

Indian Overseas Migration, Marriage Markets and Citizenship Issues¹

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Abstract

This paper deals with marriage markets involving Indians living overseas, particularly in Europe. It focuses on trends in international marriages involving Indian nationals; effects on marriage markets in India; the wellbeing of married Indians overseas, whether the marriage involves two Indian nationals or one Indian national married to the national of another country; and issues that arise when marriages of Indians overseas break up. Of the 20 to 25 million persons of Indian origin living overseas, those in Europe are a rather small proportion of the total, and are heavily concentrated in the UK, which has possibly as many as 1.6 million people of Indian origin. The newer wave of Indian mobility to Europe is basically a movement of skilled workers. The paper discusses the extent to which Indian communities in Europe practice ethnic endogamy, and the extent to which they seek marriage partners from India itself. Other issues touched on in the paper include the claim that the bride-seeking practices of Indian IT workers in Europe have effects on the way marriage markets operate in India; the risk a permanent migrant from India may face in bringing a spouse from India that the spouse may view this transnational marriage as no more than a means to immigration and citizenship; the particular adjustment problems facing dependent wives brought from India by Indian husbands who have visas to work as software engineers and programmers; and the problems for children of marriages which break up in Europe, which will be influenced by whether the children inherit both parents' citizenship at birth. There is a need for further studies on the issues raised by marriage patterns characterizing the "new wave" of mobile Indians, in the context of European migration policies, visa regulations and citizenship laws.

Keywords: Indian Migration, Marriage Market, International marriages, IT workers, Europe.

I. Introduction

The increasing volume of international mobility of Indians – whether as contract labourers, skilled IT workers, health professionals, students, regular permanent migrants, or in other guises – carries with it implications for Indian marriage markets and for the wellbeing of married Indians living in other countries, whether they are married to another Indian or to a national of that country. This paper will be a modest attempt to explore some of these implications and some of the policy issues that may arise as a result. Lack of time and lack of data mean that I must underline the word “modest”.

Ideally, we would like to understand the following kinds of effects that international mobility may have on marriage markets:

- Trends in international marriages involving Indian nationals.

¹ Paper prepared for the International Conference, “India-EU Partnerships in Mobility: Data, Agreements and Policy in International Migration”, Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi, India, 21-23 February 2009.

- Effect of the growth of a wealthy group of Indians with overseas degrees, overseas jobs in technology-intensive industries, or frequent travel overseas, on aspects of Indian marriage markets. Elements of this include dowry payments, the scope of weddings expected, and the spin-offs on expectations and reality of weddings of ordinary Indians.
- Effect on well-being of married Indians overseas – whether the marriage involves two Indian nationals, or one Indian national married to the national of another country. Issues include the adjustment problems experienced by Indian brides marrying ethnic Indians in Europe, and also those experienced by the smaller group of Indian grooms marrying ethnic Indians in Europe. What evidence is there on issues such as spousal abuse?
- Issues that arise when marriages of Indians overseas break up, particularly the effect on children.

Consistent with the nature of this conference, the key emphasis will be on Indians living in Europe, but since the Indian population in Europe (apart from the UK) is relatively small, similar issues faced by the large number of Indian nationals living in North America, Australia and the Gulf states, will also be touched on. Apart from this, some attention needs to be paid to the marriage practices of the large ethnic Indian populations in countries such as Malaysia, South Africa, Fiji, and Mauritius, representing the Indian diaspora resulting from British policies in colonial times, insofar as these practices may reflect ingrained values that may still be operative to some extent among more recently mobile Indians.

Issues related to the marriages of Indians in Europe that will be investigated in this paper include the extent to which Indians are practising ethnic endogamy – i.e. marrying within their ethnic group, and in the cases where they marry an Indian, whether this is a spouse from the local Indian community or one recruited from India. To what extent do marriage practices of such Indian communities gradually gravitate toward those of the host population, as has been observed of the fertility of overseas Indian populations (Muthiah and Jones, 1983)? In the case of spouses (normally brides) recruited from India, what are the visa regulations relating to the work of spouses of various categories of workers, and what effect do these have on the adjustment issues facing these spouses, and what are their implications should the marriage break down? Is the Indian bride able to remain in the European country of residence? What is the status of her children? And what is the status of children to marriages between Indians and nationals of the countries if the marriage breaks down?

The nature of the mobile populations being considered is also important – whether they are permanent migrants, contract IT workers, health professionals, labour migrants or students.

II. Who are the Indians Overseas?

This paper will focus on Indian nationals, so will not be concerned very much with the Indian diaspora dating from colonial times, when Indians were moved as indentured labourers, guards, watchmen, etc. or moved independently as business people to countries all around the globe, including Burma, Malaya and Singapore, Fiji, Mauritius, South Africa, countries of East Africa, and British Guiana. In some of these countries (Fiji, Guyana, Mauritius, Trinidad and Surinam), Indians approach or even exceed 50 percent of the population (Muthiah and Jones, 1983: Table 1); in others (Burma, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, South Africa, U.K., U.S.A.) they

number more than one million. These days, the vast majority of Indians in most of these countries are local born. Approximately half of the Indian population of the UK are local born,² but the relative recency of the migration flows to the USA, Canada and Australia, and the continuation of these flows, means that the local born are a smaller proportion of Indians in these countries, certainly less than half. In many of the countries of settlement, the Indian population is large enough for Indians to find Indian spouses locally without recourse to seeking them in India – though brides from India may sometimes be sought because they are seen to have the traditional characteristics that local-born Indian girls are seen to have lost.

It is estimated that some 20 to 25 million persons of Indian origin and emigrants with Indian citizenship are now living abroad, of whom about 10 million are emigrants with Indian citizenship (Castles, 2008). It is this latter group that will mainly concern us, especially those living in Europe. Those living in Europe constitute a rather small proportion of the total, and are heavily concentrated in the U.K., which has possibly as many as 1.6 million people of Indian origin. No other European country appears to have more than about 140,000 (Netherlands). Around 2006, the India-born numbered one and a half million in the USA, half a million in Canada and over 140,000 in Australia.³

The nature of the movement of Indians to Europe differs by country.

- In the case of the U.K., the small long-standing Indian population swelled in the 1950s and 1960s, following the partition of the Indian sub-continent. Many of these migrants were of relatively low socio-economic status. It grew further as the result of the expulsion of East Asians from Kenya, Uganda and Zanzibar. It has swelled again from the 1990s, with the mobility of highly skilled personnel. The current Indian population in the U.K., then, is very diverse.⁴
- The Netherlands has the largest number of Indians of any European population outside the UK. In 2002, it had about 110,000-140,000 first and second generation Indians, the great majority descended from indentured labourers who had been shipped to the Dutch colony of Surinam, and who moved to the Netherlands in large numbers in the 1960s and especially the 1970s (Gowricharn and Choenni, 2006).
- In the case of France, people from the former French colonies in India were given the option of French nationality when the subcontinent became independent. The largest of the French territories in India was Pondicherry, and it was the source of the majority of France's Indo-French population (Niklas, 2006).
- In Germany, the movement of Indians has built up in recent years, especially IT workers, most of them males. This is very much a temporary movement, with restrictions on length of stay, and the disallowance to bring family members.

² In 2001, 49 percent of the South Asian population in the UK were local born (Peach, 2006: 134). This includes Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, along with Indians, but the Indian proportion local born would not be much different from that for South Asians as a whole.

³ Adding second and third generation Indians would bring the figure for USA to well over 2 million, for Canada to about one million and for Australia to in excess of 200,000. New Zealand had 104,000 ethnic Indians, constituting 2.6 percent of its population, much higher than the proportion in the USA, Canada and Australia.

⁴ The Indian population of the UK, though, has a considerably higher proportion in professional and managerial occupations than is the case for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis (Peach, 2006: 138-9).

Indian migration to Europe is building up. However, the newer wave of Indian mobility to Europe is very different from earlier movement, as it is basically a movement of skilled workers, dominated by IT and health workers (Khadria, 2007). The EU is interested in attracting IT experts from India, and through the “Blue card”, highly qualified labour force from third countries will be able to get access to the European labour market. The Blue card will give a two-year residence and work permit, after which it is renewable and movement to another EU country is also possible. It would then be easier to bring family to the country of residence (Knerr, this conference).

III. Indian Marriage Markets

Indian marriage markets are idiosyncratic, one feature being the high proportion of marriages that are arranged by parents, others being the continuing importance of caste, and the changing role of dowry. While Bollywood plays on a romanticized idealization of love matches, such matches are not very common, though the proportion differs according to locality and social class, and changes in the system are taking place.

If we go back a couple of decades, at least in rural areas, marriages that were not arranged were extremely rare. Writing of fieldwork in rural Karnataka, in South India, Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell (1982: 706) noted that although great changes had been transforming marriage over the past third of a century, there was no claim of any decline in the significance of arranged marriage, which remained universal. But marriage practices are gradually changing, with average age at marriage of girls increasing and the proportion of marriages in which the individuals concerned have a major say also increasing. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that most young women are still teenagers when they marry, and that the choice of groom is rarely theirs alone.

As noted by Kumari (2004: 91-2):

The traditional pattern was marked by the prominence of arranged marriages which were primarily oriented towards creating alliances between two families through “classical matchmakers” such as family priests and relatives. In such a marriage there was only a minor role for the bride and bridegroom in the context of decision-making regarding the marriage. Contemporary marriage, however, is based more on an understanding between the about-to-be-married man and woman along with attention to the views of family elders. New “mediators” such as the media (matrimonial columns) and marriage bureaus have also emerged, contributing to the rise of a nationwide, and sometimes transnational, system of information and choice-making in the context of marriage.

Class and educational level undoubtedly affect the extent of self-choice of marriage partners. The study by the Raos (1985) showed that 25 percent of women executives were finding their own partners in marriage, some of them inter-caste and inter-religious. The proportion doing so is likely to have increased in the 20 years since then.

IV. Marriage Patterns of Indian Communities in Europe: how much Endogamy?

There are two important questions about marriage patterns of Indian communities in Europe. First, to what extent do they practice ethnic endogamy? Second, to what extent do they seek marriage partners from India itself?

Seeking of marriage partners in India itself appears to remain an ideal in some communities, but the issue is the extent to which the ideal is changing, and even where it remains strong, the extent to which it is actually followed in practice. Castles (this conference) notes that "Marriage migration continues, with 'second generation' and even 'third generation' descendants of Indian immigrants seeking their marriage partners in the home region". But I have not seen the numbers underlying this statement.

Concerning one group of Indians in Europe, the Podicherians in France, Niklas (2007) writes:

Even today, the preferred manner of marriage is still to look for a bride or groom in India. Young Pondicherians in France—boys more than girls—appear willing to accept arranged marriages, and they often leave the choice of partner to their parents or other relatives back home in India. Although the traditional Tamil marriage between cousins is no longer appreciated by Pondicherians, they still look for partners whose families match theirs in social status, an important element of which is the caste the family originates from.

French nationality is still a great asset for a marriage partner, and it can be of great value, especially in the case of a girl: when a France-based female French national marries an India-based male Indian national, he is given the opportunity of gaining French nationality and migrating to France. In such situations, the girl's family does not have to pay any dowry. In recent times, inter-cultural marriages (between Pondicherians and French partners) have increased, which implies major changes in the life patterns of the community.

There is a strong tradition of endogamy in many overseas Indian communities. The extent to which this tradition is met by males or females in overseas Indian communities seeking a spouse in India depends heavily on need and ability: need referring largely to the size of the Indian community in the particular overseas locality, and ability referring largely to capacity to afford the expenses needed to find a bride in India, which normally requires travel to India. It also relates to whether the Indian community is a long-standing one; out-marriage rates tend to be much higher among the third generation in such communities, but in countries such as Australia there are few third-generation Indians. In any event, there seems to be much more stress on the overseas Indian male seeking a bride in India than on the overseas Indian female seeking a husband in India.

On the extent to which diasporic Indian communities maintain conventions of ethnic endogamy, and the extent to which this breaks down over time, evidence from countries such as the UK, USA, Canada and Australia, with a growing community of India-born and India-descended residents, needs to be assessed. The experience of countries with a much longer-standing Indian community dating from colonial times also needs to be examined to throw more light on the issue. The general trend appears to be for endogamy and arranged marriage to remain strong among first generation Indians in these countries, but for a shift towards love marriages and inter-ethnic marriages in the second and third generations among the Indian community in countries such as Canada, Australia and the USA (Qian et al., 2001; Naidoo and Leslie, 2006: 332; Khoo, 2004; Lakha, 2006: 387).

The careful study on inter-marriage of ethnic groups in Australia by Khoo (2004) shows that while more than 80 percent of first generation Indians are married to other Indians, this falls to half among the second generation, more than the proportion practicing ethnic endogamy among most European migrant groups in Australia, but lower than English,

Greeks, Lebanese, Turks and Chinese. Of the second generation Indians who married an Indian spouse, the proportion marrying first generation Indians (presumably recruited from India, following a traditional pattern for Indians overseas) was only 18 per cent. These two statistics indicate that Indians in Australia are not particularly prone to restrict themselves to marrying other Indians, and when they do, it is more likely to be another member of Australia's Indian community.⁵

In the UK, analysis of marriage and unions by ethnicity in the 1991 census showed that 91 percent of Indian men were married to Indian women, while 95 percent of Indian women were married to Indian men. Data for 1991 and 2002 shows only a slight reduction in these rates (Peach, 2006: 143). Ethnic endogamy among Indians is clearly more pronounced in the UK than in Australia. This may be partly due to the more selective nature of Indian migration to Australia, with the highly educated representing a large proportion of the Indian population. They are presumably more likely to challenge traditional norms than would Indians from more lowly backgrounds. Certainly, tradition appears to be more strongly observed among Indians in the UK. "Marriage is central to the values ... and still broadly arranged rather than individually contracted (although 'negotiated' rather than 'arranged' would be a truer representation of current practice" (Peach, 2006: 142).

V. Effect of Mobility of IT Workers on Indian Marriage Markets

The presumption that more highly educated Indians are more likely to challenge traditional marriage norms must be subjected to scrutiny. It has been argued that mobility across nations may not diminish the patriarchal norms intrinsic to marriage practices, but may result only in their relocation and reconfiguration (Sheel, 2005: 340). Biao (2005: 369) notes that many are surprised that IT professionals demand high dowries because they expect that highly educated professionals with a Western exposure would break with this kind of 'tradition'. He argues persuasively that migration enlarges the scope of search for a match (through newspapers, the Internet and marriage bureaus) and makes economic calculations more central to marriage negotiations. "Once the marriage market is disembedded from other social relationships, decisions regarding a match come to rest almost exclusively on economic calculation (though caste and horoscope are still the bottom line criteria)" (Biao, 2005: 370). Moreover, in the local society high dowry is seen as a direct reward to the groom's parents for their investment in his education. Indeed, a 'futures market' pattern of dowry payment has grown, whereby a girl's father may offer to pay the college fees or the costs of going abroad for a boy on the condition that the boy later marry his daughter (Biao, 2005: 372).

The entrenchment of high dowry payment for young men in the IT industry would not be so serious if it were confined to this social group. However, the emulation of higher castes by lower castes has been identified as the main mechanism by which dowry became a common practice in an earlier period (Srinivas, 1983). And this is reinforced by within-caste competition in dowry payments. Thus anything that increases dowry payments among the

⁵ The summary by Lakha (2006: 387) therefore appears to be correct: "It is quite common for first-generation unmarried Indian migrants in Australia to find a partner from India or from among diasporic Indian communities across the world. (But) statistics indicate that second- and third-generation people of Indian descent have married outside their ancestral group to a very substantial extent compared to those of the first generation. In the case of third-generation Indians, a very large majority of both males and females have intermarried with non-Indians". (Lakha, 2006: 387).

higher castes and the wealthier will have ripple effects throughout the society, contributing to the growth of 'instalment payment' of dowry among the poor, and the excesses and the dowry killings that result.

Another example of the persistence and indeed strengthening of the tradition of dowry in the face of modernizing influences is provided by Gallo's (2005) study of female Malayali migrants in Italy. As she notes, among this group, marriage payments can be seen as a 'traditional' vehicle for families to express 'modern' achievements in educational, social and geographical mobility, and access to consumer goods (see also Osella and Osella, 2000). "Arranging a good marriage, widening the field of spouse selection possibilities and giving a 'good' dowry are understood in Kerala more as a way of showing off newly-acquired status and modernity than as a 'traditional' practice" (Gallo, 2005: 229).

VI. Some Issues Relating to Marriages of Indians in Europe

It is likely that the issues relating to marriage of different groups of Indians in Europe differ greatly according to the nature of the group. For example,

- Students will mostly be unmarried, but those who do marry while in Europe may tend to marry non-Indians to a greater extent than, say, longer-standing groups of Indian permanent immigrants who, as we saw earlier, practice ethnic endogamy to a marked extent, at least in the U.K.
- One of the risks a permanent migrant from India may face in bringing a bride or bridegroom from India may be that for some, this transnational marriage may be no more than a means to immigration and citizenship.
- The bride-seeking practices of Indian IT workers in Europe and their families may have effects on Indian marriage markets similar to those discussed above in the section on IT workers.
- Particular adjustment problems may face dependant wives brought from India by Indian husbands who have visas to work as software engineers and programmers. There are important power relationships involved in cases where the bride is brought from India as a dependant spouse. Is her visa automatically withdrawn if the marriage breaks up (as would be the case in, for example, the United States or Singapore)? If so, this would provide a strong incentive for the woman to remain (prisoner?) in an unsatisfactory marriage. (Green, 2005; Devi, 2002).

Another important issue is the stability of marriages of Indians in Europe who marry non-Indians. They subject their marriages to the stresses common to inter-ethnic marriages anywhere, but these issues may be compounded in the case of Indians in Europe by widely differing perceptions of the marital relationship held by the Indian and the non-Indian partner. Of course, it is hoped that such issues would be discussed and to a large extent resolved before the marriage, but this may not always be the case.

In cases where marriages break up, what is the effect on children of the circumstances in which the marriage took place? If the citizenship of the Indian father and the mother are different, will the children inherit both parents' citizenship at birth? If so, this makes it easier to resolve the issue of where the children will go on divorce, although custody battles could certainly complicate the situation. If not, real problems could arise. What about cases where the bride was brought from India as a dependant spouse, and her visa was withdrawn on

divorce? If the Indian father is a citizen or permanent resident of the European country, presumably his children would inherit this citizenship, and would be able to stay in the European country with him, provided he stayed there. But what if the agreement on breakdown of the marriage is that the mother will keep the children? Will they be able to return to India with her and take up Indian permanent residence or citizenship? A key factor here will be whether the children of such a marriage are entitled to dual citizenship.

As in many other countries, children of mixed-nationality parents (for instance a German father and an Italian mother) normally both inherit both parents' citizenship at birth. Arising out of the prevalence of *ius sanguinis* in the citizenship laws of most countries, this source of dual nationality has evolved considerably over time and was limited to a German father until the Federal Constitutional Court extended this privilege to German women, effective from 1975. Between 1975 and 1997, almost 780,000 German children were born to bi-national (married) parents (Green, 2005, p. 925).

VII. Conclusion

International marriages in Europe that involve Indians are increasing in number, and this increase is likely to continue. Both the trends and their implications need to be studied. There is clearly a need for better data on this topic, as well as for more detailed analysis of the data already available. In particular, there is a need for studies focused on the issues raised by marriage patterns characterizing the "new wave" of mobile Indians, in the context of European migration policies, visa regulations and citizenship laws. This is a topic on which opinions are easy to give, but on which careful research is rare.

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