst couples. As readers engage with such genre, so the romance novel turns into a repository of relational learning.

Furthermore, the interpretation can sometimes be subjective. Additionally, romance friction offers unrealistic events that harm marital relationships. Therefore, a guided reading and apt interpretation may further support readers to distinguish between practicable romantic marital life and unrealistic attributes. Eventually, family instability can be curtailed that will pave a way towards extended family in the world.

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