

Crack down on Fraud Marriages and Unlawful Human Trafficking

Dr. Ragbir Singh Bains (Canada)*

* The author, honoured with an OBC, is co-author of Encyclopedia of Sikhism, and Professor Director, Multimedia Sikh Museum, at Surray, B.C. Canada. Add: 8879-128, St. Surrey B.C. Canada.V3V 5M6.

Once upon a time, women were highly respected in the society. Indian society suffered from the barbaric custom of 'Sati', i.e. forced immolation of wife on the pyre of her dead husband. So much so, women could be sold and purchased in the flesh market. We also witnessed an era of 'honour killing' of daughters even in foetus. Subsequently, we also observed the evil of dowry killings.

To curb this social evil in the world, the Sikh Gurus spearheaded a crusade to end such brutal and repressive practices in society. With passage of time, enterprising inventive people from different countries moved to foreign lands in search of better economic opportunities. It seems that the materialistic greed did not end, and the lawful or unlawful trend of migrating to promising lands grew more and more.

In recent times, the opportunists started a vicious circle of trading in human beings, through the institution of marriage - which is a sacred commitment that entails both religious and social obligations between a husband and wife. The sacred bondage of marriage started to be abused, contracted or bartered for reasons other than those of love or family. So much so, the phony marriages between real brothers and sisters are performed to dodge the law. Unethical bargains are struck in the matter of sale and purchase of children in the choice of matrimony and at the altar of sham marriages or for pecuniary benefits. Instead of sacred bond, jokingly referred to as 'marriages of inconvenience' are contracted or orchestrated for personal benefits to exploit legal loopholes for economic purpose, such as immigration.

Vigilance: The Canadian immigration department have unraveled dozens of fraud cases of fake marriages which have brought embarrassment and humiliation to the communities. Green Card-marriage ring aimed at helping immigrants from Africa, Vietnam, India and other countries to obtain their green cards, or permanent U.S. residency, has also been cracked down by the US Government in which some former immigration officers were also involved. Statistically, almost 1,000 phony marriages might have been performed, mostly in Arlington but also in Alexandria, Fairfax County, in the District and Maryland in US. To deal effectively with this issue, **India has recently announced plans to set up an international network to crack down on the bargains of fake marriages, and has vowed to aid harassed and abandoned brides at home and abroad. Well orchestrated and organized racketeers who are behind the scam of fake marriages are being smashed in Britain.** These days, Australia is keeping a stern eye on surreptitious 'import and export' of brides and bridegrooms into the country.

Sanctity: Culturally and religiously, marriage is not a barter, a trade, or a contract. It is rather a sacred tie between man and a woman. However, in a few cases of marriage, bargains and barter deals for money are reached before marriage arrangements take place for the purpose of immigration only. Often the arrangements are contracted through marriage brokers and mafias who are active especially in Punjab these days. Terms and conditions of bartering or dowry are set beforehand, documenting that a particular newcomer from the new immigrating family in foreign land will marry such and such a relative in the 'back home' country. In this way, commercial marriages of sons and

daughters are horse-traded like merchandise.

Mostly the fake marriages are arranged to bring blood relations, or relatives, who otherwise could not come through legal procedures to promising lands. Under such cases, the life and dignity of migrating family's girls or boys is negotiated or gambled away, long before they know who their partner would be after reaching the new country of their dreams. It is distressing that parents agree to barter their daughters or sons for the old doddering widowers or widows, 'druggies', or to the best bidders of the girls or boys, often addicts or simpletons. Sometimes, simpletons are married to beautiful, intelligent and highly educated children, resulting in miserable life for them. In most cases, children are given in marriage to anyone, the brokers choose.

Parental Collusion: It is regrettable that many of the sadistic exchanges take place through active participation of fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, or uncles and aunts of the girls or boys. After union of both the families in foreign lands, the children accompanying the migrating family are forced to fulfil the pre-marriage bargains and marry the relatives of the sponsor whether they suit the educational or age standards or not. In the event of resistance or non-execution of the bargain by the newcomers, the hosting families in the new country become verbally abusive and violent. Thus, ugly scenes are created for the bride or bridegroom. Normally, husbands try to bend their wives to fulfil their will. They are given threat of divorce, and in some cases, killed by the bridegrooms or their accomplices.

Barter System: The fate of the 'bartered brides' becomes horrible. Many, who are very young and wedded to old and greedy men, often run away in search of a suitable partner. Their lives are endangered; such brides become vulnerable to further unlawful trafficking. Sometimes unmarried girls who accompany their parents to the new country escape from the vicious circle of contracts. Some cases have come to notice where girls and boys from 'back home' countries perform real marriages, but after coming to the new country they defraud and divorce their partners to bring their respective paramours into the new haven. These kind of sham scams bring backlash and stigmatize the communities in the media. Legal loopholes for such tendencies and vicious contracts need to be plugged by enactment of appropriate law by the respective governments.

We, in Canada, are living in a peace-loving country that respects decorum and dignity of human beings. The media, from time to time, plays its part and alerts people every day about fraudulent people. Divorces, abandonment, killings or trading of brides and bridegrooms have become a familiar pattern in many countries, including the so-called industrialized world. My reason for writing this article is not to blame or censure any community or culture. Therefore, this article does not cover all the various socio-economic and religio-cultural aspects of this immensely complex issue.

Social Reforms: Many activists and campaigners in India, Canada, UK, USA, Australia and other countries are working ceaselessly to help the victims of social evils, to end their miseries. To put an end to the evil of 'marriages of convenience,' the community educators are spending their time and energy to keep the torch of social justice aflame. It is the duty of the citizens to encourage such social crusaders everywhere in the world to accomplish justice. **It is fervently recommended that educational campaigns and preventive measures must be started by the respective governments in collaboration with the socio-religious organizations to deter the cheats.** We, the citizens and immigrants, must respect the rules and regulations of the country wherever we live, and must unveil the social evils by fulfilling our rights and duties.

The governments of respective countries must be determined to enforce their immigration

systems and marriage laws to avert the unlawful human trafficking and the agony caused by fake marriages.

