RULE BY THE *DANDA:* DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG INDO-FIJIANS

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Domestic violence is part of the taken-for-granted world of being female in the Indo-Fijian society. This is not to imply that all Indo-Fijian women are subjected to constant physical violence. Rather, it suggests that violence is experienced by large numbers of Indo-Fijian women at least occasionally and is accepted by the community as an inevitable part of being female. Varying degrees of violence are imposed on women, and their control by the occasional use of the *danda* (stick) is seldom seriously questioned by either males or females.

The threat and use of physical violence against females is a powerful and effective mechanism for ensuring the maintenance and reproduction of traditional gender relations among Indo-Fijians. In many instances, however, a need for physical violence seldom arises since women control their own behavior and actions as set by the parameters of the prevailing gender ideology. Blatant, overt control of women through the use of violence is often unnecessary in the face of a powerful and influential familial ideology that demands and stresses the need for female submission to male control. Violence is used as a supplementary mechanism of social control to assert and consolidate male dominance and female subordination within the family.

As such, any analysis of domestic violence among Indo-Fijians must be undertaken within the wider context of gender relations and must address the fundamental issues of women's inequality in the family and the society.

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The Setting

The Fiji Islands are situated in the southwest Pacific and have a total land area of approximately 7,022 square miles. Fiji is an independent nation, having acquired independence from the British in 1970. Of a total population of approximately 700,000, Indo-Fijians constitute 50.5 percent and indigenous Fijians 42.4 percent, with the remainder other Pacific Islanders, Europeans, and Chinese.

The vast majority of Indo-Fijians are the direct descendants of indentured laborers brought to Fiji by the British between 1879 and 1916 to work in the sugarcane plantations. After serving periods of indenture ranging from five to ten years the vast majority became free settlers, while a minority returned to India (Lal 1983). The descendants of these free settlers are the concern of this article.

The women in my study come from different class backgrounds and include both Hindus and Muslims.[1] Few participate in paid employment and those who do are in traditional "pink collar" occupations such as stenographers/typists, sales assistants, and clerks.

Gender Relations among Indo-Fijians

Domestic violence among Indo-Fijians must be located and analyzed within the wider context of gender relations and women's status in the family. Only through such an analysis can the nature, causes, experience, and acceptance of violence be explained and understood, for physical violence is only one of the forms of control exercised over women.

The patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal North Indian Hindu family pattern and ideology has generally established hegemony among Indo-Fijians. The essential characteristics of the North Indian family are: male dominance and female subordination, males as the economic providers with females as the economic dependents, spatial and social confinement of women, male inheritance of family property, and the treatment of females as reproducers of the male lineage and repositories of family honor *(izzat)* (Kishwar 1984; Mies 1980; Gupta 1976; Jeffery 1979).

Indo-Fijian gender relations and the status of women cannot be understood without reference to the ideology of purdah[2] and to the family and the material structure of the household. The essential elements of purdah are the segregation of the sexes, the protection of women's sexuality, and the maintenance of family honor. It is this ideology of

purdah that relegates women to the private domestic sphere and restricts their spatial movements, sets the parameters for the deferential relations between males and females, provides the guidelines for female behavior and demeanor, and stresses the need for male/female segregation. Ideally, women should be quiet, demure, unobtrusive, and obedient, They should dress modestly and generally attempt to be physically and socially inconspicuous. Interaction with unrelated males should be avoided and spatial movements outside the home should be minimized. Women must not talk too much or too loudly or be argumentative, especially in the presence of males or older females. A disobedient, argumentative, talkative female who mixes freely with males and is seen alone in public too often has the potential to dishonor the family

Women are perceived as both sexually vulnerable and sexually impulsive and thus in need of protection and control since they are the repositories of family honor. With the honor of the entire family resting in the purity of its women the protection of women's sexuality is of utmost importance. Neither males nor females are considered capable of exercising self-control, so attempts are made to curb or neutralize the volatility of human sexuality by segregating the sexes and the "symbolic sheltering" of women. The imposition of external controls on women is the mechanism by which the twin aims of male/female segregation and the protection of women's sexuality are achieved.

Potential for ruining the family reputation is a powerful motivation for ensuring women remain within the guidelines of proper conduct and accept the external controls imposed on them. Constructed around women's sexual vulnerability and dangerous sexuality, the ideology of purdah invokes notions of *izzat* (honor) and *sharm* (shame) as mechanisms of social control. The power and persuasiveness of such ideas encourage women to conform their behavior and accept external controls so that they do not bring shame upon themselves and their families. An ideology that stresses the need for the protection of women thereby legitimates the authority and control exercised by the protectors, the males.

The need for the strict segregation of the sexes and the protection of women's sexuality leads to the creation of separate spheres of existence for males and females: men to the public realm of economics and politics, women to the private domestic realm. Hence, the role of women is largely confined to marriage, the performance of household chores, bearing and rearing children, and caring for menfolk. These separate spheres of existence mean women are largely denied access to the labor market and, consequently, rendered economically dependent on males.

The growth of the Fijian economy, particularly during the 1970s, generated both increased employment opportunities for women and provided greater prospects for a higher standard of living. The striving for a higher standard of living made dual-income families more attractive and working women sought after as marriage partners. To reap the benefits of women's paid employment some ideological readjustments were made and some 14 percent of urban Indo-Fijian women became engaged in paid employment (Fiji Bureau of Statistics 1986).

The problem of combining the need, on the one hand, to keep females segregated and protected and, on the other, to permit them to engage in paid employment is resolved by regulating and controlling the types of occupations women enter. Certain ones are designated "inappropriate" (waitressing) and certain ones "appropriate" {clerks, typists) as defined by the parameters of purdah, that is, by whether the women can be supervised, too much interaction with unrelated males is not possible, and no night work is entailed.[3] Consequently, Indo-Fijian women in paid employment tend to be concentrated in the service sector working as stenographers, clerks, and domestics--areas not renown for high income. By being excluded from the labor market altogether or having only restricted entry, women remain either in a perpetual state of economic dependency or partially dependent because of inadequate income.

Purdah ideology, then, is integrally related to and supports a familial ideology that requires the domestication and protection of women and sets guidelines for the deferential relations between males and females within the household. The North Indian/Indo-Fijian ideology of family stresses that ultimate authority should be vested in the father or, in his absence, the eldest male in the household, while both females and younger males are subject to the control of the male head to whom deference is given. Women should always be under the control of a male--as daughters by fathers, as wives by husbands, and as widows by sons.

This idea of male supremacy is reflected in the greater importance of male children over female children. Male children are more desirable and viewed as assets since they will become the future economic providers and will ensure the continuance of the patriline. Female children are less desirable and viewed as economic and social liabilities until husbands are found for them since they are economically dependent and pose a potential threat to the reputation of the family (cf. Kishwar 1984; Mies 1980; Gupta 1976).

An important aspect of familial ideology concerns the importance, inevitability, and necessity of marriage for females. Only in and

through marriage can a woman achieve and perform her true function of wife and mother. Arranged marriage is the preferred and dominant form since the ideology of purdah limits women's spatial mobility and social interactions. Through arranged marriages, parents are able to maintain control over the time of marriage, the choice of marriage partner, and, more fundamentally, even the question of whether to marry. Consequently, large numbers of women have little control over such matters. The ideologies of purdah and the family operate in tandem to support and reinforce each other in maintaining and reproducing the institution of arranged marriage.

Marriage is ideally insoluble and permanent despite legal provisions for separation and divorce. Familial ideology not only operates to discourage divorce but directly supports female subservience to males and extols the suffering and sacrifice of women for the benefit of the family, A women's salvation lies in uncomplaining service to her husband and children irrespective of the husband's bad character, failure to provide adequate economic support, or maltreatment of her. Total devotion, respect, obedience, and service to husbands is viewed as the true function of wives (Wadley 1977: 124). It is in the service and devotion to her children that a woman is honored and accorded high status (Basham 1974). A familial ideology that supports patriarchy and patrilineality is reflected in the veneration of the mother. It is as mothers that women acquire social status and some degree of power.

The privileged position of males within the family arena is further reflected in the specified code of conduct regulating male/female interactions within the family, supported by the ideology of purdah. Respect, deference, and distance are the essential features of this code of conduct. Interactions between husbands and wives, fathers and daughters clearly reflect male dominance within the household as women defer to their fathers and husbands, serve their needs unquestioningly, and demonstrate respect and sometimes fear of them. Deference and respect are demonstrated through not "answering back," not arguing with them, and generally maintaining silence when anger and aggression are expressed. Familial ideology also legitimates and stresses this need for women to obey men, to service men's needs, and to be subservient to men.

Familial ideology is further reinforced by the higher status of married women over unmarried women, women with children over childless women, women with sons over those without sons, and older women over younger women. As women get older, bear children, marry off their children, and become grandmothers, the relationship between a

husband and wife becomes more egalitarian. Older women have more control over their own spatial movements, social interactions, behavior, and household decisions and often wield considerable power over younger women. While ultimate authority rests with males, in many instances older women are the ones who actually exercise this authority on behalf of the family. Senior women have a positive stake in their households and actively work to protect and reproduce the patriarchal, patrilocal family. Having been subjected to controls themselves, particularly as daughters-in-law, it becomes their turn to play the role of mother-in-law and exercise power and control over younger women.

Since both familial and purdah ideologies perceive women as the repositories of family honor, the stringent controls imposed on them both inside and outside the family are justified. Physical violence is but one manifestation of this control exercised over women. The disproportionate social power of males is constantly stressed, experienced, and reproduced in the everyday relations of family life.

Women and Domestic Violence

The vast majority of my informants-whether married or unmarried, employed for pay or not, upper class or working class--have been either subjected to or threatened with violence at some time in their lives. This is not to claim that all women are equally threatened by or subjected to physical violence throughout their different life stages. Older women--that is, women with adult children--are rarely subjected to physical violence. Rather, violence pervades the lives of young women, both married and unmarried, and sometimes older women who have yet to consolidate their position in the household,

Women are beaten for a variety of reasons. Generally, the unmarried women in my study were beaten for jeopardizing the honor of the family by transgressing the guidelines of purdah while married women were beaten for not demonstrating the required deference toward husbands and for not adequately performing their wifely duties.

The form and extent of physical violence imposed on women extends from a slap, push, kick, or shove to solid punches, belting, and hitting with a stick. The most common and consistently used form is slapping of the face. Often, women are also pushed against walls, their heads slammed against walls, or objects are thrown at them.

Both men and women are known to dispense this violence, although in the extreme cases (those requiring medical treatment) the perpetrators are almost always males. In general mothers and fathers beat daughters and husbands beat wives, although sometimes elder brothers

beat sisters. Rarely do mothers-in-law beat daughters-in-law (but it is not unknown), although they do incite their sons to beat their wives, The following case studies illustrate some of the reasons, context, and nature of violence imposed on Indo-Fijian women.

Case Study: Vinita

Vinita is a seventeen-year-old girl attending high school. Her parents do not allow her to go out on her own, talk to boys, have boyfriends, wear inappropriate clothes, have short hair, receive telephone calls or letters from her friends. She has been told by her parents that she will have an arranged marriage. The restrictions on receiving telephone calls and letters were imposed since her family feel friends will lead her astray and "spoil" her reputation. Besides, through friends she may be able to conduct romances or maintain links with males

Despite all these restrictions, Vinita has a boyfriend and talks to males at school, in town, and in the neighborhood. She sometimes even manages to go to town during the day without her parents' permission.

On a couple of occasions when Vinita's clandestine romances were discovered by her mother, she was beaten with a stick. Her mother said she was behaving shamelessly and was "dragging the family name through the mud." On another occasion, Vinita's mother gave her a few slaps on the face and body for going into town after school without permission. Once Vinita's mother caught her talking to the boy next door.

"I was caught talking in signs to the boy next door through our kitchen window. My mother caught me and said I was not allowed to go in the kitchen anymore. One day when my mother was out, I was talking to him from the front steps of our house and my mother came home and caught me again. I tried to say he was just asking me something but my mother said, 'How come he asks you, he never speaks to me.' I got a good hiding from her with a belt. My legs were all marked. She said if I did it again she would tell my father who would fix me up properly."

Case Study: Sarita

Sarita is twenty-seven years old, married with a four-year-old son, and works as a high-school teacher. Her husband runs a small business and they rent a house in one of Suva's affluent suburbs. They have a live-in domestic worker who performs most of the household chores except cooking.

Sarita met her husband while she was attending a university in Suva

and hers is a "love marriage." While at the university she lived on campus as her parents live in another town. Prior to marriage she lived with her husband for one year and they decided to marry when she became pregnant. Her husband's parents were not happy about the marriage since, in their opinion, Sarita did not come from a "good" family and her character was "questionable" for she had lived with their son prior to marriage. Even to this day, conflict exists between Sarita and her in-laws.

Sarita and her husband often socialize with other young couples, attend Western-style parties, and frequent nightclubs and restaurants. Unlike many other Indo-Fijian women, Sarita drinks alcohol and sometimes smokes cigarettes, has an informal relationship with her husband, and interacts with him as an equal.

Even when they were living together Sarita's husband beat her; in recent years these beatings have become more frequent. On two occasions, Sarita left her husband and stayed with a girlfriend until her husband kept harassing her and "begging" her to return. Each time he promised never to hit her again, so for her "son's sake" she returned to live with him.

According to Sarita the main precipitating factor in the violence is, "When I ask him too many questions or criticize his parents." However, when he is beating her other reasons also emerge, such as he does not like her smoking and he suspects she is having an affair with his cousin.

On one occasion he beat Sarita because she complained about his mother's spreading rumors about her. He got very angry and started punching her. Sarita responded by saying, "You always hit me because of your mother, yet she never does anything for you or gives you anything," This made him angrier and he hit her more, simultaneously saying, "This will fix you. You talk too much nowadays."

On another occasion Sarita discovered some love letters from a woman her husband had visited on one of his overseas trips. She confronted him and demanded to know who this woman was and whether she was the reason their phone bill was so high. When he refused to answer, Sarita kept screaming and demanding an answer. At this point, he started hitting her, saying that his mother was right, "I had 'trapped' him into marriage by getting pregnant." He punched her so hard (he is a big man, almost twice her size) that she fell against a door and hit her head on it. He then picked her up, threw her across the room, came over, and started kicking her.

On other occasions he hits her because he does not like her to go out with her female friends at night, which Sarita does occasionally.

Besides Sarita's telling me about these incidences, one of her neighbors also verified that Sarita is often beaten, for she hears her screaming. On one occasion, I saw the bruises on Sarita's face, arms, and legs the day after her husband had beaten her.

From these case studies, we can see that women are beaten for a variety of reasons. Generally, unmarried women are subjected to violence for fraternizing with unrelated males or for violating spatial restrictions and thus jeopardizing their own and their families' honor. In these instances, mothers, fathers, or elder brothers dispense the violence, although mothers generally deal with minor misdemeanors as in Vinita's case while fathers and elder brothers deal with the more serious. For example, a twenty-three-year-old married woman, who recounted her tale in the presence of her mother, was beaten severely on numerous occasions by her father until she finally succumbed to his demands that she leave school and marry the man he had chosen for her.

Wives, on the other hand, are beaten by husbands for "talking too much," for arguing with husbands or mothers-in-law, for not showing sufficient deference to husbands and in-laws, or for being suspected of adultery. Violence is used by husbands to demonstrate anger and frustration, to keep women in their place and in control, and, most importantly, to assert and display their power and dominant status in the household. If wives "talk too much" as defined by husbands or argue they are likely to receive a few slaps. The oft quoted threat of *"Bahuth baath niklii ek jhapar de ga"* (If you talk too much I'll give you a slap) frequently becomes a reality.

Interestingly, the words used by husbands as threats were the same for both wives and children. Often even the husband's tone in speaking to his wife bears a remarkable similarity to that used by both females and males to speak to children. Wives in turn respond to their husbands as they would to their fathers, by speaking in quiet gentle tones that demonstrate deference.

The precipitating factors for wife abuse are generally varied and confused. The complaints of the husband's mother combined with alcohol and general discontent with a wife's behavior can result in the beating of a wife. However, neither alcohol nor mothers-in-law alone are sufficient explanations for wife abuse since wives are also beaten when husbands are sober and without the encouragement of mothers-in-law. A more adequate explanation rests in the nature of gender relations and the fundamental inequalities between husbands and wives that give males the power and privilege to beat wives.

While both men and women impose violence on daughters, females express fear of the males in control of them and seldom demonstrate similar fears of their mothers. Females know that men have ultimate authority and that mothers are dispensing violence on behalf of fathers and "the family." Although mothers beat daughters, they also protect them by not always informing fathers about transgressions.

This double-edged behavior results from women's caring attitude toward daughters and an acknowledgment of their common plight as females in a male-dominated culture. On the one hand, mothers beat daughters who jeopardize their own and their families' reputations out of concern that as a consequence daughters may become unmarriageable or not attract a "decent" husband. On the other hand, they protect their daughters as much as possible since daughters soon leave the caring environment of their natal home to take up residence in their conjugal home, where they may suffer much hardship at the hands of mothers-in-law and husbands. Mothers are also wives and daughters-in-law and thus fully aware of the potential difficulties their daughters may encounter. Yet mothers will threaten to reveal information to fathers to deter daughters from continuing rule-breaking behavior. Daughters, like Vinita, sometimes express an acceptance of violence from mothers as a trade-off for not having fathers informed of their misdemeanors. While women may suffer violence at the hands of other women, ultimately it is physical violence from males that they fear most.

The vast majority of my informants explained their compliance with and lack of resistance to unpopular restrictions and constraints in terms of the fear of being subjected to physical violence by the male in control of them. Even the threat of physical violence operates as a powerful mechanism for ensuring women remain within the guidelines of proper conduct, as this explanation given by a twenty-three-year-old stenographer demonstrates.

> I don't leave the office during my lunch hour because if my father sees me or one of my relatives or someone who knows my father sees me, I'm finished. I'll get a good hiding because my father doesn't like me hanging around town. You know what Indians are like. There's eyes and ears all over town. But sometimes, you know, I take a chance and I go. I try not to go in areas where there's likely to be lots of Indians, you know like Cumming Street or Marks Street. But I'm always scared because if I get caught, that's it!

Among married women similar fears exist and their compliance--particularly to unpopular practices of their husbands such as excessive consumption of liquor--is again explained in terms of the fear of physical violence. Comments such as "my husband would kill me," "my husband will cut my arms and legs off," or "I don't wish to be kicked and beaten" are common from wives even though they are not necessarily meant to be taken literally.

While the use and threat of violence combined with powerful familial and purdah ideologies largely ensure compliance, women are not passive or "pathetic" victims of an insidious system. Women are quick to articulate their grievances, express discontent, and even engage (often secretly) in rule-breaking behavior. In many cases women repeatedly engage in the same prohibited behaviors despite having been beaten for doing so in the past, as in Vinita's case, The imposition of physical violence did not operate as a deterrent for Vinita but rather led her to be more cautious and more secretive, For Vinita the stolen moments of freedom to go out and to interact with males were worth a few beatings. Nonetheless, Vinita still feared her father's wrath but hoped for and had sufficient confidence in her mother's discretion.

Similarly, wives like Sarita fight back despite their husbands' beatings. When they argue or confront their husbands they are fully aware of the real possibility of being beaten. Yet they choose to assert themselves and to take that risk. Sarita continued to argue with her husband while she was being beaten and sometimes even deliberately taunted him with comments that exacerbated his anger. Such modern working wives are refusing to unconditionally accept total male control.

Tensions of Modernization

With increasing Western modernist influences, especially among the young middle class, traditional familial ideology is slowly being threatened and undermined. In these families the nature of husband/wife relationships resembles those of Western nuclear families in many ways. For example, husband/wife interactions are more informal and relaxed, women are not constrained spatially and socially to the same degree as other lndo-Fijian women, husbands and wives spend their leisure time together, and they espouse a belief in egalitarian relationships.

The "modern" Westernized Indo-Fijian woman, often with tertiary education and in paid employment, is increasingly asserting and exercising in the household her demand for equal, partnershiplike relations

with her husband. Such women assume they have a right to confront their husbands, demand answers, and argue, The "modern" Indo-Fijian male (like Sarita's husband), on the other hand, by resorting to violence demonstrates a reluctance to totally surrender ultimate power and control despite a somewhat nontraditional conjugal relationship.

With the declining influence of traditional familial ideology and increasing influence of Western modernist ideologies, there is much confusion and uncertainty for some Indo-Fijians in the arena of gender relations. Among the younger, Westernized women the use of physical violence by males is viewed as unacceptable, interpreted as an important indicator of women's subordinate status in the family and community. Women like Sarita question the right of their husbands to subject them to violence and are humiliated and angered by it. At times they leave their husbands for short periods but almost inevitably return, only to be again subjected to violence. Yet, even among these women small doses of violence are tolerated and explained away. The right of males to slap them occasionally is seldom questioned, a consequence of the enduring influence of traditional ideologies, In spite of aspirations to modernity, including equality between spouses and less formal control of wives by husbands, traditional values remain influential.

The competing and conflicting ideologies are a source of tension and conflict in these "modern" families, as they seem to be among urban families in Papua New Guinea (cf. Toft 1985). The influence of modernization, leading to "changing forms of family life" in Papua New Guinea, Strathern argues, places "more, not less, stress on the conjugal relationship" (1985:2). In the Indo-Fijian context, modernization creates similar stresses for unmarried women. With increasing education and under the increasing influence of Western ideologies stressing freedom, individualism, and romantic love, single women are demonstrating a reluctance to remain within the parameters of proper conduct as set by purdah. These women resist parental controls on their spatial movements and social interactions and sometimes even insist they have a right to have relationships with males and choose their own marriage partners. Such independence often leads to the use of physical violence by parents in attempts to control their daughters, as in the case of Vinita.

Sadly, the problem of coexisting, conflicting, and competing ideologies is not easily resolved. The increasing influence of modern Western ideologies does not lead to the complete displacement or demise of traditional familial ideology, The old order does not simply disappear to be replaced by a new order. Instead, a more complex situation emerges

with elements of both orders coexisting, Under these circumstances Indo-Fijians are resorting to physical violence as a mechanism for resolving some of the contradictions.

The use of violence as a mechanism of social control, however, does not negate the importance of the ideological mechanisms of control. Ideology remains the dominant mode of control as opposed to coercion. As Young and Harris argue, in societies where the ideological mechanisms of control dominate, physical violence "becomes restricted to individual violence of one man against one woman" rather than institutionalized violence such as gang rape (1982:471).

While traditional gender ideologies are crucial for securing the subordination of women, factors such as the greater participation of women in education and paid employment and access to Western media sometimes result in the weakening of traditional ideologies, although seldom their total disappearance. In these circumstances, physical violence is used as a supplementary mechanism of control and familial ideology plays a crucial role in women's acceptance of the use of physical violence by men as a way of controlling women, The vast majority of both men and women unquestioningly accept men's right to control "their" women by the occasional use of the *danda.*

Violence: An Acceptable Mechanism of Control

The control of women through the use of physical violence is accepted, seldom questioned, and even positively sanctioned by both males and females in Indo-Fijian society. The occasional slap, punch, or shove usually goes unnoticed, regarded as one of the hazards of being a woman. Transgression of the boundaries of proper conduct by daughters and wives is viewed by the community as sufficient justification for the imposition of physical violence.

Small doses of violence are sometimes considered mandatory, especially for wives if they are to be kept in line and properly controlled. Both men and women believe that once wives experience the power of the husband's hand all their future behavior will be influenced by this experience. Without some violence wives are likely to get out of hand, misbehave, and develop mistaken ideas regarding "who is boss." Men are often heard making remarks that women whose husbands treat them too easily have become spoiled. At other times men make comments such as *"Uske aurat ke chaahii ek aad laath"* (His wife should be given a few kicks) or "If she was my wife, I'd give her a good beating."

Both males and females give little sympathy to victims of wife abuse

unless the male is considered exceptionally violent and the female exceptionally submissive. Physical action toward women who "talk too much" or who irritate their husbands or his kin is considered to be justified by provocation (cf. Chowning 1985:80; Bradley 1985:53). One upper-middle-class, university-educated woman who is a victim of wife abuse gets little sympathy from her friends because they all regard her as having a "big mouth," thus "deserving" the violence. As one male said, "If she was my wife I'd beat her too."

Men who do not beat their wives, especially if their wives are perceived to be deviant in some way, are ridiculed by both men and women. In one case a man whose wife (age approximately forty-two) ran away with another man was ridiculed as being "weak" and "pathetic." As the story goes, "Even when he went and brought his wife back, he didn't give her a beating! But her brother [age thirty-four] gave her a good beating," since she had shamed not only her conjugal family but also her natal family.

None of this implies that extreme cases of physical violence (that is, where the victim requires medical attention) is condoned. On numerous occasions I heard women and sometimes men criticizing husbands who beat their wives frequently or when they are pregnant, or who cause serious injury. Sometimes even mothers, who may have initially incited their sons to beat their wives, intervene during the course of a beating to stop the transgression of the boundaries of acceptable violence. Mothers will similarly intervene when daughters are being beaten by fathers and elder brothers with comments such as, "OK, that's enough. Don't hit her too much. There's no need to keep hitting her. She's learnt her lesson." Significantly, the "Don't hit her too much" comment implies some hitting is acceptable.

Women regard men who do not occasionally slap their wives as being "under the wife's thumb." The English phrase "petticoat government" is particularly popular among middle-class men and women to refer to relationships in which the wife is assumed to be dominant and the male never subjects her to any violence. On many occasions I heard women explain other women's behavior or manner in terms of a husband's failure to use physical means to keep his wife under control. In these cases women recommend a few good slaps from the husband as a way of bringing a woman back into line, A common phrase used by both sexes to describe relationships in which wives are not kept under strict control is *"Uu to apan aurat ke muur pe charhai ke rakhis"* (He has allowed his wife to sit on top of his head).

By recommending, accepting, and condoning physical violence,

women are actively perpetuating the system. Women's acquiescence and contribution to their own subordination demonstrates the power and persuasiveness of traditional gender ideologies. It could be argued that women have fully internalized these ideologies and come to take male control for granted because they are part of an all-powerful, self-perpetuating system that continually reinforces the status quo. But this alone is not an accurate or adequate explanation of women's acquiescence. What appears as a thorough ideological subordination is misleading since women also express discontent and even engage in acts of insubordination. After all, it is their insubordination that results in violence. Whenever women get the chance they "cheat" the system by engaging in rule-breaking behavior--indicating that their ideological subordination is neither thorough nor complete (cf. Jeffery 1979).

Hence, while the ideological subordination of women is an important factor, such explanation alone fails to acknowledge that women are not pathetic victims of an overwhelming system and that they may even have a positive stake in maintaining the status quo. Senior women of the household, for example, are certainly beneficiaries of the system and actively work to maintain and perpetuate the status quo. In this period in their life cycle they enjoy the respect of younger members (both male and female) and wield considerable power and authority over younger women, especially daughters-in-law. As a mother-in-law a woman reaps the benefits of having endured the hardships of being a daughter-in-law and in turn is likely to impose similar hardships on other women (Brown 1982, 1985). For younger women, patience and conformity is eventually rewarded when their sons bring wives for them to supervise and control, the only acceptable route to gaining power and influence, albeit limited power. Without sons, a woman cannot expect to have much power in the future, but with sons she is likely to reap the benefits of the system and enjoy the power and privileges that come with seniority.

Such a system divides the women in a household rather than creating solidarity between them against men. The divergent interests of the different women within households partially explain why women encourage or recommend physical violence for other women. In the majority of instances in my study, the women who recommended violence for other women were referring to their own kin.

The images presented in the popular culture of Hindi films and songs of competition and conflict--between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, the wives of different brothers, the sisters of husbands and their wives--is also the stuff of real life. Stereotypical images of the tyranni-

cal mothers-in-law, the wicked sisters-in-law, and the oppressed daughters-in-law depicted to the point of obsession in Hindi films are not pure fiction but reflections of the real potential. conflict and competition among women of the same household. Mothers compete with wives for their sons' affections, wives of different sons compete for their mothers-in-law's affection and for a greater share of the household resources for themselves and their children, sisters compete with wives for their brothers' affections, and so forth. These conflicts and competitions operate as structural barriers that prevent women from realizing their common interests and from facilitating joint action against males and the system.

But at another level the system that oppresses them also cares for and protects them from the harsh realities of the outside world. Increasing unemployment, lack of job opportunities, and the absence of an adequate state welfare system mean women are dependent on the family-based household for their livelihood. It is no wonder that both young and old women have a positive stake in ensuring its survival. The economic support provided by males is a powerful mechanism that ensures women conform and actively work to perpetuate the system, Without this financial support women could easily be rendered destitute.

Against this backdrop, perhaps the nonconformity and insubordination of the younger modern women is understandable. Unlike older and more traditional women, they do not have the same stake in maintaining the status quo, for they are not totally dependent on males for their livelihood, Similarly, patience and conformity will not bring them rewards: because they are members of modern, Westernized nuclear families, their sons will establish separate households and are therefore unlikely to bring wives for them to control and supervise in the future. Furthermore, the modern younger women living in nuclear households can afford to espouse a general aversion to male violence against women since they are not subjected to the same degree of tension, conflict, and competition that is suffered by women living in traditional extended households. The costs of insubordination for young modern women are not as great as for the more traditional women since they do not have a similar investment in sustaining the system.

Abused Women: What Options?

The powerlessness of traditional Indo-Fijian women becomes glaringly obvious when considering options available to victims of violence. In short, the vast majority have few options but to endure the violence,

wait for seniority, and hope to be reborn as males in their next life.[4] The taunts of husbands during beatings-such as "Where can you go? No one wants you, your family does not want you back"--are generally true. The majority of women have nowhere to go since they are economically dependent on their husbands, and their families prefer they remain married. Such women are locked into violent relationships by the lack of alternatives and an ideology that stresses the permanency of marriage.

Returning to their families of origin is seldom a viable option. Parents may have died or become economically dependent on their sons and brothers cannot be expected to support the additional burden of maintaining married sisters and their children. However, this does not mean that families never support women who desire to leave a violent marriage. Occasionally, women do return if their marriages are exceptionally violent and no children are involved. For example, in one instance, a woman who needed hospital treatment on numerous occasions and became very ill was finally taken back by her parents. But her parents were not economically dependent on others and the woman had no children. More often than not, parents will attempt to talk violent husbands out of such behavior and will coax daughters into persevering with the marriage. After all, marriage is meant to be permanent and women's suffering within marriage is part of the taken-for-granted world.

Even the modern, Westernized working wives are hesitant to leave violent marriages despite their not being totally dependent on husbands for their livelihood. Even Sarita, who on occasion left her husband for short periods, returned for her "son's sake." Children are one of the reasons for women's reluctance to leave violent husbands, but there are also other reasons,

The major reason is the enduring influence of a powerful familial ideology that discourages divorce and praises women's devotion and perseverance. Another reason is the community's disapproval of divorce and divorced women. Despite legal provisions for separation and divorce, only in extreme cases of violence or desertion will the Indo-Fijian community accept divorce. Women who are divorced are regarded with suspicion. They receive little support from their families because divorce is viewed as shameful. Some of the women in my study, particularly young modern women who are having difficulties with their marriage, claim they cannot contemplate divorce because it would bring shame on their family and they would be the targets of gossip and rumor.

The lack of support divorced Indo-Fijian women receive from their families is evident in the greater proportion of Indo-Fijian females, as

compared with ethnic Fijian women, who receive welfare support from the Bayly Trust and Housing Authority Relief Trust (HART). Officers of both welfare groups and the results of my own research confirmed the larger number of Indo-Fijian female clients. The majority of women that I interviewed at the Bayly Trust claim they are deserted, thrown out, or maltreated by their husbands and in-laws and that their own families either did not want to take them back or could not afford to do so. Similarly, HART villages around Suva accommodate many divorced and deserted Indo-Fijian women whose destitute situation makes them eligible for housing. Many of these women have young children and no family or economic support, The fate of these divorced Indo-Fijian women who end up destitute, requiring welfare and food handouts from charities, acts as a powerful deterrent to divorce, keeping women submissive and tolerant even of violent marriages.

For some women, the absence of viable alternatives when their patience and tolerance is finally exhausted leaves them only one option: suicide. By committing suicide they make a public announcement of the suffering they have endured and perhaps finally (although too late) attract some sympathy. Suicide is chosen as a solution for a complex set of problems, not the least of which is physical violence, that an Indo-Fijian woman encounters in her life. A disturbing 203 reported cases of suicide by Indo-Fijian women were recorded by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics between the years 1977 and 1982, compared with twenty-five among indigenous Fijian females. Indo-Fijian women who commit suicide are mainly under thirty, an age that coincides with the period in their life when they are likely to have the least power and control (Haynes 1984). That suicide is the solution chosen by so many Indo-Fijian women is an indictment of the insidious system under which they are forced to live rather precarious lives.

Conclusion

The threat and use of physical violence is a powerful means by which males exercise power and control in the arena of the family. While the enduring influence and persuasiveness of familial ideology ensures female submission with little male intervention, the occasional use and persistent threat of violence consolidates male dominance and female subordination within the family.

The presence of physical violence does not negate the importance of ideology as a dominant mechanism of control among Indo-Fijians. But where physical violence is supplemented with coercion, familial and

purdah ideologies provide the justification and legitimation for its use. The presence of physical violence as part of the taken-for-granted world of being female is an indictment of the status of women in Indo-Fijian society.

NOTES

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1. The research for this paper was undertaken as part of a wider study on gender relations among Indo-Fijians in Suva. The data were gathered over a period of approximately four years between 1983 and 1987. No reference is made to the May 1987 military coup in Fiji because the data were gathered prior to the coup,

2. *Purdah* literally means "curtain," although in common usage it refers to the various modes of secluding women either by confining them to an enclosed space or by veiling them, the strict segregation of the sexes, the "symbolic sheltering" (Papanek 1973) of women, and a moral code of conduct (see Jeffery 1979; Vatuk 1982).

3. For more details on appropriate and inappropriate occupations, see Lateef 1986.

4. When I asked women the question, "What do you hope to return as in your next life?" (the vast majority of them are Hindus and believe in reincarnation), virtually all replied, "Male."

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