

# Fijian Indians-The Women's Predicament

## A Study Of Bureau Marriages

IN recent years there has been an increasing trend amongst Indo-Fijian women to have marriages arranged with overseas resident European males through commercial bureaux, introduction services and penpal clubs. The primary attraction for the women is the avenue bureau marriages provide for migration and for improving their economic status. These marriages have become a passport for obtaining resident status in Western industrialised countries.

While there is no statistical data to gauge accurately the extent of bureau marriages, migration statistics, newspaper advertisements and my own research provide some evidence to suggest the existence of an increasing trend towards bureau marriages. According to the Australian high commission's immigration officers in Suva, the bulk of their work now is dealing with visas for spouses of Australian males. In their opinion, the trend towards marriage between Indo-Fijian females and Australian males through marriage agencies, introduction services and penpal clubs is increasing. Discussion with a commercial marriage agency in Suva also confirmed my impression of this increased trend. Virtually everyone I encountered in Suva seemed to know someone who had contracted this form of marriage or who was corresponding with European males in the hope of a future marriage.

While it is mainly women who expressed a keen interest in this form of marriage. The primary motive is migration,

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*Fiji, where a military coup has just ousted a democratically elected government, is a small island nation in the south Pacific. It acquired independence from British rule in 1970. Of its population of about 700,000, about 47 per cent are indigenous Fijians and 49 per cent are Indo-Fijians, both Hindus and Muslims. Indo-Fijians are descendants of indentured labourers shipped from India by the British between 1879 and 1916, to work on sugarcane plantations in Fiji. Today, Indo-Fijians are farmers, traders and professionals, and are economically prosperous, but their political rights are circumscribed.*

**Manushi No. 39** carried an account of the history of the Indo-Fijian community and its present situation. This is a follow-up article by the same author.

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which is extremely appealing to both males and females but at this stage it is only females who have been successful. The main reason is that vastly greater numbers of overseas European males are seeking wives in Fiji compared with overseas European females seeking Indo-Fijian husbands. According to one marriage agency in Suva, they have made a few successful matches between European females and Indo-Fijian males. But in the

majority of instances, the agency has great difficulty in finding wives for Indo-Fijian males, much to the latter's disappointment.

### The Procedure

The woman or her family first pays an agency a sum of money which is generally referred to as a registration fee. For this fee, the woman's name, address, profile and sometimes photograph is sent to marriage agencies overseas where they are advertised or where a match is made. Once a woman is advertised overseas, she begins to receive letters from interested males. A further sum of money is payable when a successful match is made. In general, the payments range from \$200 to \$800. Sometimes, individual males may approach the marriage agency in Suva directly in which case the latter arranges a marriage for them with an Indo-Fijian woman on their files.

In Suva there are two commercial marriage bureaux operating through offices in downtown Suva that advertise regularly in the local newspapers. The following is an example of the advertising: "Marry and migrate overseas. Quick and confidential."

*(The Fiji Times, December 1985)*

Contact is also made through regular advertisements placed by overseas males in the local newspapers. Advertisements such as the following appear regularly in the local newspapers.

"Australian guy, 37, educated, quiet, nonsmoker, nondrinker, business owner, likes to hear from educated girls 18-35 who (i) will soon visit Sydney, or (ii) who are

already in Sydney, Blue Mountains, Bathurst, Brisbane, Canberra, Adelaide.”

*(The Fiji Times, 25.1.86)*

“Australian male, 29 years old, would like to correspond with marriageable ladies aged 17-22 years with view to forming a permanent relationship. Please write enclosing photograph.”

*(The Fiji Times, 28.12.85)*

“Canada single man, European origin, 42, 5'8" tall, 160 lbs., secure income, own property, open to religious beliefs. Marriage to Indian lady, sincere, friendly and willing to relocate. Please correspond with photograph.”

*(The Fiji Times, 14.12.85)*

Besides advertisements placed by individuals in the local newspapers, overseas marriage bureaux and penpal clubs also advertise locally. The following are some examples of such advertisements that appeared in *The Fiji Times* while I was in Fiji.

“Fijian ladies with 4th form education wishing to contact Australian gentlemen for marriage and friendship. Please write (name and address of agency).”

*(The Fiji Times, 25.1.86)*

“American men seeking Fijian ladies for marriage. Send age, occupation, interests and smiling photo. (Name and address of agency in Hawaii).”

*(The Fiji Times, 25.1.86)*

“Yarra Penfriends Service. Send your photo and \$4.00 (Address of penfriend club in Australia).”

*(The Fiji Times, 7.12.85)*

In addition to advertisements such as the above, representatives of overseas marriage bureaux and introduction services sometimes visit Fiji for the purpose of interviewing and screening women. On arrival in Fiji they place an advertisement in the paper asking women to present themselves for screening and interviews.

The majority of the European males seeking Indo-Fijian wives are Australian, American or New Zealanders. These men tend to be in the age range 30-60, although many are in the 40-50 age range, divorced, suffering from either social or physical



disabilities and living in rural areas.

Once the name and address is obtained, the females begin corresponding with these males. At some stage, either initially or later, the females enclose a photograph of themselves with the letter. Where a male is sufficiently interested and the female can be reached on the telephone, he may ring her up and converse with her.

Virtually all of these women correspond with more than one male simultaneously. While the women may have registered with a commercial marriage agency, they also respond to advertisements placed in the newspapers by individuals seeking wives or seeking to screen women. Of course,

some women never pay any money to an agency but simply rely on newspaper advertisements or penpal clubs.

For some, the letter writing process has resulted in early success.

Some women have been corresponding with males overseas for two or three years without success.

Once the correspondence is in progress and a likely marriage has been discussed, the male may arrange to meet the woman. This usually takes place in Fiji. Generally, the viewing only takes place if the male is intending marriage. This is not to say that all males who have promised to visit Fiji and meet the woman have actually

turned up. It seems the majority convey a desire to visit Fiji and meet the woman and marry her, but it does not always eventuate.

Because the women are simultaneously corresponding with more than one male they are never certain which one is genuine and which one will actually turn up. The male they eventually marry is usually the one that arrives in Fiji first. When the male arrives in Fiji, meets the woman and her family and is satisfied the photograph is genuine, a marriage takes place, returns to Australia and arranges a visa for her and she joins him later.

That this form of marriage entails little personal contact between the partners prior to marriage demonstrates a remarkable resemblance to traditional arranged marriages despite its unconventionality. Like traditional arranged marriages, bureau marriages do not involve close personal contact between partners, romance or courtship in general, unless the writing of letters is regarded as courtship. Therefore, it poses no threat to the reputation and honour of either the female or her family and is accommodated quite comfortably within the overall framework of traditional arranged marriage.

### **The Indo-Fijian Predicament**

The idea of migrating to another country to improve their economic status is extremely attractive to most Indo-Fijians.

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Conversations often centre around who has recently migrated, who is about to migrate, who is in the process of being sponsored and who has a desire to migrate.

Relatively large numbers of Indo-Fijians migrate each year to countries such as the USA, Canada and Australia. According to the Bureau of Statistics in Fiji, during 1983, out of the 2,752 people



**Two sisters, aged 16 and 17, whose parents are trying to find them European husbands\***

who emigrated, 83.4 per cent (2,152) were Indo-Fijians. In January 1985, 219 Fiji residents left the country to settle elsewhere. Of these, 173 were Indo-Fijians and 26 were Fijians. In 1984, approximately 100 people left Fiji each month to settle elsewhere, and Indo-Fijians constituted the majority of these emigrants.

Migration is sought not only by Indo-Fijians suffering economic hardships but also by those Indo-Fijians seeking to further consolidate their economic

migration is a result of their overall sense of insecurity stemming from living in a multicultural society in which they, as an ethnic group, do not have equal political representation or security of land tenure, and perceive themselves as being victims of systematic discrimination in education and employment. In the postindependence period (1970 onwards), the initial optimism about achieving equality was progressively replaced by anxiety and disillusionment as their expectations remained unrealised.

The sense of insecurity was fuelled by three major issues — security of land tenure, political representation and education. The initial seeds of insecurity amongst Indo-Fijians were sowed in 1972 when Idi Amin expelled Indians from Uganda. The events in Uganda led many Indo-Fijians to fear they would suffer a similar fate unless they were guaranteed security in land tenure and equal political representation.

This fear of expulsion from Fiji was further fuelled in 1975 when a Fijian member of parliament introduced a motion, that was

positions, provide better educational opportunities to their children and achieve a sense of security they perceive to be unachievable in Fiji. According to a report in the *Sunday Times* of April 14, 1985, “figures show that a significant percentage of emigrants are professional, technical, administrative and managerial workers.”

The Indo-Fijian obsession for

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\* All photographs accompanying article are by Shireen Lateef.



later defeated, calling for the repatriation of Indo-Fijians to India since, in his opinion, they had done well in Fiji and were now an obstacle to Fijian progress. While both political parties strongly opposed the motion, the sense of insecurity was firmly established in the Indo-Fijian community.

Most of the land in Fiji (83 per cent) is controlled by Fijians, the indigenous population of Fiji. The remaining 17 per cent is freehold. Limited freehold combined with the fact that Fijian land is inalienable has meant that access to leasehold with adequate tenure has become a major concern of the Indo-Fijian population, particularly the cane farmers. Since the majority of cane farmers in Fiji are Indo-Fijians while most land is controlled by indigenous Fijians, the issue of secure long term leases has led to racial polarisation.

For Fijians, long term leases to Indo-Fijian cane farmers implies loss of their land which is their only means of status and security in their own country in which they are now a racial minority. For the Indo-Fijians, their continued existence in Fiji is threatened unless they have access to long term leases. The 1976 Agricultural Land and Tenant Act guaranteeing Indians 30 year leases is perceived as inadequate.

The second issue contributing to Indo-Fijian anxiety and sense of insecurity lies in the arena of political representation. Fiji has a communal franchise giving Indo-Fijians 22 out of the 52 seats in the elected House of Representatives, although they

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### *Indo-Fijians' obsessive desire to migrate stems from their overall sense of insecurity*

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constitute 50 per cent of the population. Indo-Fijians' persistent demand for common roll has remained unrealised.

While for the Indo-Fijians, common roll is the only means of achieving and securing adequate equitable political representation, for the indigenous Fijians, common roll implies Indian takeover of their native state since Indians are in the numerical majority. Hence, the indigenous Fijians vigorously

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## THE RECENT COUP

On the May 14, 1987 military coup in Fiji, which deposed the government democratically elected in April, Shireen Lateef writes: "Since 1970, there have been only two political parties in Fiji—one Fijian, the Alliance party (AP) and one Indo-Fijian, the National Federation Party (NFP). The former have been in power for 17 years.

In 1985, the Fiji Labour party (FLP) emerged. It attempted to mobilise on a class rather than racial basis. It won the support of members of both communities, particularly in urban areas. An NFP-FLP coalition was voted to power in April 1987, and everyone seemed to accept it peacefully. The new government intended taking a strong antinuclear line, and also stood on a policy of social welfare and a promise to investigate corruption charges against the previous government. The government had a majority of Indo-Fijians but the prime minister was an indigenous Fijian, Timoci Bavadra.

The military coup led by Lt Col Rabuka took everyone by surprise. The governor general came into power. He declared a state of emergency and set up an advisory council of 19, which is dominated by the Alliance party. There are three Indians on the council. The deposed prime minister refused to join it, and called for nonviolent resistance. Indians are refusing to open their shops or to harvest the sugarcane. They hope to bring the economy, which is dependent on tourism and sugar, to a halt, through civil disobedience.

Those in power are now projecting the coup as a response to racial unrest in Fiji. The Labour Party insists that race is merely being used to cloud the issue. After the coup, some violence against Indians was engineered by thugs hired by the coup leaders. Now, most ordinary people too are reacting to the situation in racial terms. The coup leaders are set to alter the Constitution to prevent government from ever being dominated by Indo-Fijians. A number of Indo-Fijian supporters of the Labour Party have had to flee to Australia following harassment by the military."

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oppose any moves towards achieving common roll.

The third issue fuelling Indo-Fijian insecurity is education. Without security in land, Indo-Fijians have looked to education as their means of achieving security. The announcement in 1977 that

of equal educational opportunities was perceived by the Indo-Fijian community as striking at the core of their struggle for security, since education, in the absence of land tenure, is the mechanism through which they aim to achieve economic security.

Despite all these factors, however, the majority of the country's professionals, university graduates, middle level shopkeepers, public servants and cane farmers are Indo-Fijian. The middle class in Fiji has a strong Indo-Fijian element. Many Indo-Fijians live in the best suburbs of the major towns and enjoy high economic and social status in comparison with the Fijians and are more prosperous.

However, not all Indo-Fijians are rich and prosperous. There are many poor Indo-Fijians, particularly farmers with little security of land tenure, huge debts and a

rather precarious existence. But the advancement of Indo-Fijians on virtually every front has created a certain amount of hostility amongst the indigenous Fijians, and insecurity amongst Indo-Fijians, fuelling the desire of the latter to migrate.

### **Marry To Migrate**

Initially, migration to the USA and Canada was through technical qualifications, but now it is mainly through marriage and family sponsorship. Migration to Australia is a more recent phenomenon. Those groups without professional qualifications and with a desire to migrate overseas are dependent on their families residing overseas for sponsorship, or the marriage of a son or daughter to an Indo-Fijian residing overseas. Hence the great demand for overseas resident Indo-Fijians as marriage partners.

It is only amongst those who either have no family residing overseas or whose families have failed to sponsor them or who have been unable to arrange a marriage with an overseas resident Indo-Fijian that marriage, especially to Europeans, through commercial marriage bureaux or penpal clubs is used as a means for migration. Bureau marriages tend to be prevalent amongst unskilled groups who are desperate to migrate and have no other means of achieving their goal.

The lure of living overseas and improving their economic and social status operates as a strong factor in favour of this form of marriage, particularly amongst working class women. Interestingly, the parents of these girls are increasingly allowing and encouraging their daughters to marry these men, despite the social and religious incompatibility.

Some of my informants even asked me to try and find husbands for their daughters in Australia. My reply that I did not know any Indians in Australia was often met with the comment: "It doesn't matter, a European will do." These women openly admitted their desire to marry their daughters to someone residing overseas as an avenue for family migration. Often,

the request would be prefaced with a statement about their desire for migration. The inclusion of Europeans in the marriage market is on the assumption that, like Indo-Fijians residing overseas, they too will sponsor their spouse's relatives. Whether these European husbands will fulfil their obligations to the same degree as Indo-Fijians are expected to is difficult to predict.

Amongst working class families, the general preference of the Indo-Fijian community to marry within one's race or religion may be set aside for overseas Europeans. But it is seldom set aside for native Fijians or Indians whose religion is not compatible. Families who allow their



daughters to marry Europeans from overseas would generally not allow them to marry native Fijians of any religion or even Indo-Fijians residing overseas who happened to be Hindu or Muslim as the case may be.

So, while the practice of cultural endogamy is set aside in the case of overseas European males, this does not entail the total disappearance of this practice. Cultural endogamy remains an important factor and is vigorously pursued in choice of marriage partner in all forms of marriage, even "love" marriage, amongst Indo-Fijians, and is only set aside in the case of bureau marriage.

With increasing economic hardship in

Fiji, the prospect of migrating overseas becomes increasingly more attractive. For families that do not possess skills marketable in overseas countries, the only avenue for migration is the marriage of a daughter to a male residing in another country.

Until recently, the overseas marriage market was confined to Indo-Fijians residing either in Canada or the USA. Now, with increasing numbers of Australian males seeking Asian women as wives, the overseas marriage market has been extended.

The inclusion of European males as potential husbands has occurred because the number of Indo-Fijians seeking potential husbands overseas far exceeds the number of Indo-Fijians residing overseas seeking potential wives in Fiji. The undersupply of overseas resident Indo-Fijian marriage partners for women, juxtaposed with the ready availability of European males, has resulted in marriage with the latter becoming more common. The publicity given to one such marriage in which an Indo-Fijian woman was murdered in bizarre circumstances by her husband in Australia does not seem to have deterred anyone.

### **The Women's Social Profile**

Approximately 99 per cent of the women contracting marriages through commercial marriage agencies, introduction services or penpal clubs are of Indian origin. According to the Australian high commission officials in Suva they have not encountered any indigenous Fijian women contracting this form of marriage. Fijian women who marry European males are more likely to have met them at nightclubs rather than through commercial marriage bureaux, penpal clubs or introduction services and are more likely to have had an intimate relationship with them prior to marriage. Of the two commercial marriage agencies operating in Suva, one had no indigenous Fijian woman registered.

A few tentative reasons suggesting a partial explanation of this phenomenon can be offered. The majority of European males

seeking wives in Fiji stipulate a desire for women of Asian or Indian origin. This seems to correlate with the stereotype of Asian women as docile, servile and submissive. Secondly, the desire for migration seems greater in the Indo-Fijian community than in the indigenous Fijian community. And, finally, Indo-Fijian women appear to be more desperate than Fijian women to escape the tyranny of the family and the Indo-Fijian community.

The vast majority of Indo-Fijian women who have bureau marriages come from the working class, have minimal education and virtually no job prospects. They are in the age range 18-29, unemployed and, in fact, have never participated in any form of paid employment. Most of these women have spent several years staying at home after leaving school midway through high school. While a significant proportion of these women come from rural backgrounds, urban women are also represented. In addition, women come from both the major religious groups—Hindus and Muslims.

Some of the women have been previously married and are now divorced. Amongst this group of divorced women a small number have a dependent child.

Given the social background of these women, it is not surprising that the majority of them have little knowledge about the country to which they are migrating, and the culture, lifestyle and values of Europeans. According to one of the Australian high commission officials, one woman who was marrying a man from Darwin, Australia, when shown a poster of Darwin, highlighting its desolate and arid landscape, remarked: "It is very beautiful. I will love living in Darwin."

Most of these women have had hardly any contact or social interaction with Europeans, and in general are unfamiliar with Europeans. Their English language skills are minimal and they have difficulty communicating effectively and fluently in English. Even the few who are relatively competent in English display a degree of unease and discomfort when using



**A woman who was looking for a European husband**

English. Discussions with the officials who deal with these women at the Australian high commission confirmed these views.

On occasions when I was present at these interviews it seemed the women did not fully comprehend the questions asked and the information they were given. At times, the women's answers or comments had little relation to the questions being asked. Often, they came equipped with a bag of stereotypical phrases such as: "I am in love with my husband and I want to be with him very soon", "I want to go and live in Australia because it is a good place to live", "Australia is a very beautiful place and I will love to go there."

The social characteristics of the women discussed so far have been derived from and deal mainly with those women who have already contracted this form of marriage. There is some evidence to suggest that the social profile of women seeking overseas Europeans as husbands is changing.

Discussion with one commercial marriage agency in Suva suggests that,

more recently, women from a variety of backgrounds are approaching and registering at the agency. For example, larger numbers of urban women in paid employment are now seeking overseas males as husbands. Typists, clerks, middle-level civil servants, and even some teachers were registered with this marriage agency. In fact, some women in paid employment that I encountered were corresponding with overseas European males or were toying with the idea of registering with one of the marriage agencies.

These urban women in paid employment are generally more fussy than the rural, uneducated and unemployed women. While they wish to marry Europeans living overseas they do not readily accept men who are much older than them or are physically unattractive, divorced or with dependent children. Hence, they have greater difficulty in acquiring husbands as the majority of males seeking Indo-Fijian wives are in the age range 30-60, divorced, with dependent children, and not particularly physically attractive.

According to the marriage agency, these women remain on file for a much longer period and have a much lower rate of successful matches. One woman I interviewed, who worked as a stenographer in Suva, complained to me that the majority of males who were writing to her were old and unattractive *Many women openly stated that these marriages were their passport to a better life* and so she was not interested in them. She was waiting and hoping that a man closer to her age would write soon.

So, while the social profile of women seeking overseas European males as husbands is changing, the social profile of those achieving success remains constant. It is generally the rural, uneducated and unemployed women who are more successful, at this stage, in obtaining overseas European husbands.

### **Women's Aspirations**

For these Indo-Fijian women, the acquisition of an overseas European



husband is synonymous with migration. Women who desire overseas European males as husbands are seeking to improve their economic position and status, realise their fantasies of love and marriage, and escape the shackles of the family and the Indo-Fijian community.

Virtually all the women I encountered provided some or all of these reasons to explain their desire to marry a European

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*Many women openly stated that these marriages were their passport to a better life.*

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living abroad. That many of their husbands are old enough to be their fathers, previously married, sometimes with dependent children, retired, and living in rural areas, was of no major concern and few seemed perturbed by it. My discussions with the marriage agency reinforced my interpretation of the women's sentiment. According to the agency, women "beg" the agency to find them a husband living abroad. They even go as far as to openly state "they don't care who, anyone will do."

Undoubtedly, the primary attraction of this form of marriage is the chance it provides to live abroad and enjoy a higher standard of living. From discussions with these women, it seems the issue of marriage is inconsequential, at times even irrelevant, compared with the issue of migration and the consequent betterment of economic status and life chances in general.

They are not particularly concerned about the male they are marrying but instead are preoccupied with the idea of escaping Fiji and living abroad. Many openly stated both to me and to the Australian high commission officials that these marriages were their passport out of Fiji to a better life.

The vast majority of the women knew very little about their husbands' backgrounds and often when they did know was inaccurate. At the interviews conducted by the Australian high commission officials, prior to the women obtaining visas, it was common to find

the women's perception of their husbands' occupations was quite different to the Australian high commission's records. This discrepancy did not seem to perturb the women at all. Women seldom showed any enthusiasm for acquiring additional or more accurate information about their husbands.

### **An Indo-Fijian housewife**

In one case, a woman of 21 marrying a 62 year old divorced male showed no sign

of concern when informed that her husband had been convicted of inflicting "grievous bodily harm" on his former wife. When asked "But what if he beats you?" her reply was "No, he won't. His wife used to make a lot of trouble. She was into drugs." The official explained to her that



**An Indo-Fijian Housewife**

the man's former wife was 55 years old and highly unlikely to have been a drug addict. The woman's reply was simply: "I'll be a good wife."

### **Viable Option ?**

These mixed marriages between males from western industrialised countries and third world women have drawn much attention in recent years, particularly in

countries in which they are prevalent. In Australia, marriages between Australian men and Filipino women have incurred the wrath of the women's movement, provided good copy for newspaper and magazine articles and been the subject of TV documentaries. The media has been responsible for simplifying and sensationalising an otherwise complex issue by creating negative stereotypes through notions such as "mail order brides."

Much of the criticism from feminists has centred, and quite rightly, on the exploitative nature of these marriages. Western men, armed with the spoils of Western industrialised society, in search of exotic, submissive wives, are able to entice poor third world women, understandably attracted by these bounties, to marry them and virtually become their slaves. Feminists point out that these men, most of whom are divorced, cannot find women in their own society to marry and put up with them and therefore thrust themselves upon poor, unsuspecting, third world women.

Many of these men admit that the major incentive for marrying these women is their docility, submissiveness and uncomplaining service. In one television interview, an Australian male married to a Filipino woman remarked: "Where would I find a woman in Australia who brings me a can of beer and my slippers when I get home from work and generally treats me like a god?"

Besides the fact that these men use their obvious economic advantage to lure disadvantaged third world women, they seldom make any attempt to familiarise themselves with the social and cultural backgrounds of their newly acquired wives. According to the Australian high commission officials in Suva, the males they encounter know very little or nothing about Indo-Fijian traditions or culture and demonstrate little inclination to learn about them. Many do not even consider the potential adjustment and settlement difficulties their Indo-Fijian wives will

encounter in the totally alien Australian environment.

However, it must be pointed out that in the Indo-Fijian situation the exploitation is double edged. It is not only the Western males who exploit these women but also the families of the women who encourage their daughters to enter into marriages with overseas European males in the hope of future migration for the whole family.

It could be argued that Indo-Fijian families who encourage and permit their daughters to marry these males are trading, selling or exchanging their daughters in the marriage market for resident visas in Western countries. By encouraging and allowing their daughters to marry Europeans about whom they have little information, despite the racial, social and religious incompatibility (especially when they would not permit their daughters to marry such men resident in Fiji), they are using their daughters as passports for their own migration. The potential problems associated with such marriages and the future welfare of daughters are given little consideration.

The inherently exploitative nature of these marriages, combined with the fact that these women are generally ignorant of European culture and lifestyle and lack adequate and accurate information about the men they are marrying or the country to which they are migrating, makes such marriages problematic. In general, the women have no idea of what they are getting into and the potential problems associated with such marriages.

Many of the marriages between Australian men and Filipino women are now breaking down as a result of a combination of factors such as cultural isolation and loneliness, lack of kin and family support, unrealised expectations and the difficulties associated with marrying males much older in age, with children from previous marriages and with emotional and physical problems.

At the risk of being labelled an apologist, it must be pointed out that in the Indo-Fijian situation, these marriages



**A market vendor**

provide some women with a second chance, otherwise not available, for marriage. For divorced women and women who are regarded by the Indo-Fijian community as unmarriageable due to previous indiscretions, overseas European males, not particularly concerned by divorces or minor indiscretions, provide a totally new market of eligible husbands.

This form of marriage could be viewed as providing a safety valve for those women who are unsuccessful in the Indo-Fijian arranged marriage market. The

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potential of this form of marriage to become a safety valve could also in the future chip away at the need for Indo-Fijian women to remain within the cultural boundaries of proper and acceptable behaviour.

Furthermore, one cannot ignore the fact that marriage to European males provides these women with a chance to improve their economic status, to escape the cultural shackles of the family and the Indo-Fijian community, and to achieve a better standard of living. If we realistically examine

the options available to these women, then outright condemnation of this form of marriage becomes difficult.

The alternative for these women is marriage to an Indo-Fijian or for divorcees, no marriage at all, which means suffering the humiliation of becoming economically dependent on their families again or being reliant on meagre welfare payments and handouts. And who is to say that marriage to an Indo-Fijian is a better prospect? The major criticism of marriage to European males is that the latter are seeking sub-missive females who will become not only their wives but also their servants. Marriage to Indo-Fijian males also means docility, submissiveness, subordination and service to husbands and in-laws with the added disadvantage of substandard housing and, consequently, more arduous work and a lower overall standard of living.

At least, with European husbands in an industrialised Western society, these women will enjoy a better standard of living with access to labour saving devices, a higher status within their own families, and, if their marriages fail, access to a better welfare system. Hence my hesitancy in condemning outright this form of marriage.

This, of course, is not to imply that marriage to European males is the solution. Rather, such marriages present a dilemma

since, on the one hand, they are inherently exploitative, while, on the other hand, they provide these women with the chance, otherwise not available, to improve their economic status. To simply condemn such marriages when the alternatives are not intrinsically better, would be presumptuous, especially while women's overall economic and ideological conditions of existence remain unaltered and they are locked into the institution of marriage. □