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TOPIC: MARRIAGE

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SUBJECT: THE FIJIAN MARRIAGE

In the olden days, (even today) when a small girl is brought up in a home, she is carefully looked - after by her parents. The parents knew exactly that it is their role to play by looking after the girl carefully concerning all the well-fare of her body. When the small girl grew up and her hair is a bit bigger, the parents will tie one side of her hair. This is called the TOBE. This signifies her goodness and youthfulness - virgin. Of course, boys and their parent often look or search for this type of girl.

Come a time when a parent of a boy comes and tell the girls parent of the proposed marriage. The boy and the girl doesn't know anything about their proposed marriage. When parents of the both sides agree - knowing too that the girl is older and ready for marriage - they will come together and ask the girl. During this talking arrangement, nothing is done or any ceremonial event took place. The girl will come in front of the two parent and she will be ask by her father about the proposed marriage. When she agrees, the parent of

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the boy will return home.

Shortly after that, the boy's parent with their relatives will go to the girl's place. They will be taking some tabua for the VAKADONU NI GUSU. This is a ceremony or gift done to girl's parent and her relative in return or thanksgiving for the approval to the proposed marriage by the girl. The boy's relative wish to thank the girl for agreeing to their request. From then on, food is taken to the girl every now and then. The two-proposed couples are not allowed to see each other or talk to each other. Of course they knew about their marriage but they are not allowed to meet. This point is very important because both side of the family must see that the girl will enter her new home (boy's house) still in virgin. This is very important because ceremonies which are going to be held later on is much depended on the girl's virginity.

Not long, the boy's parent and relatives will tkae a tabua (whalestooth) and go to the girl's place. They will present the tabua and ask the girl's parent and relatives if they could take the girl to the boy's place for a prepared feast especially for the young couples.

When the girl's side agree, the boy's parent and relatives will take the girl to the boy's place when the two young couples is going to have their feast. This feast ceremony is called the VAKALI. In fact, no girl's side is present at the small feast. When the girl arrives at the boy's place before the feast gonna begin, the boy's relatives(especially

the women) will change the girl's clothing. This cloth-changing done to the girl is called the VAKAMAMACA. When the girl is changed, she then goes and sit with the boy and there the feast begin.

After the feast, the boy's relatives will take the girl back to her home. With all the Fijian gifts, given by boy's relatives to the girl and a dead animal (cow); the boy's relatives will take the girl then to her parent. This ceremony is also called in some place as VAKABI.

No doubt when the boy's side is bringing the girl back to her parent, the girl's relatives is preparing a small feast too for the boy's relatives coming.

Just after the girl's relatives presented what they are prepared to the boy's parent; the boy's parent and relatives will show forth another tabua and thus presented to the girl's parent and relatives informing them of the date of marriage. Concerning all the activities and decision-making of the marriage ceremony, this is solely the responsibilities of the boy's relatives.

Come the time when the two couples gonna be married. The girl will leave her home and come to the boy's place. In here, the boy's relatives is going to dress the two young couple before going to be bless from the TALATALA or layman (priest).

After the blessing from the priest, the married couples will come to the boy's place for the prepared feast. After the feast, the women from the side of the boy will make the VAILAMAMA of the married girl. In here the new girl is cloth and dress again in new traditional clothing. After dressing the girl, the boy's parent and relatives will take the girl with a tabua, clothing and the magiti(food) to the girl place and present her to her parents and relatives. In this meeting, the boy's parent will inform the girl's parent the date they (boy's side) will come and take the girl to the boy for them to stay or sleep together.

Come the time when the girl is suffered to be taken to the boy. The girl's parent and relatives will bring the girl along and they will be bringing their wishes too such as mat, kumi, tabua and other items. They (girls side) will come and stayed for a while in a house which is not quite far from the boy's house.

While the girl's and her relatives are staying there, a man from the boy's side will come bring, a tabua and informing them all that they are invited and request to come with the girl to the boy's place at this moment of the time, the relations of the both sides come in contact and meet each other. When the girl and her relatives come to the boy's place, they

will first do their SEVUSEVU which is a welcome ceremony. After their sevusevu they will be shown to their villa or place to stay during the night.

Shortly after the showing of their villa, they are told that the TEVUTEVU is about to begin. When the tevutevu started, the girl's relatives especially the women will bring lots and lots of mats and kumi and spread it in front of the boy's relatives (especially women). This will be the same for the boy's side. All this mats and kumi be spread out will be the bed and place for the two couples to sleep on.

After the tevutevu or the showing of the two bedding, the girl is taken back to their villa by her relations. She will be dressed-up again and brought forth to the boy and his relations by her parents and relation. They will be bringing gifts and tabua and offer it to the boy's parent. This ceremony or present of the girl to the boy is called SOLI YANI NI YALEWA (which means the giving out of the girl to the boy). Following that comes the ceremony of KALI NI SUCU (away from breast). This signify to the boy's parent and relations that the authority of girl is given to boy and thus there is no more authority of the parent to their daughter.

In respond to all the ceremony coming from the girl's side; the boy's parent will present another ceremony namely the NAI VOLA. This is the presenting of wishes such as mat, kumi

etc.. to the girl's parents informing and asking them that the married girl is going to leave her former (previous home) home or place to come and stay for good into the boy's house. Thus the girl is entitled to stay in her new house.

When the time comes for the two couples to eat together, they will be sitting on the spread-out mats and kumis - which is mentioned earlier on - which was prepared by both sides of their relations.

On this eating occasion, few are chosen to eat with the two newly married couples. If six comes from boy's side than six also from the girl's side. Those twelve people eating with the married couples will be dress-up neatly in the traditional custom. These people will automatically stop eating when the married couples finished their food. After eating, the six people from this side will exchange clothing with other six. All this exchange of clothing is named the YAU MATE (dead wishes). After eating the married couples will wash their hand in a bowl of oil.

About nine o'clock in the night, it is announced that everybody in house should go outside so the two married couples could sleep. Everybody will go out, the door closed and only the couples will be alone there.

Early next morning about four o'clock, some ladies will come and knock at the closed door so to wake and greet the two

sleeping couples. To come and knock at the closed door, the ladies will be bringing with them a cooked animal specially a cooked pig. When the two couples woke up, the food will be presented and said that the food is a ~~taken~~ gift for waking the two up from their sleep. This ceremony is called VAKAYADRA(wake up!)

On the second night the door will still be closed but early the next morning of the third day, two ladies - one from the boy's side and the other from the girl's side - will come to the house and ask the couples for the evidence concerning the virginity of the newly-married girl.

Looking at the blood as the evidence of the girl's virginity, the two ladies will jump up in joy, they will shout to the top of their voice so that everybody in the ceremony will hear their joy.

Hearing the joyful cry of the two ladies, everybody knew what it meant and no doubt everybody join - in the celebration.

When the fourth day arrives, the two couples are ready to go to bath for the first time since their marriage day.

Some relatives from both side will be going with them. When the girl goes to the bathe she will dye her hair will mixed brown soil.

This bathing will take place in a river or stream. It will be announced that the two couples are going to the stream

or river to do some catching. The people going with them to the stream will do the actual catching of fish but the two couples will collect the catch. Both the couples will have a basket where the catch is stored. If the side of the boy catch a fish, the catch will be put into the basket of the girl and vice-versa.

While the catch is still going, the relatives of the boy will bring food especially the VAKALOLO to the couples catching. After eating, it is then announced that they should come over to the land.

Reaching the land, they will go separately the girl will take her relatives and the boy will take his side. They will meet again when the big feast, known as VAKA BOGI VA, will be held shortly after few hours.

The VAKA BOGI VA (fourth night) is the last big feast where the relations of the boy and the girl come and meet before they depart. This is last ceremony of all the marriage ceremonies. After this big feast, the girl come to her new house and her parents with their relatives goes back to their villages with many wishes in return.

As we seen all ceremonies done to a good and youthful girl virgin. But, no doubt some girl are spoiled before she gave her hand to a boy to be married. In this category, she brought big shame to her parent and relation.

Take for instance, when the two ladies went in and ask for any evidence concerning her virginity, on the morning of the

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third day and found out that she had been cracked already, every atmosphere will be silent. No happy mood is felt in that ceremony. All the sweetness of the marriage-ceremony turns sour. The mood of the atmosphere is very dull then. As we see how important the marriage in the olden days is. If the girl is cracked already, it is just a shame to her parent and relations because now and then during the ceremony, the boy's parent or relation will make signs to the girl's relation informing them that their girl is a spoiled one. Sometimes before the ceremony finished, the girls relations left the boy's place. Of course as you can see that the girl's well-fare is very vital in old Fijian traditional marriage.

VINAKA.