

WHERE HUSBANDS GO BY DEGREES

The Status of Women in Modern India

I HAVE recently been told about a Northern Indian, long domiciled and married in New Zealand, who had refused to allow his daughter to be sent to school and college believing that he was thereby adhering to the custom of his community in India. He is, actually, so far out of date in this idea, that he would find it very difficult to get his uneducated daughter married off, if he took her back to his native land. In modern India, education is demanded as a prerequisite in making marriages, and it may take the place of a dowry especially if accomplishments are added on.

Just before I left Bombay my husband's sister's son, Madhukar Karnik, was married to his cousin Shalini, my husband's brother's daughter. That is the one form of cousin-marriage which is permitted among the C.K.P. community of the Deccan. This marriage was arranged because the Karnik family did not want a stranger to come in, and because Shalini's family did not want to give a dowry. They have five other younger girls, and a son, yet to be educated. Therefore, strange as it may seem to you, Shalini had to be pushed somehow up and over the B.A. hurdle, before she could suitably be given to Madhukar, who is himself an M.Sc., now teaching in a Ratnagiri boys' college, or high school.

There is another young woman in the same family group who has already passed B.A. She is to marry a man in Baroda State service. Therefore she is being taught photography, drawing, and painting, and music. Her prospective bridegroom will not ask for a dowry. He wants an intelligent wife, with accomplishments.

Last year our man-servant left us. Most of the men could get better money



★ Written for "The Listener" by ARUNA YESHWANT GUPTÉ ★

LAST week we published a BBC talk on education in India as applied to boys. Now we deal with the distaff side of the subject. The writer of this article for "The Listener" (left) is a New Zealander by birth and a graduate of Canterbury University College. Her maiden name was Aroha M. Hardcastle. In 1936 she went to India and the following year married into a Deccani Hindu family, being formally given Hindu nationality and taking the name of Aruna Yeshwant Gupte. She has recently returned to New Zealand. Her husband, Yeshwantrao Gupte (right) is medical and pathological photographer in Grant Medical College, Bombay.



"What I know is not what is usually shown to Europeans who have business, Government, or teaching interests in Modern India," she says in a covering letter with this article, which is based on personal experience.

from the military families, or from working in the near-by military and motor transport camps. So we had to engage a woman from the local village of Sion-Kolvada. Shanta's eldest girl came in to oblige one day when her mother had fever. She was useless in the house, and I had to tell her to let it go. She was useless, because she was a school-going girl, studying to matriculate and better herself and her family by marrying a motor-truck driver. Housework was beneath her!

Every young educated woman in India is married, or has refused good offers in the hope of getting something very good indeed. When I visited Travancore State some years ago, I met a number of girls of Thampi families. These are Nair Brahmin people, very near the throne by birth. Many of them had been abroad, either before marriage, or with their husbands. For dignity's sake they maintain a kind of *purdah*; many of them had

taken the M.A. or M.Sc. degree, usually studying science, mathematics, history, and similar modern-style subjects.

Languages, except English, are not very popular. There are almost too many women doctors, who are what my husband calls "glorified *dais*." A *dai* is an Indian midwife. The good thing about them is that they marry, often with men doctors, and have children of their own. So also those who take the B.T. examination (Bachelor of Teaching): usually marry teachers and get families themselves.

Literacy is Not Education

I do not think I have ever seen a really illiterate Indian woman. Those who do not know the English alphabet know the script in which their own mother tongue is written. After all, there is no record of a time in which there were no written languages in India: and it is not a sign of ignorance, but of a high degree of culture, when education is oral—as in the Vedic tradition.

Remember that the Maori people, who did not write, had schools and colleges in which their learning was imparted by word of mouth and very scrupulously memorised. We people of the Western European civilisation have laid altogether too much stress on "literacy" and not nearly enough on memorisation, and consequent absorption, of great literature. We have made far too many books: there is an enormous quantity of chaff to what appears to be only the original quantity of good sound grain. In fact, we have confused literacy, the ability to read and write, with education, the bringing out of the full mental powers of the pupil. We have tended to reckon a certificate or a diploma, showing proficiency in a set source of study, as an absolute proof of ability to think and to work in many varied fields of human activity. And perhaps we have overdone this examination business.

Certainly it looks rather odd to see the girls of India solemnly studying to obtain certificates and diplomas, in order to get nice husbands. Perhaps it is just as odd of us to set our young people studying seriously, in order to get nice jobs. Perhaps we have all forgotten that

education should be a training for life, not for job-getting. Perhaps life is much more important than business. And perhaps I am hypercritical. So let it go!

Everything Depends on Economics

Modern India is full of schools, colleges, and universities. Girls and women get the education which their families can afford. Economically it is not possible to pay for high education for all family members equally, since all schooling must be paid for. That is the reason why the men get most money spent on them. They have to bring in money, in return for the outlay. They have also to marry and to educate their children. The women have to be married as advantageously as possible, with the least outlay, because they will each take this education into another family: while linking the husband's people economically with the father's house. Everything nowadays is connected with economics, in all countries. It may be that the Indian communal system is, even in these years of distortion, more practical than our present individualism.

Recipe for a "Happy" Marriage

You get some very odd sidelights on modern educated Indian women. One of our Brahmin friends in Bombay, having the diplomas of the J.J. School of Art, wished to be quite modern-style. So he married the young widow of a certain university professor. Far from being a success, the marriage caused endless trouble. This fashionable lass had no respect, or affection for anybody. She bore her husband a son. But she openly preferred her first husband's friends to her second husband's family (perhaps with reason) and made everybody very uncomfortable. Another Decanni Brahmin boy openly derided this marriage, and took an orthodox wife, a teacher. When I asked him how he was getting along, he said, "Oh, we have a son. She and I never have a harsh word." But my husband informed me, mockingly, that the wife lives in Poona, teaching. Her widowed aunt minds the child, and she graciously consents to keep her Bombay husband company, occasionally on a

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Cecil Beaton's photograph of schoolgirls in class, Victoria Institution, Calcutta