

# WOMEN AND EDUCATION : THE FIJI SITUATION

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the real issues in education in Fiji, be it formal or non-formal, is the lack of women's representation in the various professions. Table 1- shows the occupational distribution of the economically active population according to the 1976 Census Report. Statistics such as these reflect the lack of education and training opportunities offered to women within the last fifty years.

**TABLE 1 : DISTRIBUTION OF TOTAL EMPLOYMENT BY SEX, BY TYPE OF EMPLOYER**

	Total Persons		Males		Females	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Total Economically Active	175,785	100	146,315	100	29,470	100
<b>OCCUPATIONAL CLASSIFICATION</b>						
Professional Technical and related workers	12,649	7	7,877	5	4,772	16
Administrative Managerial	1,656	1	1,529	1	127	*
Clerical and related workers	11,462	7	6,896	5	4,556	16
Sales Workers	9,222	5	7,124	5	2,098	7
Service Workers	11,429	7	6,303	4	5,126	18
Agricultural, Animal Husbandry and Forestry Workers and Fisherman	76,444	43	69,549	48	6,595	22
Production and related workers, Transport Equipment Operators and Labourers	38,680	22	36,979	25	1,701	6
Workers Not Classifiable by Occupation, Unemployed	14,243	8	9,756	7	4,485	15

Source : 1976 Census Report, Suva, Fiji.

Another problem related to the education of women has to do with the drift of young people to the urban areas. Many young women flock to our cities in search of the good life. Many are employed as domestic help and a few are exploited by their employers.

More generally women are struggling to cope with the consequences of social change in a multicultural society which often lacks the necessary mechanisms to provide help to those who most desperately need it.

Pacific women who attended the Mid-Decade Copenhagen Follow-Up Regional meeting in Suva in October, 1980, attempted to define the women's movement and found that, although the younger educated women were more vocal about the discriminatory practices against

women in their nations, they agreed with the older traditional stalwarts that there was a need to develop and articulate a relevant and meaningful Pacific interpretation. The traditionalists believed that although men have always been the accepted heads of Pacific families the special role of women had always been recognised and honoured. In fact in many Pacific communities women were given the high honour of heads of tribes and kingdoms. Women first-born were as highly honoured with titles and privileges as their men counterparts. Male and female roles complemented each other.

This same Pacific understanding was reiterated and confirmed in July 1981, in Papeete, when Pacific programmes that could be promoted by the South Pacific Commission and other regional agencies. Madame Flora Devantine of French Polynesia, in emphasising the special role of women, pointed out that women in development strived to remember the past and learn from it, and live the present as they planned for the future. Many Pacific women have claimed that western influences have degraded the special status of women in the old traditional communities. The early missionaries, for example, promoted feminine modes of Pauline Christianity in middle class Victorian England which resulted in women being domesticated and homebound (Schoeffel and Kikau, 1980).

Today Fiji women have begun to participate fully in the development of their community: There is no discrimination in formal education. The Fiji Education Act does not discriminate against females. Similarly, the Act of the University of the South Pacific, the only university in Fiji, does not discriminate between male and female: "Men and women are equally eligible for any office or appointment in the University or membership of any institution, body or committee of the University, and all Degrees, Diplomas, Certificates and other distinctions or awards and all programmes and courses of study in the University shall be open to men and women alike." (USP Calendar, 1982).

The South Pacific Social Science Association has honoured Pacific women and their effort to promote a Pacific-styled women's movement by devoting to it an entire volume of its publication **Pacific Perspective**, (Vol. 11, No. 2, in 1983,) and titling it "Pacific Women on the Move." The articles contained in this volume, written by women who have been raised or are living in the region, indicate a need for Pacific women to continue to dialogue and interpret their feminine developmental issues.

All the articles reflected, in one way or another, the aspirations of younger educated women and their need to articulate, to the members of their own communities, their struggle for improved conditions for their womenfolk in all developmental activities and programmes.

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

When Abel Tasman first sighted Fiji in 1643 a feudal cultural system existed. In this early community, Fijian women besides being wives and mothers were also craftwomen, traders, horticulturalists and fisherwomen. Female chiefly succession was permitted in the absence of a male heir and Fiji occasionally had ruling female High Chiefs. After marrying, women retained personal property and membership rights in their own groups.

The first Christian missionary arrived in 1835 and after 1859 planters began arriving from England. As Fijians were not willing to work for wages on the sugar and cotton plantations, Melanesians, especially Solomon Islanders, were brought in (often blackbirded) with some of their women folk. When the indentured labour system was introduced in 1879, to remedy the labour shortage, Indian women began to arrive from India as spouses of Fiji-born Indians. Direct descendants of these early labourers were later joined by traders and their families. Today the Indian women make up about half of Fiji's female population (which comprises 49.46% of the population).

Apart from the two major ethnic women's groups, those remaining groups such as Chinese, Europeans, Pacific Islanders, etc. are referred to as 'Others' in population statistics. Fiji, over the last century, has developed into a multi-racial and multi-religious community. Attitudes towards the education of women have changed enormously.

### **FORMAL EDUCATION**

Many developing countries of the world have defined formal education as a conscious organised programme by the government of the day for members of their communities to prepare their citizens for life. In Fiji, the Western influenced formal education system was initiated by well-intentioned missionaries who came from the United Kingdom and who valued the three "r's" as a useful tool for personal development. So the teaching of the alphabet, and the reading of the translated bible, was closely intertwined with their early evangelical work. This remains as the current emphasis of all Christian church school even today.

In Fiji all religious-based authorities that administer a training institution promote the language of that faith consciously in a language programme. So as a result Urdu, Hindi, Fijian, Chinese, English and other languages are taught. Each education authority or agency, religious or otherwise, determines the curriculum/syllabus content of the institution. According to a recent Fiji Ministry of Education Annual Report there were many educational agencies operating in Fiji, in 1981, although the number and type of schools controlled by each differed. (See Table 2). The Fiji system provides the youth of the country with six years of primary education and most have six to seven years of secondary education.

**TABLE 2 : TYPES OF SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION AUTHORITIES RESPONSIBLE**

	Special School	Primary	Secondary	Tech/ Voc	Teacher	Total
Ministry of Education	19	11	3	2	35	
Committee	492	70	10	..	572	
Catholic Archdiocese	37	14	3	1	55	
Methodist Church in Fiji	14	8	4	..	26	
Diocese of Polynesia	5	1	..	..	7	
Seventh Day Adventist Mission	9	3	..	1	13	
Marist Brothers	2	1	..	..	3	
Assemblies of God Mission	2	1	..	..	3	
Sisters of St. Josephs de Clunty	..	1	..	..	1	
Brethren Assemblies	2	1	..	..	3	
Institute of St. Gabriel Brothers	..	..	1	..	4	
Church of Jesus Christ of LDS	1	..	1	..	2	
Marist Sisters	..	..	1	..	1	
Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji	15	6	1	..	22	
Fiji Muslim League	13	6	..	..	19	
Then India Sanmarga Iiya Sangam	19	5	..	..	24	
Dakshina India Andhra Sangam	4	1	..	..	5	
Sanatan Dharam	4	2	..	..	6	
Gujrat Education Society	3	2	..	..	5	
Civil Aviation Administration	1	..	..	..	1	
Rabi Council of Leaders	3	1	..	..	4	
Fiji Electricity Authority	1	..	..	..	1	
International Schools Association	1	1	..	..	2	
Pacific Harbour Development Ltd.	1	..	..	..	1	
Fiji Sugar Corporation	1	..	..	..	1	
Emperor Gold Mining Co. Ltd.	1	..	..	..	1	
League Commercial Enterprises Limited	..	..	..	3	3	
Pacific Commercial School Board	..	..	1	..	1	
Fijian Affairs Board	..	1	..	..	1	
Commercial Education Society	..	..	2	..	2	
Tamavua Education Society	1	..	..	..	1	
Social Welfare Department	..	..	1	..	1	
Society for Intellectually Handicapped	2	..	..	..	2	
Crippled Children's Society	3	..	..	..	3	
Fiji Blind Society	1	..	..	..	1	
YWCA/SYC Board	..	2	2	..	2	
YMCA	..	..	1	..	1	
Private	4	..	2	..	6	
Rehabilitation Council	..	..	1	..	1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>856</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>839</b>

Source: Fiji Ministry of Education Annual Report, 1982, Suva, Fiji

## PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Most educators believe that the first six years of any child's life are very important formative years, which lay the foundation of formal education. As a direct result of good preparatory pre-school education, children perform exceptionally well when they enter the formal school system, usually between the age of five and six. Iole Tagoilelagi of Western Samoa, in discussing the Pacific pre-schools, reminds us that it was not a totally modern invention, but a natural activity which begins in all homes. However, in the same article, Tagoilelagi warns us about modern education; that it brings about crucial and dangerous changes in women's roles in the Pacific as it affects women and mothers' attitudes concerning children. (Tagoilelagi, 1983, p.34).

In Fiji the same concern for the possible deterioration of pre-school-home-based programmes is shared amongst women of the community. Women in Fiji, through their traditional interest in child rearing practices, have initiated improvements in pre-school education. Today there are 200 registered, recognised, pre-school centres which accommodate about five thousand children. There are other unrecognised centres which have been created by concerned groups of women and supported from their meagre resources. These are run by sometimes 'self-styled' pre-school teachers. Some centres are unrecognised and unregistered, because they have not fulfilled the registration criteria stipulated by government.

One of the problems facing pre-schools is the lack of trained teachers. Out of the total of 250 teachers who teach in pre-school centres, only two possess Diplomas in Kindergarten Teaching from Australia and New Zealand, and seven possess Certificates in Primary Teaching from Nasinu Teachers' College, while a few are currently enrolled in Pre-School Certificate courses offered by the University of the South Pacific.

There is great need for teachers and advisers to obtain advanced training, preferably locally. Pre-schools are very much in demand. According to the 31st December, 1982 Bureau of Statistics estimate, there were 34,794 children between the age of 3-5; of these only 5,000 children were in pre-school.

Concerned women have formed a local Pre-School Association which meets annually and has a membership of 28 teachers, mothers, and interested male and female supporters.

## **PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Any child whose parents can afford to send him, or her, to school can now enrol without any problems at the local primary school. Those who are neglected may miss out, but there is usually a social welfare agency that can meet the need. The same applies for secondary education. The opportunities are available but the resources may be the barrier. Some funding agencies are sponsoring youngsters who cannot be supported by their parents or relatives.

Co-ordination of this type of social service, aiding in the provision of basic education for every child, needs to be improved. Many young girls drop out of school, and the reasons for this are numerous and quite involved. Often schools lack the services of well trained and experienced counsellors who can ensure that everyone, including the girls, complete the formal education necessary for their future and which would enable them to enter the career training for which they are best suited.

If one studies the Ministry of Education Annual Reports from 1971-1981 one would notice a marked increase in the number of girls attending primary and secondary schools. In 1981 there were 59,602 boys enrolling for primary education and 56,716 girls. In addition there were 22,693 boys enrolled for secondary and 23,150 girls. The total number of girls attending school between the age of 5-19 in December 1982 was 113,982 while in 1981 it was 79,865. (Fiji Ministry of Education, 1982).

## **THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

Very little in-depth work has been carried out in order to examine sex role differentiation in the school curricula. The subject of sexism in the curricula is not yet recognised as an area of serious concern warranting urgent attention by researchers and/or writers, although locally-oriented literature and materials relevant to Fiji have been developed by the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Development Unit. Furthermore, no conscious attempt has been made to encourage girls to study traditionally 'male' subjects such as science and technology. Staff of the C.D.U. have been drastically reduced recently and a new approach to curriculum development is yet to be devised.

The formal education curriculum content has also been recently criticised by parents and members of the community. Many see the irrelevancy and rigidity of the school curriculum as a major cause of the

current high rate of unemployment, especially among school leavers. Displaced girls and 'drop-outs' are becoming a widespread social problem especially in urban areas.

### **POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION**

According to the 1982 figures, 2.8% of the population or 9,734 people in Fiji received post-secondary education. Of these 40.9% were women and 59.1% were men. Of the women, 65.2% were economically active as opposed to 86% of the men. Contributing factors towards a much lower rate for women include family commitments and traditional attitudes towards working mothers.

Even allowing for the estimated 2% increase in population between 1981 and 1982, and subject to rounding errors, there is still a substantial number of females who drop out from both the primary and secondary systems. These female 'drop-outs', as they are popularly termed, if they are lucky enter one of the few available vocational training institutions, but the opportunities are limited. In 1981 there were thousand more females attending technical courses compared to male students. The reason for this disparity is the preferential entry given to females in stenography/secretarial courses which, it should be noted, are also open to males. There is a shortage of training facilities and opportunities for both girls and boys. In 1981 37 technical/vocational institutions in the entire country were expected to fulfil the needs of an estimated 113,982 school leavers.

A closer examination of the enrolment record, by school type, course, race, and sex at the Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT) shows that there were 928 females enrolled as compared to 1,498 males. No females were enrolled for Maritime Studies, one for Mechanical Engineering, three for Agricultural Engineering and three for Electrical Engineering. For General and Secretarial Studies 119 males enrolled compared to 548 females. (See Table 3).

**TABLE 3 : FIJI INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ENROLMENT, 1981.**

SCHOOL	COURSE PROGRAMME					RACE				SEX		
	Full Time	Sandwich	Block Release	Day Release	Extension Class	Fijians	Indians	Europeans	Others	Male	Female	Total
Agricultural Engineering	-	-	122	-	46	50	100	-	18	165	3	168
Building & C/Engineering	88	-	63	43	68	92	154	-	16	252	10	262
Business Studies	-	96	-	45	558	168	433	1	97	450	249	699
Electrical Engineering	-	-	126	-	14	22	86	-	32	137	3	140
Hotel & Catering Services	108	-	-	-	-	39	35	7	27	57	51	108
General & Secretarial Studies	166	-	-	-	501	255	318	7	87	119	548	667
Maritime Studies	-	8	73	-	-	47	12	2	20	81	-	81
Mechanical Engineering	-	-	56	-	21	17	46	-	14	76	1	77
Printing	40	-	-	-	-	22	16	-	2	36	4	40
Western Division Tech. Centre	42	-	51	40	51	42	139	-	3	125	59	184
<b>Total</b>	<b>444</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>491</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>1,259</b>	<b>754</b>	<b>1,339</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>1,498</b>	<b>928</b>	<b>2,426</b>

Source: Fiji Ministry of Education Annual Report, 1982. Suva, Fiji.

One of the senior lecturers at FIT, when interviewed, stated that Pacific Island female students were denied enrolment for Engineering courses because there were no women's hostels attached to, or near, the Institute. For convenience and for effective study students for Engineering courses are required to live in a hostel, which at this time only accommodates male students.

In 1979, 335 male and 190 female students enrolled as full-time degree students at the University of the South Pacific. In 1980 the figures increased to 369 and 207 respectively. In 1981 435 males and 232 females enrolled. The total enrolment for each of these years of Fiji women students increased steadily. This was mainly due to an increase in the number of girls who reached university entrance level.

The increase in enrolment of females at the University also reflected a change for the better in traditional attitudes towards higher education of women. However, more research is needed in this area. A newly formed Women Graduates Association of Fiji is currently conducting research on local women graduates aimed at obtaining meaningful information that can be used to promote the interests of women in Fiji.

## **NON-FORMAL EDUCATION**

The Ministry of Education in Fiji introduced an adult and community education programme in 1980. According to the 1981 Ministry of Education Annual Report, three primary schools (viz. Naitasiri Bhartiya, Dravo District and Wallotua District) began running programmes for women and school leavers in the areas of Craft, Sewing, Cooking (using locally produced foods), Nutrition, Health, Culture (learning how to use musical instruments and cultural songs) Functional Literacy and Communication in the Home. Knowledgeable and skilled women from the local community shared their skills among themselves. Men attended the evening classes in Functional Literacy, Human Relationships and Communication skills. Both men and women participated in group discussions on parental roles and responsibilities.

One of the objectives of this adult education programme was to provide parents and members of the community with opportunities in educational programmes so that they may be able to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to improve the quality of family life and its varied aspects. However, lack of finance has limited many of the activities.

Several training workshops for women were planned and conducted by the sole female adult education officer in the Ministry of Education during 1982 and 1983. The 1983 workshops were organised at divisional level, there being four administrative divisions. They were for head-teachers and community leaders. One of the objectives of these training workshops was to enable the participants to recognise and understand that the main thrust of community education was to extend the dimensions of understanding of the people about the total environment (social, economic and cultural), as well as equip people with adequate knowledge and skills to solve their problems by identifying and using existing resources.

## **EDUCATION OF WOMEN FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Since the productive use of human resources is the main factor in development, more attention has been given to the key role played by women in development and to the education programmes relevant for women's activities.

In January, 1980, the Women's Interest Programme was introduced by the government under the direction of a Women's Interest Officer. This special programme for women was introduced after much pressure and lobbying from the then existing national organisations such as the Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association (PPSEAWA), Soqosoqo Vakamarama, the Methodist Women's Fellowship, the Roman Catholic Women's League, the Sri Sewa Sabha, the Muslim Sanana (Women's) League and the Dorcas Society.

According to an unpublished 1982 report by the Women's Interest Officer, the main aim of this programme was the improvement of the standard of living in the home and the community through learning activities in the areas of Home Economics, Community Work, Family Education, Craft Development and Marketing and income generating activities such as Piggery, Poultry farming, Tailoring and Gardening. The Women's Interest Office also co-ordinates mainly rural women's activities and conducts training programmes for women's groups in urban areas when requested.

Other government ministries that have specific programmes for women include the Ministry of Commerce and Industries, Ministry of Co-operatives, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Energy and Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Most of these programmes for women contain elements intended for training in specific areas but so far there has been little co-ordination of these programmes.

### **THE ROLE OF VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS**

Voluntary organisations such as the YWCA and the National Council of Women (NCW) and its affiliates, also contribute towards the non-formal education of women.

The NCW was set up to co-ordinate women's activities, at the national level. It studies the needs of the community, especially of women and children and organises resources for action. The Council also collects and redistributes information of service to the community. Since it was inaugurated in 1967 twenty-nine women's organisations have affiliated to it, seven of them national. The Council represents the Non-government Women's Forum. In 1982 the NCW initiated a social awareness, non-formal educational programme for its affiliates and other women in the community who wished to participate. In 1983-84 four divisional

awareness training workshops were held, financed by the Women's Unit of the World Council of Churches. A training manual based on this training programme is to be published later.

### **EDUCATION AND THE CONCEPT OF 'VANUA'**

As shown in Table 2, about 13 religious groups run private educational institutions aided by the government. About half of these religious authorities are Christian based. The other half reflects the religious faiths of the Indian population. The two main religions of Fiji Indians are Islam and Hinduism. Each religious body has its own emphases which are reflected in the school programmes and curricula. All religious schools teach their own set of doctrines, usually with a bias towards the original language of that faith. There has been very little work done on the study of these various systems, and how they compare with the traditional Fijian educational system.

The indigenous Fijians have inherited a 'vanua' ethnic traditional system. This system reflects the blood relationship of Fijians, their origins and their kinship systems. According to Dr. Nayacakalou, an indigenous Fijian classifies his/her kin logically and relates the linguistic usages of kinship to actual events. (Nayacakalou, 1957). Fijian kinship terminology varies considerably with locality and according to the spoken local dialect, but the basic principles underlying the kinship structure vary to a comparatively small degree. Each principle, or value, is related to a specific behavioural pattern. When one wishes to study the 'vanua' system one can only effectively do so by studying the behaviours and the related principles that cause them, with specific references to the locality chosen. Dr. Nayacakalou for his study of Fijian kinship and marriage, used Tokatoka, his home locality. Young Fijian children born into such a vanua system, in whatever locality, normally learn about their particular system from their parents and elders. A Fijian adult therefore learns the system, and knows how to behave, as a result of a socialisation process, which begins during childhood, and continues throughout life.

The kinship system is part and parcel of the Fijian non-formal vanua education system. Women's positions and roles, therefore, are viewed in the totality of a community concept of blood-relationships or kinship ties. (See Fig. 1). These determine the ways people are expected to behave towards one another. For instance, mothers-in-law in some areas of Fiji are not expected to talk to their daughters' husbands; brothers and



Below are areas of women's needs which can be taken as potential issues for further discussion and/or action.

- a) Co-ordination and planning of women's activities (in-country).
- b) Development of a national educational plan for women.
- c) A national survey to identify specific areas of women's needs before new projects are undertaken, especially when overseas aid funding is involved.
- d) Examination of both existing formal and non-formal educational structures with a view to improving the status of women.
- e) Utilisation of existing regional educational institutions (e.g. USP and PTC) for the co-ordination of regional programmes related to women and education in general.

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