



NRI MARRIAGES - WOMEN VICTIMS AND SCAPEGOAT FAMILIES

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Abstract: *Indian bridegrooms abandoning their wives is not a novel occurrence. Men were often pressured by their families to marry many wives in the past, and bigamy was common. Husbands often concealed their foreign wives and then left their Indian wives. The issue, however, has taken on new dimensions as a result of the global growth in the number of Indian NRIs, who come from a wide range of economic and social backgrounds. Most states have reported incidents of women being abandoned by predators posing as brides, therefore the issue is not limited to a single location. The plight of Indian women who have had their NRI husbands desert them is often overlooked among the country's many pressing challenges for women as a whole. This underreported socioeconomic issue that weakens the social fabric of the nation pales in comparison to trafficking women, violence against women, rehabilitating the homeless, and providing prenatal and postnatal care. False marriage, infidelity, and dowry extortion are on the rise as more and more Indians leave the country in quest of better opportunities elsewhere, and this trend has a devastating effect on women. Indeed, NRI grooms may easily take advantage of the avarice of the bride's family since they consider their daughter as their passport to El Dorado and the luxuries of foreign shores.*

Keywords: *abandoned, rehabilitation, destitute, social problem, bigamous, multi-dimensional*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Those in the middle class and the countryside are particularly vulnerable to the allure of a foreign bride. Parents who have probably sacrificed money to aid their daughter join the so-called marriage often do not wake up and go to the state authorities until their daughters have been abandoned. The government has to take action by examining proposals like adding a marriage indicator to visas, aiding women who find themselves abandoned abroad, working with other countries to have the grooms arrested on bigamy charges, and preventing the granting of ex-parte divorces.

The institute decided to conduct this research in Andhra Pradesh and Punjab, two states with high rates of young girls and women falling prey to bigamous/polygamous suitors, to better understand



the causes, effects, and potential areas for policy interventions to help alleviate the problems of deserted married women.

The Lok Bhalai party in Punjab claims that there have been at least 1500 incidents of spouses being abandoned in the state during the last several years. Having children or becoming pregnant compounds the anguish for these left brides since they become unwelcome dependents on their in-laws and parents. For example, Shri RamooWalia said, "In reality, two or three females in every village have a narrative to share," during an Abandoned Wives Conference held in Chandigarh, India, back in December 2004. H.G.S. Shaliwal, the Police Superintendent in charge of the Women and Child Care Unit in Chandigarh, said that 40 percent of cases in the city were marriage fraud at the same Conference.

Case - I

The press also covered the case of NRI abandoned wife Satwinder Kaur Jumb (Tribune India, Ludhiana, 8 May, 2005). In April of 2000, Satwinder Kaur tied the knot with a Canadian-based NRI who was a photographer and whose family was from Ludhiana. After the proposal was finalised, the groom's family urged that the wedding happen right away, even though the lad wasn't there. In July of 2000, while the groom was still in India, the wedding ceremonies and registration were repeated. The wedding cost the girl's parents between 10 and 12 lakhs. Following the wedding, he spent a month enjoying the hospitality before departing for Canada in August 2000 and promising to take her on a flight to the country of dreams. But destiny had other plans, and he never returned or kept his word. She has spent all these years waiting for the day when she and her husband will be reunited, and she believes that day will come. Despite her best efforts, she was unable to reach him via phone. A Canadian journalist sent her a fax after five years of marriage informing her that her husband had filed for divorce in the Supreme Court of British Columbia. The girl must now hop from one supporting structure to the next in her quest for justice. No one can get her out of this jam. Satwinder Kaur's experience is not unique. The same tragic tale of abandonment and helplessness is repeated by hundreds of Indian women every year.

There are between 50 and 70 incidents of desertion recorded each month under the jurisdiction of the 15 police stations that make up this division. During a few short months of their weddings, young people in this region use the dowry money to leave for the Gulf States. They'd cheat on their spouses once they had jobs and money, then leave them. It's very uncommon for men to leave their first wives behind in favour of more gorgeous second wives once they arrive in the Gulf. In order to start new families, they want to divorce their current spouses.

Most brides go back to their parents' homes after being married and remain there until their husbands join them. In the meanwhile, the girl's in-laws begin to bother her since she isn't remaining with them and serving them. They also begin to fabricate tales about her and cast aspersions on her character. As a result, he may start looking for a higher-class female who can provide a larger dowry and eventually leave her for someone else. Yet, most women who report incidents to police are doing so not to lodge complaints against their spouses but rather to seek compromise and professional guidance. (Hindu, May 16)

The online press has also documented some instances of desertion. Foreign men often go to India, marry, get royal treatment, accept dowries, sleep with their new wives, and then never send for them, leaving their brides pregnant or dishonoured and their parents and relatives distraught. Divorce or annulment documents are then often sent. If they succeed in bringing their spouses to our country, they may either desert them after a short time or mistreat them so severely, treating them like slaves, that the women are in continual dread of and suffering because of their treatment.

Case - II

The Times News Network has reported another more tragic news of non-resident aliens leaving the country (24 November, 2004). The wife of a non-resident Indian (NRI) computer engineer in Hyderabad has committed herself. The woman finally snapped under the constant abuse from her in-laws. In November of 2003, Rajashree tied the knot with an NRI Engineer. Around 30 troy ounces of gold and 8 million Indian rupees were presented as dowry. Her mother and father alleged the harassment started on the third day of their marriage. Instead, her husband whisked her off to the



United States. Yet, after a year, she was tormented in that setting as well. They travelled to India, but once there, her husband and in-laws wanted an extra 5 lakh or else they'd ask her parents to return. Although he went for the United States, her parents took her back. The girl was so devastated by this that she ended up hanging herself.

Case - III

Another example of desertion is Sanyogita Reddy's tale. She had guts and was prepared to defend herself. To rescue her sick baby daughter, she begged Andhra Pradesh's then-chief minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, to intervene and have her husband deported from the United States. This is a really sad case of an NRI leaving their country. The following website provides access to several other first-person accounts of Americans who have been victims of violent crime. The following online resources provide first-person accounts¹.

2. DESERTION, CHEAP LABOUR, SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

In states like Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala, it is common for NRI men to abandon their wives, but in Andhra Pradesh and to a lesser degree in Kerala, this is especially true among Muslim women who marry Arabs. Thousands of Muslim women were abandoned by their husbands since Muslim Personal Law allows men to have many wives, yet marriage is considered a binding contract in Islam. Hundreds of impoverished Muslim teenage girls in the city of Hyderabad in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh are forced into marriages with Arab men. Recent years have seen a rise in the desertion of Muslim women by Arab males as UAE citizens marry girls from Hyderabad. Each of these unions comes with its own unique history. It was plain to see that the Nizams had cordial connections with Arabs in the 1930s. As a result, a large number of Arab military commanders settled in Hyderabad and began dating Muslim women (Deccan Chronical, 5 September, 2004). Girls from impoverished Muslim families are sometimes "sold" to Arab men. When Arabs marry off their daughters, they give the girls' families a dowry known as Mehar. Also, the girl's brothers often find work in the Gulf states.

Case - IV

This discussion about Arab weddings would benefit from highlighting some disturbing news that has just come in the press. "Haseena, 19, married 73-year-old Arab Jafar Hasan Al-Zagrani. Two weeks later, he still wouldn't acknowledge her. Mohd. Jaffer Hasan wed Haseena on May 7, 2004 and then tied the knot with 16-year-old Rukhsana Begum on May 24. Supposedly he married another adolescent girl, but her parents decided against reporting him to the authorities. (5 September 2004, Deccan Chronical). Ameena, then only 14 years old, was saved from her elderly Arab husband by an airline hostess in Delhi 13 years before to this occurrence. A warrant was issued for the Arab's arrest. The press publicised the tragedy in an effort to spur bureaucracy into action and help the young ladies, but nothing has changed in all these years and underprivileged Muslim kids continue to face the same predicament. Ameena, it goes without saying, recently remarried. She finally found someone to share the rest of her life with, and he happens to be twice her age. But, the stress from her family prevented her from breaking free of her predetermined destiny.

3. MARRIAGE AS ENDUCEMENT TO POOR FAMILIES

Getting married in the Gulf nations is an expensive endeavour. There, the groom must pay a substantial sum, known as "Mehar," in order to marry a woman. Thus, low-income Arabs began travelling to Hyderabad in search of affordable wedding venues. While the bridegroom was often above the age of 50 and in search of a second or third wife, their daughters' families showed little reluctance in agreeing to the weddings. One or more of the bride's brothers would be able to find work in an Arab state, and the family would benefit financially from the marriage. The Arabs took the girls to Gulf, where they lived as house slaves with the wife they already had there. The girls were used sexually and exploited. Girls were sometimes sold by Arabs to other Arabs. Several low-

¹ The Asian Pacific Post; www.manavi.org; www.huisasurvey.org; www.usas.gov/graphics; etc.



income families were prepared to sell their daughters to Arabs in the aim of improving their economic situation. In some ways, it started to resemble a business.

Case - V

The two Arabs who were detained for raping Begum were remanded to police custody, according to a different news source (Deccan Chronicle, 21 September, 2004). In August, 52-year-old Mattar Hameed Geilani weds the much younger Begum. He stayed with her for two weeks before returning to Oman. A month later, two Arab prostitutes reportedly brought the girl to Bombay to be united with her husband. They kidnapped her, transported her to a motel, and sexually assaulted her for two days. As she phoned for help, the Hyderabad Police Department arrived and brought the girl home.

4. CHANGED TIMES CHANGED WAYS

Contract weddings are the new standard in the marital system. The girls' parents consented to this arrangement with the understanding that their daughter would be divorced from her Arab husband after a certain amount of time, often between a few weeks and a couple of months. When the parents have been compensated, they will sign the agreement and the divorce documents. Each young woman, whether she a virgin, recent divorcee, or widow, will get a different sum based on her age. The amount might range from Rs.5,000 to Rs.50,000.

A gang of Quazis have been implicated in the contractual marriage scam, according to a news article published on September 5th, 2004 by the Deccan Chronical. These Quazis are connected to the Gulf and have a web of brokers and drivers throughout the city. Brokers rely on taxi drivers to learn about young women from low-income homes. Muslim families are told by marriage brokers that Arab Shaikh are wealthy businessmen willing to pay the maximum "Mehar" to the girl's family in exchange for their daughter. They are interested since there would be no dowry to pay. Before the Arab Shaikh's arrival, the brokers will take care of all the details. The Shaikh will arrive, marry the girl, and then depart the nation, either with or without a divorce. One man will wed many women within a few of months' time.

5. PLIGHT OF NRI BRIDES

The police commissioner has said that pursuing action against contract marriage is difficult since the whole procedure occurs with the cooperation of the persons concerned. So, it is required to amend the law. But, the Quazis have been warned strongly by the police not to become involved in any such weddings. Attorney Rehana Shaikh claims that "most of these females are left with the parents of the guys so as to serve them" (she has six examples where NRIs have abandoned their lawfully married spouses). As far as anybody is concerned, they may as well be slaves. After hearing their accounts, I began to wonder whether we really really live in a civilised society. Huma Mansuri's spouse was a non-resident Indian (NRI) from Dubai, although he never took her to Dubai. After three years and two months of marriage, she finally managed to escape the in-laws who had effectively imprisoned her in their home. She has spent the last seven years in court arguing her case. The situation with Ajmal Faqih's daughter, Maryam, simply highlights the problem again. In 1997, she tied the knot with Tahir Ladhi. When he returned to the UK, he abandoned her with his parents. No one saw him again for two years. Maryam, however, had no idea what her husband was doing to in the UK and so continued to serve his family. When she and her family found out in 2001 that he had remarried in the UK, it was already too late. Maryam and her family have filed a police report (FIR) against the youngster and his parents.

Case Study - VI

The struggles of forsaken spouses are epitomised by Nazreen, the daughter of a cab driver named Rehan Ansari. In 1994, Nazreen tied the knot with Yasin Ansari. After a year of marriage, the non-resident Indian husband took his new Qatari bride there. She lived with him for two years, and he tricked her into returning in 1997. Without telling her, he secretly returned to Qatar after taking her passport and other travel papers. Cases involving him and his family were inevitable, since the girl and her family had no choice.



6. CONCLUSION

In such instances, there is no foolproof legal remedy. But, this issue is deeply rooted in our society and the economics of daily living. There are parents who are led by the greed of marrying their daughters to NRI grooms, just as there are poor people who are enticed into marrying their daughters because they imagine a beautiful life for their daughters. The family as a whole is greedy, therefore they think that leaving the country would lead to better opportunities. Numerous families have tied the knot with non-resident Indian (NRI) grooms who are at least twice as old as their daughters. We need immediate revisions to existing laws, if not whole new ones, to address this threat. Lawyer Rehana argues that the government should revoke the passports of such NRI grooms as a temporary measure to provide some kind of justice to the females who have been abandoned (Islamic Voice, March 2003).

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