Gender, Caste, and Religious Identities

Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab

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ToSatyajit,

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Contents

Abbreviations

ARLM	Annual Report of the Lodiana Mission
BM	British Museum
COP	Census of India, Punjab Report
DAV	Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College
EPW	Economic and Political Weekly
KMV	Kanya Mahavidyalaya
KTS	Khalsa Tract Society
NAI	National Archives of India
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
OIOC	Oriental and India Office Collections
PB	Punjabi Bhain
PNQ	Punjab Notes and Queries
PP	Panchal Pandita
PR	Punjab Record
SKM	Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya
SNNRP	Selections From Native Newspaper Reports of Punjab

Introduction

Ttiis study examines how the notion of being 'high caste', as it developed and transformed during the colonial period in Punjab,[1] contributed to the formation of a 'middle class' among the Hindus and the Sikhs. This process, on the one hand, required redefining interaction with those designated 'low', and on the other meant re-thinking women's relationship to the categories 'high' and 'low'. The organization of a middle class life, in other words, had a significant impact on gender relations, and encouraged the re-examination of women's roles and place in society.

Much scholarly attention on colonial Punjab has focused on the establishment of the mighty bureaucratic British Raj, or has been concerned with the emergence of sectarian politics and the manner in which the communities of'Hindu', 'Sikh' and 'Muslim' acquired a fixity.[2] The impact of these processes is far-reaching in Punjab and it is difficult to write a social history that does not take cognizance of these changes. However, the over-arching presence of the Raj or its impact on the emergence of communal identities must not draw attention away from

[1]In this study Punjab refers to the pre-partition Punjab of colonial India. However, my work does not directly pertain to the present states of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh which were a part of colonial Punjab, but formed distinct regional entities.

[2]See, for example, David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Berkeley, 1988); Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Delhi, 1994); Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century Punjab* (Delhi, 1989, first published 1976).

the persistence of a state of flux, or the simultaneous nurturing of multiple identities. This work is about a people poised at one such historical juncture, where they, on the one hand, strove to both retain and rewrite notions of caste, and on the other, began a division on the lines of being Hindus and Sikhs.

Scholars have shown how the fluid pre-colonial boundaries of caste and community were fixed in certain ways as the orientalist body of 'facts' about the 'different' Indian society grew under colonialism, and as the indigenous elites themselves engaged dynamically with this knowledge.[3] Thus the markers of high caste status—whether in terms of their rituals or customs, professions and occupations, or their attitude towards women including wives, widows and daughters—came to be assessed afresh. The association of certain advantages with a high status also underwrote the need to record and sustain it for some, and for others on its periphery, it opened the avenues for trying to achieve it. The regrouping of a broader high caste that ensued had a special resonance in women's lives.

It may also be pointed out that the Sikhs had an intellectual tradition that denied caste among them, and that also among some Hindus, the Arya Samajis being the prime example, caste was at least intellectually reconceptualized. However, the idea of caste, both as a marker of status, and as an organizing principle of daily life persisted. Nevertheless, it is clear that a certain amount of embarrassment with its praxis crept into the thinking of the middle classes now. This embarrassment is to be understood in the context of acquiring appropriate modernity, a project central to the contest among elites. The divisive effect of caste was also decried for a people who ought to be 'religiously' united, at least in public appearance. If'communitarian' ambitions were a public face of sectarian politics of an indigenous elite, then, caste with all its changes, remained an aspect of its 'hidden' self. This meant that certain aspects of constructing a self-identity worked in the private, and caste, with its renewed emphasis on the regulation of the conduct of women, entered that covert domain. It nevertheless provided an important ingredient to build a middle class life.

In an economic sense, the urban middle classes of Punjab among Hindus and Sikhs came to depend heavily on the bureaucratic structures

[3]See, for example, Arjun Appadurai, 'Number in the Colonial Imagination', & David Ludden, 'Orientalist Empiricism: Transformations of Colonial Knowledge', in C. Breckenridge & P. van der Veer (eds.), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Philadelphia, 1993), pp. 314-39 & 250-78 respectively.

of the Raj and on its largesse In time, they also came to perceive themselves as especially disadvantaged as the British came to be associated in their minds with the agrarian Jats and the Muslims. Politically, the assertion of middle classes was in the sphere of occupation and contest over public spaces. It was in the ideological battles that took place in the public sphere that claims to dominance could be made—whether in the power-play among the indigenous elites or in the subtle challenges posed to the power of the colonial state. However, in very significant ways the material, ideological and social structures on which a middle class life could be built were provided by the practice of caste. The mutating, changing and reorganizing principle of caste provided cognitive structures which allowed the functioning of everyday life. From the workings of such a quotidian life, and from the ideological moorings upon which it rested, the desire for dominance was etched out. Thus, caste and class coalesced in very significant ways in Punjab.

Women and the management of their sexuality were the hallmarks of caste status, while the attitudes that a people harboured towards their women was also an index separating a successful from a failed modernity. Middle class men engaged in intellectual and practical battles seeking superior status devoted substantive energy in reorganizing women's lives, reiterating norms of correct behaviour for them, regulating their relationship with public spaces, and with the castes and classes marked 'low'. In the quest for achieving appropriate class behaviour, women were re-situated within caste.

Historians studying the idea of nationalism have commented on how the indigenous elites resorted to rediscovering, reinventing and rewriting a 'tradition' when faced with a colonial onslaught that ridiculed their cultural conditions. A number of scholars have also spoken of the special onus borne by women in such a predicament as they came to signify and constitute a tradition.[4] However, few have examined the range of attitudes that surfaced in the process of reimagining the past. It was not as if a

[4]Partha Chatterjee,' The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', in K. Sangari & S. Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi, 1989), pp. 233-53; Partha Chatterjee, 'Women and the Nation', in his *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 135-57; Tanika Sarkar, 'Rhetoric Against the Age of Consent: Resisting Colonial Reason and the Death of a Child Wife', *Economic and Political Weekly* (henceforth *EPW)* Sept. 4, (1993), pp. 1869-78; Tanika Sarkar, The Hindu Wife and the Hindu Nation: Domesticity and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal', *Studies in History,* 8:2, (1992), pp. 213-35; & Rosalind O'Hanlon, *A Comparison Between Women and Men: Tarabai Shinde and the Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India* (Madras, 1994).,

people merely discovered an Aryan golden age in which women were educated and participated equally in rituals with men, a constructed ideal in need of re-adoption.[5] What also came to agitate minds was the notion of women's dubious relationship to caste, their intense sexuality, the cunning inherent in their being, and the possible ways of taming their sexuality. Indeed these themes seem timeless—enshrined as they are in the *shastras*, with a reflection in every age. In fact, it can be postulated that rethinking women's sexuality becomes necessary whenever change demands a reorganization of social life, and the coming of the Raj in that sense was no different. The difference perhaps lay in the simultaneous need to sort out questions relating to women's sexuality along with projecting women as symbols of an acquired modernity.

This work deals with the central problematic of women's unhappy relationship to caste in the imagination of men. In a deeply physiological sense, caste was seen to be a quality 'attached' especially to the bodies of men, making women's relationship to this category ambiguous.[6] Necessary as women were to the propagation of the institution, their own place within it was ambivalent. The late nineteenth century high caste men tried once again to grapple with this conundrum. They reviled women for being like *shudras* and simultaneously tried to upgrade them to the life suitable to the high caste, modernist middle classes.

In a similar vein, women's relationship to a 'pure' religiosity was also discussed. As definitions of what constituted right Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam began to take shape, so too did the cogitations on what place women held in these religious communities and what should be their religious mien. Women were seen to be mired in religious customs with no sound religious basis, and a firmer religious identity was sought to be bestowed on them. In the process, many shared cultural and religious experiences, including those between the 'Hindu' and 'Sikh' women,

[5]For the growth of the myth of the Aryan golden age in nineteenth century India see Uma Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past', in Kumkum Sangri & Sudesh Vaid (eds.) *Recasting Women*, pp. 27-87.

[6]'Several castes are like the species of animals and that caste attaches to the body and not to the soul.' P.V. Kane as cited in Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nation and its Outcasts' in his *The Nation and its Fragments*, pp. 173-99. The larger point that Chatterjee is making is the ideological possibility of the outcastes rejecting the caste system altogether. However, I wish to draw attention to the ambivalent position of the high caste women to caste. The periodic 'impurity' of women's bodies is one instance when women's ambiguous relation to 'purity' and caste emerges. But 1 specifically wish to draw attention to the ideological postulations of the late nineteenth century reformers in Punjab, who saw the bodies of men embodying caste, with women seen as having a much more problematical relationship to this category.

between the high caste women and their low caste counterparts, and between high caste women and the low caste men, came to be frowned upon, and a religion suitable to an appropriate class and 'communal' behaviour worked out.

The striking new emphasis on the old and venerated ideal of the *pativrata*[7] must be understood for the multiple attractions it had in our period. The extreme flexibility of the concept, in that it could be moulded and used to suit a new middle class life as much as accord a caste to women, or urge them towards 'correct' religious rituals, accounts for its popularity. The idea of the pativrata was reinvented by the new elites to establish women in, indeed pin them down to, new role expectations demanded of them.

If the pativrata wife became the ideal, the non-ideal woman was the wilful, obstinate, and a sexually aggressive *kupatti*—a quarrelsome woman bent upon stripping men of their fragile honour *(pat)* by persistently dealing in cultural practices now deemed opprobrious by the middle classes. Between the ridiculing of the non-ideal type of woman and the worshipping of the ideal, men acquired yardsticks to measure all women and place them in appropriate slots. The ideal of wifely devotion, with all its material, social and cultural connotations allowed men to deal with not only wives, but also widows, daughters, sisters, and mothers.

In a significant way, then, this work is about the emergence of new high caste, middle class patriarchal structures among the Hindus and the Sikhs, and the ideological pillars on which it rested. The discursive and symbolic realms through which ideologies hope to homogenize values in a given society are, of course, studied here. But the term ideology is also used in a larger sense. The manner in which ideologies influence the experiential realm js of special interest, and the way in which they come to provide the invisible colour of daily life itself is explored.[8] Ideological discourses necessarily try to suppress conflict and dissonance, engaged as they are in perpetuating a particular power structure. However, this work is acutely conscious of the fact that a discourse produced by an elite of men, in our present context, hid under its smoothness many contestations and conflicts. The negotiation and suppression of such dissent is the essential part of producing an ideology. However, a

[7]In the Gurmukhi script *pativrata* is written as *patibrata.* For the sake of consistency and readability I have used pativrata throughout, except when quoting from a Gurmukhi text. All Indian language words are only italicized the first time they are used, afterwards appearing in normal typescript, unless reused after a long gap.

[8]Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London, 1991), p. 221.

consciousness of the trajectory of discourse-production makes one sensitive to the many voices—hidden, suppressed, or raising their pitch—that lay beneath the surface. This creates a space for hearing women's voices, when they might not be otherwise audible.

When dealing with patriarchal structures working to establish a contested legitimacy, one is in danger of writing a history peopled with cardboard men endlessly exhorting and moralizing women. Women similarly appear as victims, wronged, manipulated and oppressed. This is an aspect of dealing with ideologies keen on constructing and upholding ideal masculinity and a safe femininity. While men in their writing often deliberately denied confusion over correct behaviour arising out of lived experience, the change, as it came, meant different things to women. It came for them with new choices of assertion—in education, new careers, or in new valuing of domesticity; but it also came with many losses—of cultural spaces, ofpower over kinship structures, and of a special spirituality. Also sometimes the oppressiveness of new structures led to protests, either through their rejection, denial of cooperation or even rebellion after cooperation. In such a situation, women's voices may appear more layered, nuanced, human. This is, as already posited, a necessary corollary of dealing with specific historical sources. However, it may well be worth reminding oneself that men and women were both subjects of ideologies, subjected to them, as well as actors who created them.[9]

Sources

At this stage the significance of some of the materials used in this study may be pointed out. The specificity of some of these sources relates to firstly their 'newness', in the sense that these materials have not been used by historians to construct a 'social history' of Punjab, if they have been used by them at all. These are not only the myriad journalistic pieces, but also consist of the didactic pamphlet, the semi-fictional morally edifying tract, the fumbling new novel innovative of the modernist prose, as also the mushrooming of the 'relic' of the old-type of verse in the form of *jhagrras* and *kissas*—all a product of the new print

[5]For a plea that a study of gender relations must involve an examination of ideas about masculinity see Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Issues of Masculinity in North Indian History: The Bangash Nawabs of Farrukhabad', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 4:1, (1997), pp. 1-19. Also see idem., 'Community Identity and Sexual Difference in South Asian History', Paper presented at the India Fifty Conference, University of Sussex, 25-27 September 1997.

revolution of the second half of the nineteenth century in Punjab. Second, the historical production of these materials was enmeshed to some extent in the 'politics of language', an aspect of the gradual condensing of the sectarian divide in Punjab. Here, I attempt to comment briefly on the literary form and language of the materials, and their utility for historians, for which I have found little space elsewhere in this work. Though I have also made extensive use of 'official' records, the unpublished files of the Home Department, and the manifold published reports, as well as utilizing some missionary records, the following comments are not related to these second, more 'orthodox' sources of the historian.

Though part of the conventional wisdom, little systematic research has been undertaken by historians of Punjab to show the manner in which divisions over the use of language (Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu) and script (Gurmukhi, Devnagri, Urdu) fed into rigidifying communal identities.[10] The process of how by the late 1920s in Punjab the Sikhs came to appropriate the Punjabi language as theirs, the Hindu leaders struggled to unlearn Urdu (the 'official' language as also the medium of teaching in government schools) and pick up the rudiments of Hindi[11] and then initiate its sanskritization, and the Muslims identified themselves with Urdu has yet to be analysed in detail. While these processes were dearly visible in the period and materials under discussion, the picture that emerges is much more ambiguous than has hitherto been recognized. The protean use of language was more visible at the covert levels of reform. This was a level at which both the actual contravention of the aspirations of the sectarian leadership occurred, as well as where many strained to accept lingual dictates coming from higher up, but did not succeed in achieving their self-imposed goals, or where a confusion remained as to what these goals were in the first place. This 'floating' character of

[i0]For a study of the manner in which the politics of language developed over the use of Hindi/Hindustani/Urdu in north India under the colonial regime see David Lelyveld, The Fate of Hindustani', in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, pp. 189-214.

"The example of Lala Lajpat Rai is a case in point. He inherited a highly eclectic tradition in his Aggarwal Baniya household. His grandfather was a strict Jain, his father so attracted to Islam that he read the *namaaz* and kept *rozas*, threatening at a point in his life a conversion to Islam, his mother was from a Sikh family who in her marital home took care of'Hindu' rituals. Lajpat Rai, taught by his father, was himself proficient in Persian and Urdu. He learnt Hindi only at the time of the Urdu-Hindi controversy in Punjab, supporting the stand taken by the Arya Samaj, the organization to which he remained devoted in his life. Lala Lajpat Rai, *Atma Katha* (Lahore, n.d.). Despite learning Hindi, Rai's oratory was at its best in Urdu. See K.L. Gauba, *Friends and Foes: An Autobiography* (Delhi, 1974), p. 59.

language points to a situation where a communal divide was not as apparent as it has been made out to be among the people under discussion. When this is taken in conjunction with what has been recently pointed out as an idiosyncratic trajectory of modernity of the many languages of India, the persistent differences between their written and spoken forms, the simple formula that links languages to communities becomes inflected with many complications.[12] This is especially significant for Punjab of our period where the lingual cleavage of the 'public sphere' was countered by the use of the Punjabi language (albeit with its many dialects) by the various communities at home.

Once again, a sensitivity to the analytical possibilities of the category of gender yields surprising new perspectives. It has been well known, for example, that the educational programme for women undertaken by the indigenous reformers was closely supervised by them. But in what language were women to be imparted their religious and moral education? While Urdu continued to be taught in indigenous schools set up for boys, the Hindu and Sikh reformers absolutely refused to instruct 'their' girls in this language. It was not only because Urdu came to be seen as an 'alien' language associated with Muslims and so capable of corrupting the 'purity' of Hindu women, but also because Urdu was the language of the officialese, and girls were not taught to do clerical jobs or *navkriP* Thus in the Arya Samaj primary schools for girls that began to multiply in the province by the end of the nineteenth century, the medium of instruction was Hindi. Even though the common language of interaction at home may have been Punjabi, the knowledge of different scripts on the part of literate and middle class women and men must have created many a piquant situation at home Lala Feroze Chand, born in Gujranwala in 1899, a participant in the early nationalist movement in Punjab, and an established journalist later, was probably one of the few who escaped getting caught in this curious situation. He recalled in 1967 how his mother, being a good Arya Samaji, taught him Hindi at home before he joined school and became proficient in Urdu.[14]

[12]David Washbrook, 'To Each a Language of His Own: Language, Culture, and Society in Colonial India', in P.I. Corfield (ed.), *Language, History and Class* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 179-203.'

"Quoting Miss Greenfield of Ludhiana, G.W. Leitner, the champion of oriental learning in Punjab, and a critic of the governmental educational policy, showed the particular distaste of some Punjabis for teaching Urdu to girls for they argued that they did not want girls to become *munshis* and do *naukri,* G.W. Leitner, *History of Indigenous Education in Panjab—Since Annexation and in 1882* (Calcutta, 1882), p. 109.

"'•interview with Lala Feroze Chand conducted by Dr. Hari Dev Sharma, Delhi 15.2.1967 (NMML).

A striking aspect of a lot of materials under scrutiny here that were meant for 'reforming' women and carrying the new ideological messages to them is the extensive use of the Punjabi language in the Gurmukhi script. Among the high castes of Punjab, this reflected a situation where a fair number of women were literate, even if not formally educated, and who were 'familiar' with some religious texts in the Gurmukhi script.[15] Thus Leitner, when inspecting the state of indigenous education in Punjab in the beginning of 1880s noted the relatively high degree of literacy among the higher classes of women of all communities.[16] Miss Greenfield, a missionary in Ludhiana, commented on the comparative ease with which women picked up the Gurmukhi script, and their facility with Punjabi even in comparison to Hindi.[17] Bhagat Lakshman Singh, a Singh Sabha reformer of 'Kohli' Khatri parentage, some of whose ancestors were renowned saints of a tradition straddling the Hindu and Sikh paradigms, and who converted to Sikhism in his adulthood, noted how his mother picked up Gurmukhi at the age of twenty.[18] The point that I am striving to explain through these diverse examples is, then, the reason behind the extensive use of the Punjabi language, often in the Gurmukhi script, but also at times in Nagri, to carry the reformist message to women. That the literacy skills of high caste, middle class women imposed their own logic on the language controversy in Punjab, sometimes feeding it and at other times contradicting its principles, needs to be acknowledged and examined.

Let us begin with those materials where the lingual and sectarian divisions matched. I have made extensive use of school journals—the

[15]I use the term 'familiar' here to bring out the myriad uses to which the written word is put in semi-literate societies following the analytical light thrown on these questions by Chartier. Thus women may have read individually or may have heard readings of certain popular texts at gatherings. See Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France* (Princeton, 1987). Also idem., *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations* (London, 1988).

[16]*History of Indigenous Education,* p. 97.

[17]ibid., pp. 109-10. There are a number of amusing anecdotes that demonstrate the problem Punjabi women had initially faced with the new sanskritized names for children favoured by the Arya Samajis. Thus the litterateur Bhisham Sahni recalled how his brother Balraj (the famous actor of Indian cinema) was initially named Yudhishthir by his parents, an appropriately sanskritized name of the eldest of the mythological Pandavs. However, their father's sister *(bua)* could not pronounce the name, so it was changed to Balraj. Nevertheless, the fervour for 'Hindi' names as opposed to 'Punjabi' ones was not given up by the family. Their sister Veeran Wali was renamed Ved Wati. Bhisham Sahni, *Balraj—My Brother* (Delhi, 1981).

[18]Bhagat Lakshman Singh, *Autobiography* (ed. by Ganda Singh), (Calcutta, 1965).

Panchal Pandita (later also *Bharti)* of the Kanya Mahavidyalaya (KMV) of the Jullundur Arya Samaj in Hindi, and the *Punjabi Bhain* of the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya (SKM) of the Sikh reformers in Ferozepur in Punjabi. The former started publishing towards the end of the nineteenth century and carried through till the middle of the second decade of the twentieth century, being replaced later by *Bharti. Punjabi Bhain,* on the other hand, brought out its first issue sometime in 1907, and continued its publication into the 1920s. These journals were major vehicles for the transmission of the ideologies of the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha movements to women, and their readership was not confined to only those associated with the schools. Contained in their many issues were articles which were topical, historical, informative or morally instructive in nature, written by both men and women. In this ideological surfeit of ideal behaviour, however, one also finds the occasional dissonance, a woman who not only dared to think differently, but also culpably put that in writing. These journals have also been an important source to draw out biographical sketches of some women participants of these movements.

Among some of the other periodicals meant for a more general (male) readership, the early and prolific journalistic efforts of the Arya Samajis have been of particular value in tracing the reformist stand on some controversial issues, for instance, on the question of widowhood or child marriage. *The Arya, The Arya Patrika,* and *The Regenerator of the Aryavarta* (all in English), were among the early journals of the Arya Samaj whose pages have yielded important insights into these issues. Though these journals were in English, both the Arya Samajis and the Singh Sabhaites used other languages of Punjab for purposes of propaganda and dissemination of their ideology, even if they chose to identify with just one.[19] Some of these journals have also been examined and their appropriate references given.

Of tremendous importance to the present study are the numerous tracts and pamphlets that were published in abundance in our period, specifically carrying the reformist message in the simplest and the most obvious way possible. It is here that one comes across the extensive use

[19]The Arya Samajis were among the early exploiters ,of the potential of the written word in Punjab. They published journals in Hindi and Urdu too, besides English. The Singh Sabha reformers began their publishing crusade a little later, but deployed it equally efficiently, writing in Punjabi, English and U rdu. On the publishing feats of the Arya Samaj see Kenneth W. Jones, 'Sources for Arya Samaj History^ in W.E. Gustafson & K.W. Jones (ed.), *Sources on Punjab History* (Delhi, 1975), pp. 130-69. On the Sikh reformers see N.G. Barrier, *The Sikhs and Their Literature* (Delhi, 1970).

of the Punjabi language, mostly in Gurmukhi script, in order to carry new messages to women (though tracts were published in all languages, including English, depending on the target audience in mind, and the particular message disseminated). The Arya Samajis, the caste reformers, whether Aroras or Khatris, educationalists with varying sympathies, all. used Punjabi, along with the Sikh reformers, especially in the nineteenth century, to propagate their ideas. It is also here that the older affiliations of Punjabi with Braj, or its newer evolving structure and idiom, or a desire on the part of some to break from it into Hindi become visible.[20] Lahore was the fulcrum of such publishing activity, but Amritsar was close behind, and there were many lesser centres as well.

The tracts of the Khalsa Tract Society (KTS) set up in 1894 by some Singh Sabha reformers (mostly under the aegis of Bhai Vir Singh), and published largely by the Wazir Hind Press in Amritsar, have been an invaluable source material for this work. A close reading of some of the numerous tracts churned out by the KTS has been undertaken for the first time here, the focus being on those related to familial matters and the ideal behaviour of women, which formed a very large chunk of the overall repertoire of the Society. A study of these tracts has been rewarding from many points of view. First, they have uncovered the peculiar mindset of an emerging middle class, high caste society, with its own phobias and insecurities. This is especially true for the early tracts, where the class/caste concerns appear more compulsively than the forging of a Sikh identity, for which the tracts were ostensibly written. Second, these tracts reveal the experiments undertaken by the Singh Sabha reformers with the Punjabi language in order to standardize it, and evolve a puritan, modernist prose.[21] This involved not only shedding the idiomatic use of the language, but also excising from it its everyday use (the Indian lingual paradox that Washbrook has referred to). For our purposes it is important to note that purifying language and purifying women were closely associated projects; reforming women, then, at the heart of varied

[20]On the historical evolution of Punjabi see Christopher Shackle, 'Some Observations on the Evolution of Modern Standard Punjabi (MSP)', in J.T.O. Connell et. al. (eds.), *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto, 1988).

[21]ibid. The first of the three phases in the evolution of MSP that Shackle refers to is under discussion here. Shackle notes the use of Majhi dialect of central Punjab as the basis of this standardization, but also carrying strong inflections of the western Lahndi. This matches the regions associated with the high castes of Punjab. It was, of course, G.A. Grierson, who in his linguistic survey identified and analysed the dialects of Punjab. See his *Linguistic Survey of India—Vol. IX—Specimens of Western Hindi and Punjabi* (Calcutta, 1916).

reformist activities.[22] Another notable feature of the evolution of the Punjabi language was its parallel trajectory with the construction of the Sikh identity. As the language became standardized and free of'dross vulgarities', it undertook to discourse on what should be the ideal behaviour of its constituents, including an attempt to structure the day of the average ideal Sikh denizen. Lastly, it was from these tracts, most of which were semi-fictional in nature, many were even able to stretch the thin plot into two parts, that the novel evolved, or, at least, was very closely related.

Very little is known about the evolution of the novel in Punjabi, and whatever analysis does exist is confined to the work of that stalwart of Punjabi literature, Bhai Vir Singh. Little is known about some gauche early translations of Bengali novels into Punjabi, the emergence of the overtly titillating novel, or the one carrying an obvious social message.[23] The titillating novels, for instance, are interesting to the historian because they made the fears about social change among the conservative elements of society, or even those of parvenus, an excuse to be promiscuous, or surprisingly, even moralize. The exhilaration generated by the print revolution encouraged some to simultaneously experiment with novels of different genres all at once. Bhai Amar Singh, for example, whose novels have been discussed in some detail in the main body of this work, and whose 'social' novels were rather successful, also wrote detective novels, and those meant to generate humour. Whatever the fate of his other productions, his social novels were successful, some picked up by the intellectuals of the period as examples of good literature in Punjabi, meant to generate right morals. Though never flagging in their didactic tone, some of the fictional characters of Amar Singh (and not necessarily the central ones) developed with a logic of their own, so that McGregor's statement in the context of some early Hindi novels that vital knowledge was gained of a section of society can be applied here as well.[24] Amar Singh's novels are of a special interest here, for they are directly concerned about the middle class under study. The observations of some of the commentators on one of his novels, that it was about 'a joint Hindu-Sikh

[22]For an example in which languages are represented as women see Christopher R. King, 'Forging a New Linguistic Identity: The Hindi Movement in Banaras, 1868-1914', in Sandria B. Freitag, *Culture and Power in Banaras: Community, Performance, and Environment, 1800-1980* (Delhi, 1990), pp. 179-202.

[23]On the evolution of the novel in India seeT.W. Clark (ed.), *The Novel In India: Its Birth and Development* (Berkeley, 1970).

[24]R.S. McGregor, 'The Rise of Standard Hindi and Early Hindi Prose Fiction', in *The Novel In India*, pp. 142-78.

family,' 'the honour of a joint Hindu family/ and 'the domestic life of the Punjabi homes' brings out their significance for this work.[25]

Lastly, there is a need to introduce another literary genre that has also been extensively used in this study, and which has provided a fresh perspective to the abundant reformist output. The literary form and content of the *jhagrras* and *kissas,* a sort of collapsed new 'print' version of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries of the 'pure' forms of jhagrras and kissas[26] (if, in fact, such pure forms existed) has been analysed at length at junctures where they have been referred to in this work. It may suffice here to say that whatever political role such literature played in the early part of the nineteenth century, and the ways in which it was a product of elite and popular culture,[27] by the end of the nineteenth century this genre was bridging the gap between the elite among the reformers and the 'people' by carrying forth the reformist message in a popularized version. The necessary ambivalence involved in carrying new messages in a given literary form has been commented on elsewhere. Here, it may be worth noting that one of the ambiguities of concurrently tackling reform and entertainment was the inventive use of the Punjabi language in which all of this literature appeared. The persistence of common, 'vulgar' language, moreover, appearing in lurid and alluring verse, along with, at times, popularizing and rendering understandable the reformist lingual innovations, was surely a fantastic feat that deserves attention and analysis. That it is also a comment on the persistent popularity of the Punjabi language among a religiously divided people is another matter.

So what was the reach of these new ideas concerned with re-fabricating people's lives, of shaping the contours of an inevitable metamorphosis? In other words, what was the reach of ideologies?

If we confine ourselves to the statistics of a given readership—for instance, of the journals mentioned above—then, we are dealing with no more than a few hundred concerned individuals. The school journals, on the other hand, had a captive audience amongst their students, but these will again amount to very limited numbers. However, there must have been a common, almost an imperceptible agreement on the mode

[25]See the introductory note to Bhai Amar Singh's novel, *Char Da Nirbah* (Lahore, n.d.) [26]On the effect of print culture on a particular form of kissas see Frances W. Pritchett, *Marvebui Encounters: Folk Romance in Urdu and Hindi* (Delhi, 1985).

[27]For such an analysis and a brief comment on the Punjabi jhagrra as a farce between two stereotypical members of the community see C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 208.

and content of education between the parents who sent their girls to school and the teachers who tutored them.

It is this quieter, impalpable, shadowy mode of dissemination of ideas that is of interest, a spread of thoughts and attitudes that arise out of, and in turn create, a likeness of frames of mind. And some ideological postulations had an especially receptive audience. Thus the KTS pamphlet *Patibrat Dharm* ran into at least five editions. The works of Bhai Ditt Singh appeared in multiple editions, and numerous pamphlets and novels ran into two editions.

More pertinently, the appeal of the new ideas on women, sexuality, and conduct of life can be gauged from their influence on the literature that the reformers themselves positioned in opposition to these writings. The pulp literature of the period, whether the titillating novels dealing in soft-porn, or the libidinous kissa alluded to earlier, had a moral framework similar to that of the reformers. The raunchy novel, for example, moralized in the reformist fashion, though its interpretation of particular messages emanating from varied, often contradictory sources might be a sifted, straightened out version of'a' reformist stance. Undoubtedly the messages transmitted in turn by this pulp literature were multifarious, and had little in common with the reformist intent, yet the separation of right from wrong, of good from evil, often followed the newly prescribed moral laws. At this level, then, the reformist message had moved beyond its target audience, and had in fact percolated to different levels of society, and became open to different appropriations and interpretations.

It is also worth noting that some new ideas came in old garbs, most eloquently the idea of the pativrata. Similarly the use of proverbs, encompassing the distilled everyday verities of life, were easily placed in the business of living. The use of old proverbs, folk-songs and folk-tales, located in new situations was an interesting deployment of old techniques to achieve new aims. This allowed for an imperceptible change in the thoughts guiding daily life.

But what about oppositional ideas and ideologies? As already pointed out, these were necessarily dealt with in the process of formation and dissemination of new thoughts. The persistence of opposition, and there is evidence of that, was a reflection of the conflict the imposition of new ideas created, especially the disquiet it engendered in some women. It is indeed in the strength of some new ways of voicing dissent that the shackles of dominant ideologies can be broken. As the new ideas progressed, they also created spaces for the success of new ways of thinking.

CHAPTER ONE

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Gender, Caste, and Religious Identities in Punjab

A few steps inside Anarkali, there was a new shoe shop, run by a well-respected Kshatriya gentleman, a Master of Arts from Punjab University, who was something of a pioneer. His shop had a signboard reading, *'B.A. bane lohar to M.A. chamar ho/Phir dekhiye bahar keh kaisi bahar ho'.* (When a B.A. becomes a blacksmith and an M.A. becomes a tanner, then let's see how the country flourishes.) Not only was it unusual for someone with a university degree to take up shopkeeping but among Hindus anyone who handled skins or leather for a living was considered an Untouchable.[1]

Despite almost two centuries of British colonial administration and the efforts of western influenced Hindu reformers in the nineteenth century, the Hindu caste system entered the twentieth century almost unchanged. At its apex were the Vedic Brahmans... at the bottom were the Untouchables.[2]

In the first account printed here, Ved Mehta, narrated to his readers the new experience of his mother going shopping in the Anarkali *bazaar* in Lahore, escorted by her new husband. This anecdotal account was filled with a nuanced understanding of changes occurring in the 'system' of castes. On the one hand Mehta displayed a pride in his father's (as well as his own) and the 'gentleman's' kshatriya credentials, and on the other he was acutely conscious of the inability of all 'kshatriyas' to retain the 'purity' of their occupations in the changed circumstances. The hitherto low castes and Untouchables were threatening to break the high castes' monopoly over education and jobs, leaving them to fend for themselves

'Ved Mehta, *Daddyji* (London, 1972), p. 140.

[2]*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol. 2* (Chicago, 1997, 15th edition), p. 931.

by taking on partially the work fit for the low, i.e., dealing with leather. Shopkeeping, however, was a Khatri occupation, but the 'pioneer' gentleman felt compelled to explain his entrepreneurial skills of selling 'polluting' leather shoes, by alluding to a social situation where things were anyway topsy-turvy. Mehta also showed the profession favoured by the educated 'Khatri-Kshatriyas'—government service—scored over shopkeeping.

The second statement taken from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* feeds the notion of an unchanging India, where caste continued to have a hold over the religious-minded people in the otherwise modernizing twentieth century. This was so despite the apparently 'progressive' (or neutral?) presence of the British in India for almost two centuries, and the laudable efforts made by its own 'western influenced' reformers to bring the abhorrent system to an end. Moreover, not only did the caste system survive, it retained its 'age-old' pattern of segmentation, with Vedic Brahmans on top, and the Untouchables at the bottom.

This chapter sets out to introduce the people who are the subject of study in this work, examining their class, caste, and religious affiliations. The central concern, however, is with probing the manner in which an understanding of caste fed notions of the self among these people. The chapter opens with a brief discussion of the debate among historians on the question of the influence of the colonial state in reifying the institution of caste. Is the above quoted second statement of stasis in the institution of caste in the colonial 'interregnum' the correct picture? The question is analysed by looking at the impressions one has of the significance of caste in pre-colonial Punjab, and the changes introduced through colonial intervention. However, the intention is to show the ways in which the indigenous elites themselves reinterpreted caste and wrought changes in it to fit in with their various social and political goals, against a background of colonial administration. Even though Mehta's statement cited above may depict a people bemused by seemingly uncontrollable changes in the institution of caste, the argument here is that Punjabi high castes themselves participated in manipulating, changing, and redesigning caste for their purposes.

Caste and Colonial Intervention

It is difficult to sum up briefly a debate that has aroused passion among historians and other intellectuals, viz., what role did the colonial state play in the politics of caste in India? Not only do scholars hold dramatically

divergent views on the subject, but their polemic is also coloured by, and contributes to, the raging controversies on the question of caste today.

Bernard Cohn, writing in the 1960s, had commented on the orientalist gaze through which the colonial authorities saw India as an essentially caste-based society. He had also shown how the requirements of administration, combined with new forms of knowledge, could lead to the freezing of castes. The pigeon-holing of people into easy-reference categories created the illusion of knowing the colonized peoples.[3] In an important statement more recently, Nicholas Dirks has spoken of the 'invention of caste' by colonialism in India.[4] Dirks is of the opinion that the colonial authorities made caste a central institution to depict an essentially different (from the West), and a 'traditional' civil society of India. He goes on to state that there was nothing traditional in the manner in which caste stratification came to be reified in Indian society, and that the innovation of the colonial state lay in the ways in which native voices and opinions were appropriated by 'colonial forms and logics of knowledge.'[5] Thus, caste itself was not new, but the specific range of meanings it came to hold in the colonial period was. The methods and modes of information gathering, including the employing of Brahmans to gather textual materials, the privileging of certain kinds of information over others, and the use to which this knowledge was put, were all constitutive of innovation. New fields of meaning were created by the decennial censuses, legal codes, revenue systems and the like. A salient aspect of Dirks' argument is that the pre-colonial states in India had considerable power in adjudicating questions of status and caste of social groups. The colonial view that looked at India as a rigidly religious society where the Brahman was on top of the fourfold *varna* hierarchy, above the king, led to the arresting of indigenous social processes of change and mobility.

Dirks' critique extends to Louis Dumont who took an essentially religious view of Indian society in his *Homo Hierarchicus*.[6] Dumont's work was based on ancient Indian texts and ethnographic studies of rural

[3]Bernard S. Cohn, 'The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia', in his *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi, 1987, first published in 1968), pp. 224-54. Also see the Introduction in Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, 1996).

[4]Nicholas B. Dirks, 'The Invention of Caste: Civil Society in Colonial India', *Social Analysis*, No. 25, Sept., (1989), pp. 42-52. Also see his *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1987).

[5]"The Invention of Caste', p. 48.

[6]Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (Chicago, 1980, first published in English 1970).

society. His work carried the implication of an essentially unchanging rural India, deeply divided by caste hierarchy. Dumont's view on caste as a fourfold *vama* based system, organized around the central axiom of purity and pollution, where the Brahman emerged as more powerful than the king, has come under a lot of criticism.[7] Sociologists have, for example, pointed to not only the greater relevance of studying the *jati* aspect of caste, but have also shown that the mutual ranking *ofjatis* is often unclear, ambiguous, and varied in different regions, a situation conducive to caste mobility. Pre-colonial kingship exercised a powerful right to settle caste disputes, a social process which came to a halt under the British.[8]

In contrast to the above discussed views that point to a structural change in the perception of caste in colonial India, historian Christopher Bayly questions the intrusive character of colonial rule in India.[9] According to Bayly, the British only 'indirectly stimulated' changes through their ranking and grading that were intrinsically occurring in Indian society.[10] Bayly has shown how the caste system incorporated within its fold the hitherto nomadic and pastoralist people in pre-British India. He noted how 'brahmanism' with its organizing concepts of purity and pollution, caste endogamy and hierarchy, only received a further stimulus under pax Brittanica, as some regional elites broke free of 'Muslim' rule. 'Brahmanism', then, was not an invention of the colonial masters, but was an ideology adhered to by many sections of the Indian society, among whom were the politically and socially powerful commercial and mercantile caste groups.[11] Brahmanism, Bayly further posits, was always visible in the great centres of Hindu pilgrimage, and ritual recension of texts, and devotional *bhakti* were the hallmarks of places where Hinduism dominated. In her study of the fight for a ritually higher status among the elite families of Marathas, and its denial by a powerful group of Chitpavan Brahmans, Rosalind O'Hanlon too has shown how brahmanic values were growing in the indigenous society in the nineteenth century.[12]

[7]It is not my intention here to detail either Dumont's view or its extensive critique among sociologists. For a recent exposition of Dumontian view for its relevance to debates on caste in India of today, see the Introduction in C.J. Fuller, (ed.), *Caste Today* (Delhi, 1996).

[8]See for example, M.N. Srinivas, 'Caste System and its Future', in his *On Living in a Revolution and Other Essays,* (Delhi, 1992), pp. 59-75.

[9]C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1988).

[10]ibid., p. 158.

[11] Also see C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770-1870* (Delhi, 1992, first published 1983).

[12]See the chapter 'From WarriorTraditions to Nineteenth Century Politics: Structure,

It is difficult to dispute the significance of the above described views, and their relative strength for our purpose can best be appreciated when understood in the context of nineteenth century Punjab. It may be noted at the outset that many scholars would consider even raising the complex question of caste in Punjab a little misplaced. As an area that experienced multiple foreign invasions over recorded history, it has been seen as a region where brahmanism found it difficult to survive, and Punjabis had to adjust frequently to different peoples, their religions and social practices. Besides, the influence of Islam and Sikhism in Punjab, with their potentially egalitarian ideologies, especially in matters soteriological, has been taken as decisive in curbing the spread of brahmanical practices. Thus historians have commented typically on the 'flatness' of Punjabi society, with a few mercantile castes on top, a flat, undifferentiated Jat peasantry in the middle, and a bunch of menial castes at the bottom. There is a lot of merit in this view, and Prakash Tandon's oft quoted statement to the effect that he discovered the exalted position of Brahmans in society only when he went to live outside Punjab, reflects the difficulty of pursuing the Dumontian model in Punjab, or looking for 'brahmanism' here.[13] Yet, it would be far more misleading to dismiss the significance of caste in Punjab altogether, and it is my contention that the politics of caste came to play an important role in defining identity in the late nineteenth century along with that of marking out religious differences.

There is ample evidence, for example, of the attempts made by the 'Jat' state of Ranjit Singh to acquire religious sanction and ritual authority after his seizure of Lahore from other Sikh chiefs in 1799. In 1801, the ceremony for his assumption of the title of Maharaja of Punjab was performed by the popularly venerated Sahib Singh Bedi, a descendant of Guru Nanak.[14] Ranjit Singh also paid regular obeisance to learned Brahmans, Sikhs of various orders, and Muslim holy men.[15] Other Jat states, e.g., that of Patiala, gave themselves prestige by tracing their descent from Rajputs, taking recourse to what the sociologists call the historically most open status of a kshatriya.[16] The Sidhu Jat Sikhs of Patiala traced

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Ideology and Identity in the Maratha-Kunbi Caste Complex', in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth Century Western India* (Cambridge, 1985).

[13]Prakash Tandon, *Punjabi Century: 1857-1947* (London, 1963), pp. 76-7.

[14]Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs Vol. I 1469-1839* (Princeton, 1963), p. 200.

[15]ibid. Also see C.A. Bayly, The Pre-History of 'Communalism'? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860', *Modern Asian Studies,* 19:2, (1985), pp. 177-203.

[16]'The Caste System and its Future'.

their descent from Phul, the common ancestor of the other 'Phulkian' houses, including those of Jind, Nabha, and Faridkot, who was said to be a scion of the royal Rajputs of Jaisalmer.[17] According to some British officials, it was difficult to trace the difference between the Jats and the Rajputs among the rich and powerful sections of the former.[18]

The position of political pre-eminence occupied by the Jats in Punjab also meant a tighter control over women and a restriction on their movements, making women symbols of ritual and social hierarchy. Emily Eden, the sister of Lord Auckland made Governor General in 1835, who accompanied him in his travels in north India, wrote romantically and graphically of her encounters with the 'natives'. She wrote of the strict segregation maintained by the wives of Ranjit Singh, five of whom she met in Lahore on one occasion—'I wish I could make out how these women fill up their lives. Heera Singh said they each had a little room of their own, like that we saw, but never went out of the *anderoon* on any occasion.'[19] Four of the *ranis* whom Emily met, and seven of the 'slave girls' of Ranjit Singh committed *sati* on his funeral pyre in 1839.[20] In fact, an orgy of satis followed in the immediate aftermath of Ranjit Singh's death as Punjab witnessed a period of brutal palace intrigues that killed a number of Ranjit Singh's descendants and courtiers.[21]

This evidence of high caste ritualism that was so clearly visible in the closing period of Ranjit Singh's reign was in sharp contrast to the position occupied by women among the Jat peasantry in Punjab, or even to the relative freedoms of women among the powerful Jat families of the Sikh chiefs in the period immediately preceding that of Ranjit Singh. Ranjit Singh's own mother-in-law, Sada Kaur, the mother of his first wife Mehtab Kaur, for instance, wielded considerable power over

[17]C.F. Massy, *Chiefs and Families of Note* (in Delhi, Jalandhar, Peshawar, and Derajat Divisions) *ofthePanjab* (Allahabad, 1890), p. 10.

[18]See the section on Jats in D.C.I. Ibbetson, *Panjab Castes* (Being a Reprint of the Chapter on 'The Races, Castes and Tribes of the People' in the Report on the Census of Panjab published in 1883), (Lahore, 1916).

[19]Emily Eden, *Up the Country: Letters Written to her Sister From the Upper Provinces of India* (London, 1978, first published 1866), p. 233.

[20]J.M. Honigberger's eye-witness account of the performance of sati by the ranis of Ranjit Singh is taken here from the note of Edward Thompson appended to Emily Eden's text. Thompson was highly disapproving of the air of jollity and sensuous pleasure at her surroundings and encounters that suffused Eden's letters. The grim account of the satis and of the Savage palace rivalries that followed Ranjit Singh's death were a counter to Eden, and a reminder to the reader of the civilizing mission that the British were fulfilling in India, ibid., pp. 407-8.

[21]ibid.

the Kanhaya chiefship after the death of her husband. Indeed, she helped and guided the young Ranjit Singh to acquire complete power over Punjab by taking on the loose Sikh confederacy that held power in Punjab.[22] The lives of women like Sada Kaur had been markedly different from those like Mehtab Kaur, as the new state mustered the trappings of what defined political and social dominance. The lives of the women of Jat chiefs could be even more sharply contrasted to that of the ordinary Jat peasant woman, who worked in the fields, was often given in marriage in return for money, who could at times be polyandrously married *to* a set of brothers, and who was often expected to marry one of the brothers of her husband on becoming a widow.[23]

There is not only evidence of the indigenous movement towards differentiation among the Jats, with certain politically powerful sections adopting manners associated with high castes, but also some inkling of the resentment the acquisition of such attitudes aroused. The political turmoil that was characteristic of eighteenth century Punjab, also saw the rise to power of the Khalsa Jats. Varis Shah, the famous poet of Punjab, who witnessed the turbulence of this period, wrote of it in an imagery suffused with the feeling of the world having turned upside down:

Thieves have become leaders of men.
Hariots have become mistresses of the household.
The company of devils has multiplied exceedingly.
The state of the noble is pitiable.
Men of menial birth flourish and the peasants are in great prosperity.
The Jats have become masters of our country.
Everywhere there is a new Government.[24]

While Varis Shah commented on the usurpation of power by those whom he considered to be social upstarts, the repercussions of such a

[22]J.D. Cunningham, A *History of the Sikhs* (London, 1918, first published 1849), pp. 174-5.

[23]See, for example the section on Jats in D.C.J. Ibbetson, *Panjab Castes.* Many **British** officers commented on the hardworking Jat woman and how she was an asset to the Jat peasant. Darling, for instance, noted that though the Jat woman did not plough, dig or drive a cart there was no other form of agricultural labour that she did not perform. A Multani proverb captured the importance of having a Jat wife—*Ran Jatti te horsab chatti* (A Jat wife for me—all the rest are a mere waste of money). Malcolm L. Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* (London, 1925), p. 38.

[24]Varis Shah in the epilogue of *Hir and Ranjha* as quoted by H.L.O. Garrett in **the** Introductory to Cunningham's A *History of the Sikhs,* p.x. That the ranks of the rebellious Sikhs in the eighteenth century were filled by the lower classes is shown by Chetan Singh, *Region and Empire; Panjab in the Sevententh Century* (Delhi, 1991), pp. 256-85.

social change was perhaps more widely felt. The higher castes of Punjab, for example, may have found the political eminence of Jats harder to digest than one can normally glean by perusing the many high caste men who served under Ranjit Singh, as they did earlier under the Mughal governors. Sondha Ram, later Sondha Singh, a poet from a village near Amritsar, who lived sometime between 1750-1850, wrote verses on the *jhaqrra* or a quarrel between a Jat and a Khatri woman.[25] The Khatri woman (Khatrani) is shown to speak of the highly precious honour of the Khatris, their high-born status, and high class living, and speaks of the Jats as people lacking in honour, and at the receiving end of the Muslim government's anger. The Jat woman (Jatti), on the other hand, is depicted as speaking with pride of the Jats as the cultivators who fed everyone, and on whose efforts the others became rich, including the Khatris who became *sahukars.* She refers to the Khatrani as *kirarri*, the derogatory term for petty shopkeepers and moneylenders. Importantly, the Khatrani tries to put the Jatti in her place by referring to the Jats' 'disreputable' customs such as widow remarriage:

Vadi bharjai mavan jedi, lahudi dhia kahave Jat
harami duhan utte, pakarr ke chadar pave.

The elder sister-in-law who is like a mother, and the younger who is called a daughter
The bastard Jat throws a *chadar* over them both.

(Chadar refers to the custom of *chadar-andazi,* the ritual of widow remarriage among the Jats, which was performed by the man throwing a chadar, a sheet or a heavy wrap, over the widow he was marrying).

The Jatti's repartee attacked the Khatrani's vulnerable honour, easily damaged, as the dirtying of a white chadar, unlike that of Jat women, which was like a brown chadar. Although the Khatrani's honour once sullied may not be easily restored, nevertheless, it was quite clear that the Khatris derived honour from keeping their delicate status-giving chadar white and pristine. In fact, the very vulnerability of this proud honour nurtured by closeting women, was the stuff that defined an exalted status. The Khatrani is aware of this and compares their respectability to a pearl, which is best kept hidden away rather than exposed. *(Moti jehi aab asadi, zahar mul na kariye).*

[25]Sondha Singh, *Jhagrra Jatti Te Khatrani Da,* in Piara Singh Padam, *Punjabi Jhagrre* (Patiala, 1974), pp. 72-5. Padam also gives the background of Sondha Singh, p. 22. See Bayly, *Empire and Information,* p. 208, for a brief analysis of this jhagrra as a political farce between stereotypical characters. Khatris were a high caste of Punjab, associating with the kshatriyas. They were a professional people who served the state, as well as merchants, bankers, moneylenders and shop-keepers. See *Panjab Castes.*

What is significant about this altercation between women of two castes, as imagined and expressed by a man, is the social world-view that considered question of women's sexuality and chastity as symbols of caste/class status. (The debates over the 'women's question' that grew towards the end of the nineteenth century would undoubtedly carry this flavour with them.) If there were some Jats who could and did appropriate an exalted status in society, whether the 'brahmanical' one of the Khatris or a 'royal' one of the Rajputs, it was important to show the more ordinary among them their place in the world. That issues of caste prestige agitated people in the early nineteenth century is borne out by Sondha's verses, especially written in the genre of jhagrra, a suitable medium to air questions of social unrest.[26] What is also interesting is that the 'quarrel' is between women, who not only fight men's battles by proxy, but are also made responsible for guarding a social group's respectability by keeping vigilance over each other and their own selves. Patriarchal ideologies work best when women are made to have stakes in them.

Further evidence of high caste consciousness in pre-colonial Punjab comes from the *Char Bagh-i-Punjab* of Ganesh Das, completed in 1849, the year the British took control over all of Punjab. Though belonging to the merchant and service gentry class referred to by Bayly, it is not so much brahmanical ritualism that we find in his writings as a pride in his Khatri origins (he was a Badhera Khatri from Gujrat), while pleading the Khatris' case as administrators and officials of a superior order in front of the British.[27] Ganesh Das's notion of meaningful cultural identities incorporated a person's belonging to specific regions and places and traits inhered from there, as well as pride in individual or group achievement of that area, be it a famous sanyasi, dervish, an intellectual or even a sati. When he wrote of the Khatris of various places of Punjab, he spoke of their capabilities in service, or as rich sahukars, traders, men of charity, or those with intellectual or artistic accomplishments. In a similar vein, he mentioned other men (and occasionally women) of note in Punjab.

It is time now to consider the significance of the view that attributes qualitative change to the perception of caste under the British Raj. From the preceding discussion it is apparent that there existed indigenous notions of caste and the status derived thereof, in early nineteenth century pre-colonial Punjab. Yet, the situation in Punjab also quite dearly reflected

[2G]That this 'quarrel' between the Jats and Khatris continued to trouble society, or as I will argue, give it newer meaning and a sharper edge, comes through from the fact that Capt. Temple recorded a version of Sondha's *jhagrra* in 1882. See *Punjabi Jhagrre,* pp. 76-9.

[27]J.S. Grewal & Indu Banga (translated and ed.), *Early Nineteenth Century Panjab-From Ganesh Das's Char Bagh-i-Panjab* (Amritsar, 1975).

social fluidity, where the boundaries that defined both caste and religion were much more fuzzy[28] than what our common sense understanding of these terms suggests today. To a certain extent I do wish to argue that the colonial forms of knowledge and needs of administration introduced a rigidity into a relatively more malleable and manipulable notion of caste, even when the ethnographers were aware that historically caste was far from an absolute, unchangeable category. Thus Denzil Ibbetson, whose ethnographic survey of Punjab in 1881 became the benchmark to which the others only added without substantially revising it, was conscious of the difficulty in defining caste and wrote of its historically flexible character.[29] Nevertheless, his attempts at recording caste created not only a terrible confusion among the people, but also initiated attempts at discovering and defining one's identity unambiguously, as also launched the inevitable desire to raise one's social status. Ibbetson mentions the case of a village which scrambled to find its *got* and dutifully gave the same one for the whole village, of Jats who traced their Rajput origins, and the case of the Suds who insisted upon a Kshatriya status and took the battle to make good their claim into the pages of the journal published by the Anjuman-i-Punjab.[30] However, the contention here is that the specific circumstances that developed under the Raj in Punjab, which included colonial perceptions of the indigenous society and the manner in which the Punjabis themselves responded to the new situation, is what gave both caste and religious communities their particular range of meanings.

The Colonial Gaze and Punjabi Society

It is apposite here to study a little further the attitudes adopted by the colonial state towards the Punjabis, for these had a bearing on the indigenous elite's response to the colonial situation. It is possible to discern at least three broad ways in which the British Raj in Punjab in its

[28]I use the term 'fuzzy' here in the manner in which Sudipta Kaviraj has used it to explain earlier, fuzzier conceptions of the community, in that they may not be territorially based, nor would they be enumerated. See Sudipta Kaviraj, 'The Imaginary Institution of India', in P. Chatterjee & G. Pandey (eds.), *Subaltern Studies VII: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi, 1992), p. 26.

[29]See the preface in *Panjab Castes.*

[30]ibid., pp. 32, 246. Also see the chapter on 'Castes, Tribes and Races of the People' in the *Census of India 1891—Vol. XIX-The Punjab and its Feudatories-The* Report on the Census by E.D. Maclagan, (Calcutta, 1892). (Henceforth *COP-1891);* and H.A. Rose, *Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and N.W.E Province* (3 Vols), (Lahore, 1911). (Henceforth *Glossary)*

developed form preferred to see and pigeon-hole the population. These were not exclusive ways of seeing, but views that were closely linked and interanimated each other. Nor did these views develop as monoliths. There were always opinions on the contrary side, but as knowledge about the natives was compiled, many of these views acquired the status of self-evident truths. Punjabis as a people were firstly seen to be divided by religion. They were thus Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, constituting according to the 1891 Census almost 41, 51 and 7 per cent of the population respectively.[31] The parts of the population that did not easily fit into what was for the British an obvious and primary category, were over the years made to adhere to it, even if only in the administrative records. The trouble over, for example, defining who the Sikhs were, has been discussed by historians.[32] The colonial state's preference for only viewing Khalsa Sikhs as the 'true' followers of that religion created administrative chaos at each successive census as to where to place the non-Khalsa Sikhs. For example, Madagan commented on the lack of accuracy of the Sikh returns in the 1891 census—'... in the case of the Sikhs there is... this additional difficulty that the line between them and the Hindus is vague in the extreme. Not only is a true Sikh generally called a Hindu in common parlance, but many of those who are spoken of as Sikhs are not true Sikhs, but Hindus.'[33] The rubrics that the state created to study its populace coloured people's own perception of themselves. To take another example, a similar problem arose regarding finding a suitable niche for the lower castes who refused to abide by the three principal religious categories offered to them. The 1891 census

[31]COP-2892, p. 88. It is notable that the figures of particular religious communities appeared changed in different census reports, not only due to natural demographic causes, but also due to the current bureaucratic idea behind enumeration. The confusion over Hindus and Sikhs is especially significant in this context. The 1931 Census compared the changes in the relative strength of the three principle communities from the figures obtained in 1881. According to this report, the Hindus declined from 43.8 per cent to 30.2 per cent. The Sikhs rose from 8.2 to 14.3 per cent, and the Muslims increased from 50.6 to 52.4 per cent. *Census of India, 1931-Vol. XVII-Punjab,* Report by Khan Ahmad Hasan Khan, (Lahore, 1933), pp. 290-1.

[32]Oberoi, *The Constmction of Religious Boundaries,* (Oxford, 1994), W.H. McLeod, *Who is a Sikh? The Problem of Sikh Identity* (Delhi, 1989).

[33]COP-2892, p. 91. The enumerators at the time of the 1911 census operations accepted the claims of those who preferred to call themselves Jain-Hindus and Sikh-Hindus. However, in the next decade this option was taken away from the people, and the new instructions urged the enumerators to record people unambiguously as Hindu, Sikh or Jain. *Census of India, 1921-Vol. XV-Punjab and Delhi,* Report by L. Middleton and S.M. Jacob, (Uhore, 1923), (Henceforth *COP-1921)p.* 171.

reported that 90 per cent of those tabulated Hindu from the scavenger/ sweeper class had actually returned their religion as Bala-Shahi, Balmiki, Chuhra or Lalbegi.[34]

In fact, the materials collected for this study speak eloquently of this indeterminacy as to who were the Hindus and the Sikhs. This is especially because the affiliations of caste, as seen for example in endogamous marriages, cut across these religious boundaries. A woman could be a member of say, a Hindu household before marriage, and of a Sikh after it, with relatives on both sides of a new fence of identifiable communities. Therefore, more particularly for the Sikh reformers, it was essential to change the cultural practices of women, if a religious community was to be made bounded and less permeable. But women also posed problems for the colonial state going through the pragmatics of'routine administration'. The effects of routine administration should not be underestimated as Cohn has shown. To take an instance, when the census operations were underway in 1901, the officials were hard put to explain why the figure for female infants and young girls was consistently lower among the Sikhs than the other religious communities. This seemed especially difficult to explain because the British maintained that the Sikhs in general treated their women better than the others.[35] This led them to consider whether the Sikhs returned the male children as Sikh, and female as Hindu, an idea that developed out of the British inclination to regard the Khalsa Sikhs with their five K's visible on the body of men as the essential Sikhs.[36] It also led them to investigate whether a woman retained her original *got* after marriage, or if the Sikhs returned their wives as Hindus, especially when the men were away on service (implying, as

[34]ibid., p. 89. Again, by the time of the census operations of 1921, the Chuhras in Punjab were not allowed to register themselves as belonging to any separate religion, outside the 'recognized' religions, and were enumerated as Hindus, if they were not Muslims, Sikhs, etc. *COP-1921,p.* 171. On the uncomfortable relationship of the low castes with Hinduism see Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religion as a Social Vision: The Movement Against Unwuchability in 20th-century Punjab* (Berkeley, 1982).

[35]The conundrum of low Sikh female figures continued to trouble the British, and in 1911 H.A. Rose, the Superintendent of the Census Operations wrote that the Sikhs considered themselves to be superior to the Hindus, and though willing to take a wife from the Hindus were not inclined to give the Hindus their daughters. It was difficult for Rose to explain low Sikh female figures, or understand how female infanticide could be practised by them when he asserted that '...no people in India treats its women better than do the Sikhs as a body. Sikh women have considerable liberty and receive a measure of education.' *Report on the Prevalence of Female Infanticide in the Punjab,* Home-Police-38/ 39-A, Jan. 1911. (NAI)

[36]*Panj kakke* or five K's are *kes* (uncut hair), *kangha* (comb), *kara* (steel bangle), *kirpan* (dagger), and *kachh* (long drawers).

Punjabi men did later, either women's carelessness about their religious identity, or their assertion of subversive power when male authority was absent).[37] Though the subsequent administrative investigation among 2600 Jat and Khatri Sikh households in Amritsar district revealed their fears to be unfounded, the motives behind the inquiry reveal how artificial the rigid categories of the census were.[38] One can also imagine the coercive/persuasive potential of such a line of questioning when it fell on a fertile soil of people eager to sharpen religious identities as well as patriarchal controls.

People were pushed into identifiable religious communities, because the rubrics under which they were classed automatically yielded a range of meanings to the colonial masters. A crude estimation of official opinion would show the Muslims and Sikhs as powerful and manly races, having acquired these much-in-demand qualities, both by absorbing the essence of their religions and by the virtue of these religious communities having tasted political power in the immediate past. The Hindus, on such a basis of comparison emerged as weak and effeminate, but also cunning and manipulative, in order to survive under different rulers. Ibbetson, in his report on the Census of 1881 spoke of the Hindus as characteristically quiet, contented, and thrifty. The essential character of the Sikh, according to Ibbetson, was that he was '... more independent, more brave, more manly, than the Hindu, and no whit less industrious and thrifty; while he is less conceited than the Musalman. ...' The effect of Islam on a man, according to Ibbetson was that '...it invariably fills him with false pride and conceit, disinclines him for honest toil, and renders him more extravagant, less thrifty, less contented, and less well-to-do, than his Hindu neighbour.'[39]

The second important way in which the colonial state divided the Punjabi people was to look at them as agriculturists and non-agriculturists. This was the 'Punjab tradition' described by van den Dungen, a desire to create and preserve a stable rural base for the Raj in Punjab.[40] Significantly,

[37]H.H. Risley in *Female Infanticide in the Punjab,* Home-Police-lll/113-A, Jan. 1901. (NAI)

^*Statistics to be Obtained at the Census of 1901 for the Purpose of Ascertaining the Extent to Which Female Infanticide Prevails in the Punjab*. Home-Police-54-A, March 1901. (NAI)

[39]Ibbetson as quoted in S.S. Thorburn, *Musalmans and Moneylenders in the Punjab* (Delhi, 1983, first published 1886) p. 16.

[40]P.H.M. van den Dungen, *The Punjab Tradition: Influence and Authority in Nineteenth Century India* (London, 1972). Also see Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj 1849-1947* (Delhi, 1988); and the chapter The British Imperial State' in Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam.* Gilmartin argues that the British colonial state in Punjab created the mediatory, collaborative category of the 'tribe' based on notions of tribal leadership, contiguity, and land

the religious characteristics attributed to the populace were in no way diluted when people were viewed through this different prism. However, the essential disposition of a religious community could be displaced onto a smaller section within it, leaving another group free of its debilitating or invigorating weight, as the case might be. The fundamental agriculturist in Punjab for the British was the Jat. Ibbetson lauded the Jats, while underlining their importance to the colonial administration in Punjab:

> The Jat is in every respect the most important of the Punjab peoples. In point of numbers he surpasses the Rajputs.... Politically he ruled the Punjab till the Khalsa yielded to our arms. Ethnologically he is the peculiar and most prominent product of the plains of the five rivers. And from an economical and administrative point of view he is the husbandman, the peasant, the revenue-payer *par-excellence* of the Province.[41]

Ibbetson could have also added that the Sikh Jat was the finest soldier in the British Army.[42] Though the Jats as a whole were thought to share these characteristics, it was the Sikh Jat of the central districts of Punjab that Ibbetson had in mind while giving the above description. Apparently the Hinduism of the Jats of the south-eastern Punjab did not mar their Jat virtues, but according to Ibbetson, the same could not be said of the Muslim Jat of the western Punjab. 'On the Lower Indus the word Jat is applied generically to a congeries of tribes, Jats proper, Rajputs, lower castes, and mongrels, who have no points in common save their Muhammadan religion, their agricultural occupation, and their subordinate position.'[43]

In Ibbetson's, and by and large official estimation, the quintessential Jat merged with the quintessential Sikh to yield the ideal Punjabi native. We will see that when viewed through the colonial gaze, the categories of non-agricultural and Hindu congealed to form the native of the non-ideal type. The colonial stand with regard to the Muslims was more ambivalent. The 'turbulent' tribes of the north-west frontier were feared, the big land owning families of the west were held in high estimation, while increasingly the peasant of the western plains came to be seen as

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ownership. Gilmartin's work is especially important because he shows the friction that developed between the categories of agricultural/non-agricultural on the one hand, and religious communities on the other.

[41]Ibbetson as quoted in the *Glossary,* Vol. *2,* p. 366.

[42]Sikhs as a whole accounted for 20 per cent of the Indians in the military service. See B.S. Cohn, 'Cloth, Clothes and Colonialism', in his *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge.*

[43]*Glossary,* p. 367.

a mix of a pathetic but a fearful figure, who was conceited, yet vulnerable, and was in need of British protection. The last opinion was most carefully enunciated by S.S.Thorburn in his influential book *Musalmans and Moneylenders in the Punjab.*[44] It was here that Thorburn expounded his famous thesis, which set to show that the rapacious Hindu moneylenders were gradually taking over the land that traditionally belonged to the agricultural classes of the Muslims in western Punjab. In Thorburn's writing, as in Ibbetson's before him, religious categories mixed with the secular classification of agricultural/non-agricultural, to create powerful myths for understanding the general population. Thus he wrote:

Throughout Eastern Europe the Jews are hated and persecuted rather because they are successful aliens and professors of an old-world faith than because they are successful. So with the Bunniahs of the Western Punjab. They offend not only because they thrive on the misfortunes of monotheistic agriculturists, but because they are interlopers and polytheists, if not idolators.[45]

Though Thorburn's initial crusade to save the Muslim peasant's land in western Punjab did not get much support from his senior officers in Punjab, it ultimately led to the enactment in 1900 of the Punjab Alienation of Land Bill which sought to debar the 'traditional' non-agricultural classes from buying land which was seen to belong to agricultural tribes.[46]

It was the contingencies of revenue collection which led the British in Punjab to cater to the specific needs of an agricultural population. It was thus that 'customary law' was made applicable to Punjab, grounded in the idea of preserving the village community,[47] which in its 'pure' form was apparently not affected by the pulls of religion or caste. Thus Sir Charles Roe in his *Tribal Law in Punjab* wrote:

[44]*Musalmatis and Moneylenders,* op.dt.

[45]ibid., p. I.

[46]For a discussion of the trajectory of the bill and the arguments that supported its enactment see Norman G. Barrier, *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900* (Duke University Monograph and Occasional Paper Series, No. 2, 1966). Though there were some British officers whose thinking differed significantly from that of Thorburn, he was nevertheless working on the lines of a well established tradition in Punjab. See *The Punjab Tradition.* It is important to note that there were many 'non-agricultural' people who owned land for generations, who were now stopped from buying land from 'agricultural' tribes. Also debarred from buying land were the various menial classes, the *kamins* of Punjab.

[47]On the concept of the unchanging village community as seen by the British see B.S. Cohn, 'Notes on the History of the Study of Indian Society and Culture', in his *An Anthropologist Among the Historians,* pp. 136-71. On the logic of the application of customary law in Punjab as against personal religious law see *Empire and Islam,* pp. 14-38.

The Hindu agriculturist of the Punjab knows nothing of caste, except as represented by his tribe. No doubt he respects the Brahman, and calls him in and feeds him on the occasion of rejoicing or sorrow, but he would never dream of referring to him or to the Hindu law for guidance in his daily life.[48]

But, of course, religion could be shown to play a determinant role in exacerbating class differences, as Thorburn set out to show in the case of the Muslim peasantry of west Punjab against their Hindu tormentors. Caste, in such an understanding, came to rule the life of those high up in its hierarchy.

This brings us to examine the third and last important way in which the colonial state perceived the Punjabis. The people of Punjab, like the rest of India, were seen to be divided along the lines of caste. In his influential report on the 1881 Census, whose chapter on the 'races, castes and tribes' of the people went into many reprints as *Panjab Castes*, Ibbetson had consciously theorized on caste. Without going into his expounding on the functioning of primitive societies, it will suffice here to say that Ibbetson regarded the phenomenon of caste to be widespread in Punjabi society, maintaining that even conversion to Islam hardly affected the hold of caste on the populace.[49] However, according to Ibbetson caste was based primarily on occupation, but also on political prominence and social standing. The last aspect he defined as a 'curiously artificial standard of social rank' which included arbitrary practices like prohibition on widow marriage, marriages arranged with those of equal or nearly equal standing, the declaring of certain professions to be impure, as also some foods and objects and so forth.[50] Ibbetson maintained that among the people who practised agriculture, it was the 'tribal' divisions based on common descent that were more important than caste. On the other hand, in the case of Brahmans and the mercantile castes in Punjab among whom there was an absence of tribal organization, caste was based upon the preservation of artificial rules that were significant to maintain their social position.[51] Through such an analysis, Ibbetson made caste in

[48]Roe as quoted in W.H. Rattigan, *A Digest of Civil Law for the Punjab* (Lahore, 1929, 11th ed.), p. 40.

[49]See the preface in *Panjab Castes.*

[50]D.C.J. Ibbetson, *Panjab Castes* (Delhi, 1974), p. 5.

[51]ibid., pp. 16-18. On the British contribution to the creation of the category of 'tribal' see *Empire and Islam,* pp. 16-20. Gilmartin has shown how the indigenous idiom of *biradari* or brotherhood, invoking a genealogical descent group, was one of those utilized by the colonial state among others, to forge a 'tribal' identity. However, the fact that such an idiom of social identity was present even among the urban, mercantile peoples was ignored by the state.

Punjab a preserve of the small section of non-agricultural Hindus, the Brahmans, and the mercantile castes of the Khatris, Aroras, and Baniyas. Though in 1881, there were only 7000 Sikhs who were Brahmans, and they composed only 0.84 per cent of Baniyas, Sikhs made up about 7 per cent of Aroras, and 9 per cent of Khatris.[52] However, for many British officials these people did not count for true Sikhs. As Thorburn put it, 'A large proportion of those so-called Sikhs are not true Jat-Sikhs, but Khatri Sikhs, and, as such, more devoted to mercantile pursuits than to farming.'[53] The fact that the mercantile, professional castes were largely urban (even though *77* per cent of the moneylenders had a rural base)[54] marked the Hindu high castes of Punjab as further distinct from the rest of the population.

This study concerns itself with the social imagination and the ideological postulations of these 'caste' Hindus and Sikhs. These groups formed a significant element towards the late nineteenth century, of what can be called the new elites or middle classes of Punjabi society. The colonial perceptions of this section of society as caste-ridden, parasitical, unmanly and cowardly, and increasingly a feeling that they were politically dangerous, bred insecurity among them.[55] The new elites turned to their own various reformist organizations to create and preserve a more flattering sense of self. Both attitudes of insecurity and a self-enhancing identity meant the adoption of certain postures towards women, which significantly contributed to restructuring upper caste, middle class patriarchy in this period.

Let us take a closer look at the people who under the colonial regime, as its attitudes reified, came to bear the rather regressive burden of 'highcasteness'. The Brahmans formed a comparatively small section of society in the plains of Punjab, though in the Punjab hills their percentage could be as high as 13 to 15 per cent. Their numbers tended to be larger in the eastern and sub-montane districts of Punjab, where the percentage of Hindus was higher among the population, while their numbers declined as one moved towards western Punjab.[56] It was the Sarsut Brahman who was typical of Punjab,[57] providing priestly service to the Hindus

"ibid., pp. 243, 246, 248, 251.

[53]*Musalmans and Moneylenders in the Punjab,* p. 34.

[54]*COP-1891,* p. 356.

[55]For the colonial perception of the Arya Samaj which attracted many followers from the above mentioned mercantile and professional castes as politically dangerous, see Norman G. Barrier, 'The Arya Samaj and Congress Politics in the Punjab, 1894-1908', *Program in Comparative Studies in South Asia* (Duke University, 1967).

[56]*Panjab Castes,* pp. 214-16.

[57]*Glossary,* Vol. *2,* pp. 122-3.

and the Sikhs, while some among the Brahmans followed agricultural pursuits.[58] Ibbetson described the Brahmans as a 'grasping, quarrelsome, and overbearing' caste, an imagery that gained popular ground in Punjab, with the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabhas lampooning Brahmans as cunning and deceitful in their literature.

The Khatris were pre-eminent among the Hindu mercantile castes of Punjab. Even though following 'vaishya' pursuits, Khatris claimed a Kshatriya descent for themselves, a claim that was by and large accepted by the British ethnographers—'Quite apart from the resemblance of the names Kshatriya and Khatri the position of the Kshatriya of ancient times finds very close parallels in his relations to the modern Hindu castes in the Punjab.'[59] Comparing them to other mercantile castes, Ibbetson described the Khatris as 'superior to them in physique, in manliness, and in energy' because they were not mere shopkeepers.[60] Sir George Campbell's *Ethnology of India* spoke of the Khatris as monopolizing the trade of Punjab and the greater part of Afghanistan, and as civil administrators with almost all literary work in their hands. Campbell further said of the Khatris that they were not military in character, though they could wield a sword when required, giving examples of prominent Khatris in Diwan Sawan Mai of Multan and RajaTodar Mai of Akbar's court.[61] Khatris were mostly Hindus, though they were also prominent among the Sikhs, with all their Gurus belonging to this caste. Indeed historians have shown that Khatris were the most numerous caste in the Sikh panth, until they were overtaken by the Jats in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[62] Khatris were present in large numbers in the central districts of Punjab, with their numbers dwindling in the east, and hardly making an appearance beyond Ludhiana. They were also present in fairly large numbers in Rawalpindi and Hazara, and in the western Hill States. They maintained a number of sub-divisions amongst themselves, mostly based on intricate marriage practices and caste biradaris. The prominent sub-divisions were those of the Bahri, Bunjahi, Sarin and Khokhran, with the Bahris often further divided into Charzati and Dhaighar.[63]

[58]Ibbetson noted, 'The Sikhs employ Hindu Brahmans as their *pamhits* or family priests in exactly the same way as do the Hindus and the Jains', *Panjab Castes,* p. 218.

[59]*Glossary,* Vol. 2, p. 504.

[60]*Panjab Castes,* p. 247.

[61]ibid.

[62]W.H. McLeod, 'Caste in the Sikh Panth', in his *The Exolution of the Sikh Community: Five Essays,* (Delhi, 1996, first published 1976) pp. 91-2.

[63]*Panjab Castes,* p. 248. Some historians prefer to see these divisions as following the

The trading caste most numerous in the south-western portion of Punjab was that of the Aroras, with more than half of them found in the Multan and Derajat divisions. They were the shopkeepers, traders, and moneylenders of this region, the *kirars* described by Thorburn as 'A cowardly, secretive, acquisitive race, very necessary and useful it may be in their places, but possessed of few manly qualities, and both despised and envied by the great Musalman tribes of Bannu.'[64] Though prominently traders, the Aroras also pursued agriculture, especially visible in the lower Chenab area. In the western Punjab they could also be found to sew clothes, weave baskets, and do goldsmith's work. Aroras claimed to be of Khatri origin, a claim rejected by Khatris, according to Ibbetson, though Sir George Campbell felt the Khatris and Aroras belonged to the same ethnic stock. The Aroras were also said to be the Khatris of Arorkot, or Aror, the ancient capital of Sindh.[65] There is a strong evidence of upward caste mobility among the Aroras in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an aspect of social history of Punjab that has hitherto received little attention from historians. This may well have created some friction between them and the Khatris, alluded to by the colonial ethnographers.[66] The Aroras too had their internal, endogamous sub-divisions, the two important ones being those of the Uttaradhi Aroras and the Dakhana Aroras.

Another important commercial caste in Punjab was that of the Baniyas, a majority of whom were found in Delhi and Hissar (part of present day Haryana). However, Baniyas were also prominent in Ambala, east Punjab and Firozepur, with some colonies of them in Gurdaspur and Sialkot. Mostly designated shopkeepers of 'inferior physique and an utter want of manliness,' by the British, some belonged to large trading houses. The two significant divisions among the Baniyas were those between the Aggarwals and the Oswals, which were endogamous.[67] The Suds, Bhabras, and Bhatias were among the other mercantile castes found in the plains of Punjab.[68]

4:12:52 convention, or the *char* (Charzati), *barah* (Bahri), *bawanjah* (Bunjahi) principle. See 'Caste in the Sikh Panth'.

[64]Thorburn as quoted in *Panjab Castes*, p. 251. For Aroras see pp. 250-5.

[65]ibid. Also see *Glossary*, Vol. 2, pp. 16-17.

[66]The rivalry between the Khatris and Aroras is referred to by Krishan Lai Gauba, whose father Harkishan Lai, an Arora from Dera Ismail Khan in extreme western Punjab, was a famous industrialist who was also a minister later in the government of Mian Fazli Hussain. See Gauba's autobiography, *Friends and Foes.*

"Panjab Castes, pp. 242-3.

[68]ibid., pp. 245, 246, & 250.

As noted earlier, caste as an ingredient of a social group's identity was an aspect of society of early nineteenth century Punjab. Early colonial rule bred a caste consciousness of a different genre as it expected the high castes in all of Punjab to behave in a manner commensurate to their high status in society. This was a flat, undifferentiated understanding of appropriate behaviour applicable to all designated high-born. There were various ways in which these expectations of the new masters of Punjab became visible. It was apparent in the early targeting of female infanticide as a high caste practice, in the colonial government's and missionaries' vivid descriptions of upper caste women's miserable life in the zenanas and behind purdah, in their desire to recruit high caste girls in government schools and target zenana women for medical benefits, as well as in the early missionary attempts at making converts from among the high castes.[69] Thus the state gave contradictory signals of its attitude towards the 'caste' society. On the one hand, the state ran them down as a manipulative people believing in an unrational system, moreover, those who lived by sponging on others. At the same time the state recognized the 'high' status of these castes and tried to lend respectability to some of its own institutions and causes by garnering their support. The high castes in turn displayed their own ambiguity on the question of caste. In public they bemoaned its destructive capability when faced with the need to unify religious communities or even a nation. Yet in private they wished to perpetuate the privileges that flowed from the respectable status it granted. What is also noteworthy is the manner in which women were recognized as symbols denoting social status by both the indigenous elite as well as the colonial state. Whether the colonial state wished to improve the condition of native women, or it colluded with the Punj abi men to extend the latter's power over women, the conversion of women's body and being into semiological markers reached new levels.

Insecurity and Ambition: The High Caste, Middle Class Elite of Punjab

As noted earlier, for colonial officials, 'caste' Hindus (and Sikhs) came to be seen as a backward element of society, sticking to abominable caste

[69]Some of the early high caste converts to Christianity are mentioned in Rev. Robert. Clark, *The Missions of the Church Missionary Society and the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society in the Punjab and Sindh* (London, 1904). Also see John C.B. Webster, *The Christian Community and Change in Nineteenth Century India* (Delhi, 1976).

practices, and parasitical upon the hapless majority of the agricultural populace; a people moreover, nursing political ambitions. The very success of these traditionally literate and administrative classes in securing new jobs and exploring educational opportunities under the colonial regime bred insecurities later.

Initial colonization had created an upbeat mood among the high castes of Punjab, and the lesson *of'Angrezi Raj Ki Barkateri* or 'The Blessings of English Rule' that was taught to boys in government schools held an experiential meaning when translated into the lives of their fathers. This was visible in Prakash Tandon's sketch of the respect his puritan father commanded as he became an engineer and served the government in its grandiose irrigation projects in Punjab.[70] The transformation in the family fortunes of the Mehtas of Nawankote was dramatic as they took to service with the British government. Ved Mehta's great grandfather was a petty land-owner who also started selling cloth. His grandfather, born a couple of years after 1857 became a *patwari,* a low level clerk in the Department of Canals and Irrigation. However, the ignominy of his job was not revealed for a long time to the coming generations in the family, as his own son Amolak Ram (Ved Mehta's father) studied medicine in Lahore and London, and came to serve as the Assistant Director of Public Health in Rawalpindi. The reversal of family fortunes is explicit in Ved Mehta's memories of the glorious life of his father, including his giving support to the Mehta clan, so that a whole neighbourhood in Lahore came to be called the Mehta *gulli* or the lane of the Mehtas.[71]

However, as the nineteenth century drew to an end, optimism was replaced by a sense of unease. This became apparent to all those who reached the end of their careers without reaching its zenith, but especially to the ones who remained at the lowest levels of the state apparatus, as the tedium of derkdom and small salaries manifested itself. The feeling of disquiet increased as the high castes perceived themselves to be treated with disfavour by the colonial state. They came to be seen to be monopolizing lower levels of bureaucracy, and were condemned as the moneylenders who drove the hardy peasant away from his land, accumulating more and more of it under their control. The final straw came with the Punjab Alienation of Land Act of 1900, which was seen to go especially against the interest of high castes by barring them as non-agricultural classes from buying land. By the early twentieth century Hindus also discerned the bias of the government in favouring Muslims

[70] *Punjabi Century,* p. 13.

[n] *Daddyji;* Also see Ved Mehta, *Face to Face: An Autobiography* (London, 1958).

for administrative jobs, creating a spectre of loss of livelihood that contributed to communal tensions within Punjab.[72]

These multiple anxieties were expressed, for example, in the memorial sent by the Hindu Sabha to the Viceroy Lord Minto on his visit to Lahore in 1909. Pointing to the various disabilities perceived to be experienced by the Hindus of Punjab, the memorialists gave a glimpse of the manner in which they felt themselves to be losing out in all spheres of life. Speaking of the various disadvantages felt by the Hindus, the memorialists wrote how—'They have affected, and are affecting, them in the pursuit of their livelihood; they are telling injuriously upon their social status as representatives of an ancient civilization with its accompanying traditions, and finally they stand in the way of their political advancement as an important unit of the Empire.'[73]

The economic insecurities experienced by high caste Hindus as the colonial regime established its style of functioning in Punjab, were matched by a feeling that social upheaval was levelling, if not subverting, recognized markers of status like caste or the control over women. The fear of social chaos emerged from many quarters. Low caste conversions to Christianity which increased at the turn of the century, giving at least some sections of these converts access to education and jobs, created visions of the world turning upside down.[74] The sensational conversions to Christianity from among the high caste society itself created the same fear with an additional phobia of the depletion in the ranks of a beleaguered community. The spread of education among women of the new elites made men insecure about women's willingness to fulfil their contemporaneously defined 'traditional' duties. The growth of cities with their large migrant population where one's antecedents could be easily veiled, more so if one prospered under the new conditions, created a paranoia about the possible erasure of social privilege.[75]

Changes, for instance, were occurring in the practice of caste, with a visible decline in the authority of the caste-based *biradari* or patrilineage, as well as a relaxation in certain rules of endogamy. This was partially a result of breakdown of local caste biradaris, as people moved to new

[72]For the development of the British policy of favouring Muslims in government jobs see *Empire and Islam & Punjab and the Raj*.

[7]*Memorial From the Hindu Sabha, Lahore, Regarding the Indifferent Treatment in the Distribution of Government Patronage. Etc.*, Home-Establishments-50 53-A, Dec. 1909. (NAI)

[74]For the Missionaries agenda around the turn of the century to encourage mass conversions among the low castes see the *The Christian Community*.

[75]On the massive growth of Lahore in the colonial period, and a relatively slower pace of Amritsar, see Ian J. Kerr, 'Urbanization and Colonial Rule in 19th-Century India: Lahore andAmritsar, 1849-1881', *The Panjab Past and Present*, 14:1, (1980), pp. 210-24.

areas in pursuit of jobs and education.[76] Prakash Tandon, whose reminiscences of Punjab of the first two decades of the twentieth century were steeped in a sense of Khatri pride, gives us a glimpse of these transformations among the Khatris—'... as the development spread, other districts like Sargodha, Shahpur, Sialkot and Gujranwala also made their contribution, when castes like the Puris of Ghartal, Sahnis of Bhera, and the Batras of Girot, all three from small places, unknown in the past, spread through the services and the professions.'[77] Old biradaris held their own for a long time, and many were able to help cushion for their adherents the new developments, if not altogether fight off the changes. However, the biradaris hold diminished, as more people were able to defy their writs. A sense of this losing battle seeps through the life of Lala Devraj. The powerful Khatri biradaris of Jullundur (mainly of Sondhis, Sehgals, Vattas, and Thapars) could not stop the young men like Devraj or his brother-in-law Munshi Ram from following the iconoclastic practices of the Arya Samaj.[78] Similarly certain region-based rules of endogamy were giving way as people became more peripatetic. Once again Prakash Tandon is able to portray a sense of what was happening. Speaking of life in a newly developed town like Sargodha, he wrote:

To Sargodha people came to settle from all over the West Punjab, professionals, traders and businessmen, artisans of all castes. Old ties were severed, and new ones were formed. The block we lived in contained mostly professional families, both Khatris and Aroras, and a new affinity sprang up between them.... In fact the bonds of education and work supplanted the old caste bonds, and a new society emerged with four castes whose membership was cutting across [sic] the traditional pattern. They were the professionals drawn from all castes; the traders, who were Aroras, but with an odd Khatri amongst them; the artisans; and in the surrounding villages the zamindars, often very wealthy. This regrouping had not yet started to affect the marriage customs. Khatris still married only Khatris, and Aroras other Aroras, but they were no longer so strict about the right sub-castes. Instead professional families married into families of the same social standing and education, and traders among traders, zamindars into other farming families. The old, tightly knit biradari system was going,

[76]For a description of caste based mohallas or neighbourhoods in old cities of Punjab see Prakash Tandon's depiction of the city of Gujrat in *Punjabi Century;* and Bhisham Sahni's sketch of Bhera, *Balraj-My Brother.*

[77]*Punjabi Century,* p. 103. On the pattern of urbanization in Punjab see Reeta Grewal, 'Urbanization in the Punjab 1849-1947', Ph.D. Thesis, Guru Nanak Dev University (Amritsar, 1988). Between 1881 and 1941, the urban population of Punjab increased from 9.8 per cent of the population to 13.9 per cent, with similar patterns visible in other parts of India, ibid., p. 85.

[78]Satyadev Vidyalankar, *Lala Devraj* (Jalandhar, 1937), pp. 9, 78-80.

and there was a new broad based sense of relationship. Among us the Arya Samaj took the place of the old biradari.[79]

This was the beginning of the broadening of the endogamous unit which scholars are noting today as emblematic of metropolitan cities of modern India.[80]

Caste, Gender, and the Arya Samaj Movement in Punjab

Tandon's perceptive statement of the high caste Hindus looking at the Arya Samaj as a new, wider, and perhaps a more relevant biradari, is one that I wish to draw attention to. That the Arya Samaj drew its followers from among the high caste, literate Hindus is a fact that historians have highlighted.[81] They have also pointed to the peculiar vulnerability of a caste of professional men who encountered an alien colonial culture daily, and the appeal to them of an aggressive monotheistic Hinduism, and a brand of rationalism, as expounded by the Arya Samaj. For a people who were stigmatized as caste-ridden, and unmanly, the allure of the qualities of Aryanism associated with a manly, Kshatriya vigour was undoubtedly immense. However, I wish to emphasize the highly ambivalent position of the Arya Samaj on the question of caste, and its essential vision of a hierarchical society, as playing an enormous role in popularizing the sect started by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in Punjab. It is also my contention that upper caste women bore the burden of stabilizing a fundamentally ambiguous stand on caste, making it possible for men to tackle 'larger' tasks of forming a Hindu community and giving shape to a nascent nation.

The equivocal attitude towards caste is revealed in Dayanand Saraswati's magnum opus, the *Satyarth Prakash* or *Light of Truth*,[82] a text that was very influential in defining the role of Arya Samaj in its incipient

[n]*Pun\abi Century,* pp. 161-2.

[80]Andre Beteille, 'Caste in Contemporary India', in *Caste Today,* pp. 150-79.

[81]Jones, *Arya Dharm.*

[82]Dayanand Saraswati, *Light of Truth* (or an English Translation of the Satyarth Prakash, by Dr Charanjiva Bhardwaja) (United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, 1915, 2nd ed.). Dayanand Saraswati was born in Kathiawar in Gujrat in an orthodox Brahman family in 1824. He started his career as a wandering sanayasi. His encounters with 'modern' reformist leaders in the early 1870s set him on a path of reforming Hinduism himself, and organizing a body of followers. Though his early attempts at setting up the Arya Samaj were in the Bombay Presidency, he achieved success only in Punjab and western U.P. See J.T.F. Jordens, *Dayananda Saraswati: His Life and Ideas* (Delhi, 1978).

years, especially following the early death of the Swami himself.[83] Here, in many instances Saraswati seems to suggest that caste as it existed in the Vedic past, and the manner in which it had to be institutionalized in the Aryan future, ought not to be dependent upon the exigencies of birth. Dayanand's society of the future was, of course, fundamentally hierarchical, based as it was on the caste system. Yet he seemed to be opening a door to social mobility built on the rational programme of allotting caste on the basis of merit, once his visionary kingship had provided education to all. Thus education, indeed the study of the Vedas was open to all:

> Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras, women, servants, aye, even the lowest of the low... teach and preach the Veda and thereby acquire true knowledge. ...[84]

Historians have tended to accept this aspect of Dayanand's vision, and have therefore spoken of the attraction of the 'open social system' of Dayanand.[85]

However, it was not just Dayanand's conception of the Aryan nation populated by healthy, upper caste Aryan men, or his horror of social chaos where castes inter-mixed that hints at the elitist society he had envisaged. It was also that imperceptibly in his work he slipped from making caste merit-based to making it contingent upon the accident of birth.[86] His belief in the theory *of karma* meant that he often said that birth in a particular station was a result of one's good or bad deeds.[87] The quality of a person's body and intellect was also dependent upon a person's biological inheritance:

> A Brahman and a Brahmani are fed on the very best of foods, hence their bodies are formed out of the reproductive elements that are free from impurities and other deleterious elements, which is not true of the bodies of the extremely degraded men and women that are simply laden with dirt and other foul matter.[88]

[83]The Lahore Arya Samaj was founded on 24 July 1877 following Dayanand Saraswati's visit there. In the next few months that the Swami was in Punjab, 11 Samajes were established. He died in 1883 in Rajputana, but the Arya Samaj movement continued to draw adherents in Punjab. See *Arya Dharm,* Ch. 2.

[u] *Light of Truth,* p. 78.

[85]*Arya Dharm,* p. 33.

[86]For a discussion of Dayanand's position on caste and its implications for women see Anshu Malhotra, The Body as a metaphor for the Nation: The Satyarth Prakash of Swami Dayanand Saraswati' in *The Arya Samaj Movement and Women in Punjab c 1875-1928: Women and the Project of Nation,* Unpublished M. Phil Dissertation, University of Delhi, (1991).

[87]*Light of Truth,* pp. 299-300.

[88]ibid.

Dayanand's ambivalence on the question of caste allowed his adherents to maintain caste privilege, while the double-speak on the merit and talents of a person allowed the Aryas to use a rhetoric consonant with modern times which offered a nominal equality to all. It also made for the expansion of the Hindu community by making it attractive for low castes and others to be purified to join the Aryan nation, through the dual programme of the Arya Samaj of *shuddhi* and *sangathan.*

However, if caste privilege was to accompany the bloating of Hindu numbers, strict control over a high caste woman's sexuality and reproduc-tivity was absolutely essential. Dayanand tried to ensure this partially by emphasizing the absolute necessity of marrying within the same caste, frowning upon the 'admixture of classes':

> They should... marry persons of their own class, namely, a Brahman a Brahmani woman; Kshatriya a Kshatriya woman; Vaishya a Vaishya woman; and a Shudra a Shudra woman.[89]

This was an injunction that high caste society was anxious to maintain, though the other message of Dayanand, of harnessing women's reproductive potential by resorting to *niyog* (Dayanand had his own understanding of levirate marriage), met with embarrassment. Strict control over a woman's reproductivity and sexuality was nevertheless a necessary, intrinsic ingredient of working out effective marriage strategies that protected a high-born status.

That the biradari of the Arya Samajis helped in finding suitable grooms for young marriageable daughters from among a more commodious high caste group is apparent in many biographical accounts of the early twentieth century. The daughters of Munshi Ram are a case in point. His elder daughter Ved Kumari was married to a Khatri in the 'traditional' manner. However, for his second daughter, Hemant Kumari, Munshi Ram found a young Arora doctor.[90] Also evident is the strict control that was maintained over girls, even as they were fitted with 'modern' accoutrements seen necessary for marriage. The daughter of Lala Durga Das Mehra, for instance, a senior advocate in the Punjab High Court, and an educationist, who married Ved Mehta's father, was imparted a minimum education, though well-trained in household chores. She was taught some English in preparation of her marriage to a westernized young man, but her formal education had ended very early when she

[89]ibi<±, p. 100.

[90]J.T.F. Jordens, *Swami Shraddhananda: His Life and Causes* (Oxford, 1981), p. 49. Also see Indra Vidyavachaspati, *Amar Shahid Swami Shraddhanand: Mere Pita* (Delhi, n.d.), p. 28.

had failed an exam. Before marriage she was hardly ever allowed to step out of the house, and when she did so, maintained *parda* and went out escorted.[91] A similar case is that of Damyanti, daughter of Devi Dayal Oberoi, an Arya Samaji of Lahore and a Professor of Mathematics at the Dayanand Anglo Vedic (DAV) College. She was married to Mangat Rai Khuller, who had also studied at the DAV College. She too received very little education, but was made adept at household chores. She spoke movingly of the discipline in her natal house, and reiterated many times how she had to wear her wrap *(dupatta)* just right, covering her bosom, never allowing it to climb up, or fall down.[92]

Caste, Gender, and the Singh Sabha Movement in Punjab

It is more difficult to show the significance of caste identity amongst the reformist Sikhs of late nineteenth century Punjab. This is a reflection of the dominant position that the 'Tat Khalsa' (Pure/True Khalsa) group of the Lahore Singh Sabha came to occupy on the question of Sikh identity, as opposed to the 'Sanatan Sikhs' (Eternal/Ancient Sikhs) of the Amritsar Singh Sabha.[93] While the Sanatan Sikhs defended both a close Sikh association with Hinduism, and adherence to the caste system, the Tat Khalsa, who successfully expended most of their energies in shaping a Khalsa identity for all Sikhs, not only denied Sikhism's relationship with Hinduism, but also condemned the caste system, at least theoretically.[94] This dual stand was, for example, sharply displayed by Bhai Kahn Singh in his famous book *Ham Hindu Nahin* or *We Are Not Hindus,* a didactic work which came to symbolize the spirit of the Tat Khalsa.[95] On the complex question of relationship with Hinduism, Kahn Singh acknowledged that the Sikhs had been a part of Hindus at a certain time in history, just as the Christians were formerly Jews. But just as Christianity is recognized as a separate religion so should Sikhism be granted such a status. He also conceded that the Sikhs had relations of

^*Daddyji,* pp. 130-40.

"Interview with Damyanti Khullar, Delhi, 4.5.92.

[93]The Amritsar Singh Sabha was established in 1873, with its membership mainly composed from among the Sikh aristocracy and landlords. The Lahore Singh Sabha, which was founded in 1879, and was referred to as the 'radical' group, drew its members mainly from among the merchants, traders and the professionals, those who collectively composed the new elite. See *The Construction of Religious Boundaries,* Chs. 4, 5 & 6, and in *Who is a Sikh?* Chs. 5 & 6.

[94]ibid.

[95]Bhai Kahn Singh, *Ham Hindu Nahin* (Arthat Hindu Mussalman Adikan Ton Sikh Kaum Nirali Hai) (Amritsar, 1907, 3rd ed.)

marriage with non-Khalsa Sikhs and Hindus, a practice in keeping with other historical examples of people (men who had a religious and a public identity) marrying women of other religions, but condemned following such customs in the future. He attacked the caste system as a Hindu practice, stating that the Sikhs did not believe in *jati-varan [yama),* and arguing that the Sikh gurus did not support the caste system, as the non-Khalsas alleged.[96] The Sikhs occupational differences, as for instance, between a *gyani* (Sikh intellectual), *granthi {gurdwara* priest), *zamindar* (landlord, a term applied to all peasant proprietors in Punjab) and a *vyapari* (trader) were not based on birth, according to Kahn Singh. However, despite the sharp dichotimizing between the Tat Khalsa and the Sanatan Sikhs made by historians, the former's stand on caste showed considerable equivocation. This was the case despite the necessity of drawing the Jat and low-caste Sikhs to the Singh Sabhas' cause in the interests of a larger Sikh community. The equivocal stand, however, reflected the fact that a large number of followers of the Singh Sabhas came from the trader-professional high castes of Punjab.[97] It was precisely this group that had a lot to gain by way of government patronage by portraying a consistent Sikh identity, as Oberoi has shown.[98] Yet, it was within this very group that there was a noticeable tendency among Sikhs to maintain a *sahajdhari* identity (this word, at least in the way it was used in late nineteenth century came to mean those 'gradually' taking on the Khalsa Sikh, or the *amritdhari* identity) which often meant not being strict about keeping the five Ks, especially the long hair or *kes,* a bodily symbolism the Singh Sabhas made mandatory to the Sikh identity by the end of the century.[99] The Singh Sabhas' insistence upon the maintenance of outward symbols of the Sikh faith becomes understandable if we keep

[95]See 'Caste in the Sikh Panth' for the gurus' position on the question of caste.

[97]The Khalsa Directory that was published by the Khalsa Tract Society in two volumes in 1898-99, noted the various branches of the Singh Sabha, as well as their membership. The most substantial groups that were listed were those in 'government service' and the *'dukandari* or shop-keepers. The preface to the first volume also betrayed the traders culture of the Singh Sabhas. It particularly noted the names of the merchants/traders *(saudagar)* among the Sikhs, hoping their followers would emulate the rich and set up independent businesses, a need for which was urgently felt, the preface noted, because the Sikhs were largely a poor community. *Khalsa Directory,* 2 Vols. (Amritsar, 1898 & 1899).

[l>s]*The Construction of Religious Boundaries.*

"The Khalsa Directory deliberately did not include the names of *sahajdhari* Sikhs in its lists, accusing them of being disrespectful to fees. It noted that though it was fine to be Sikhs from the inside, it was important to show this from the outside as well. It further took it upon itself to replace the honorific 'Lala' prefixed to the names of many of the Sabhas' adherents, a title suggestive of'Hindu' high caste status, with the more appropriate 'Bhai' reflecting a Sikh ancestry. *Khalsa Directory,* Vol I.

in mind McLeod's observation that laxity in adherence to these by high caste groups even today leads to such people's identification with Hindus, even if they themselves may be firm believers in Sikhism.[100]

An ambivalent stand on the question of caste was often adopted by the leading luminaries of the Singh Sabhas. Oberoi has, for example, discussed how f awahir Singh Kapur, a prominent figure of the Lahore Sabha, refused to include the low castes in his appeal to the Public Service Commission to create a greater Indian representation in the covenanted civil service.[101] Oberoi notes how this reflected a desire to maintain social privilege by the new elites. However, Ditt Singh's (who was a Sikh 'outcaste' himself) diatribes against the intermixing of castes is referred to as merely 'ironical' by Oberoi.[102] Ditt Singh, was not only a leading member of the Lahore Sabha, but was also one most endowed with a crusading spirit as his many books and pamphlets written in defence of the Sabha ideology show. His insistence upon maintaining caste exclusivity in spite of his own rise on the social ladder should, then, be taken as a deep discomfort with caste equality within the Singh Sabha movement. This ambiguity on the question of caste persisted despite the Sabhas encouragement to institutions like the initiation ceremony *(pahul)* and communal eating *(langar)* with their apparent disregard for caste distinctions. The Singh Sabhas reflected a vision of a hierarchically organized society, with some groups within it more privileged than the others, even though a Sikh identity hinged upon declaring everyone in its fold equal.

It was, once again, in the Sabhaites' writings on the desired reforms for women, and on the roles that they were expected to fulfil, that one sees how the control over women's sexuality and reproductivity was central to maintaining social privilege. Like the Arya Samaj, the Singh Sabhas echoed the ideal of a pativrata wife for women. The axioms of chastity and intense domestic labour on which the new ideal rested, were undoubtedly meant for women of high birth, who could forsake labour outside the home and afford to guard their honour against all odds. Interestingly, in order to legitimize the reworked ideal of the pativrata, 'Hindu' mythological characters like a Sita or a Savitri found an equally important place in literature meant for women, as the new characters picked up from the ongoing project of creating a separate Sikh history. Kahn Singh, for instance, while exhorting Sikh women to take lessons from the lives of women such as Bibi Nanki, Bibi Bhani, Mata Sahib Devi, Mai Bhago etc., and while ridiculing Hindu gods and goddesses, felt

[mo] *Who is a Sikhl* p. 111.

[101] The *Construction of Religious Boundaries,* p. 288.

[1M] ibid., p. 308.

compelled to say that if the anecdotes attached to the lives of various goddesses expounded bravery, unbounded love and respect for the husband, it was a lesson worth imitating.[103] In fact, such eclecticism meant that the popularity that some 'Hindu' texts achieved in this period in the task of underlining women's roles in society, were frequently referred to in Sikh reformist literature with additional examples given from a reconstructed Sikh history. The Sikhs were not so much foregoing a cultural inheritance as dressing it up in the right garb.

The insistence upon the principle of chastity as central to the makeup of a pativrata woman comes through most clearly in the three early novels of BhaiVir Singh. *Sundari, Bijai Singh,* and *Satwant Kaur* (Part I).[104] Bhai Vir Singh was not only a leading light of the Singh Sabha movement, but is also generally acknowledged as the most important literary figure writing in Punjabi in the last decade of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century.[105] His influence in the movement of Sikh reform was therefore considerable, and even today his novels are reprinted to exhort Sikhs (especially those living abroad) to follow the tenets of'true' Sikhism.[106] His first two novels are important also because they deal with the difficult task of convincing *sahajdharis* of the significance of a Khalsa identity, as well as with high caste Hindu conversions to Sikhism, as displayed in the conviction in Sikhism of Sundari and Bijai Singh, earlier Khatri Hindus. All three novels carefully construct a 'Sikh' history of the eighteenth century marked by Sikh bravery and suffering, but additionally in *Sundari* Vir Singh is absorbed with justifying his ancestor Kaura Mai's service to the Mughal government (he was a *diwan* to the governor of Lahore) pitched against the Sikhs.[107]

Sundari, Sheel Kaur (Bijai Singh's wife) and Satwant Kaur are shown to go through many travails in order to protect their honour, a power they acquire by following and understanding Sikh faith. Sheel Kaur, a pativrata wife, in fact, dies a sati, killed not by fire, but by her inability to bear separation from her husband. Sundari, whose character was based on a folk song in which a Hindu Khatri's daughter is carried off by a Muslim

[WJ]*Ham Hindu Nahin,* pp. 138-40.

[104]All published by Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi, 1983. First published in 1898, 1899-1900, and 1900 respectively.

[105]Vir Singh is also one of the few who is credited with developing a modern literary Punjabi. Christopher Shackle, 'A Sikh Spiritual Classic: Vir Singh's Rana Surat Singh', in I.M.P. Raeside & R. Snell (eds.), *Modern Classics of South Asian Literatures* (Wiesbaden, 1996).

[106]His novel *Sundari* is said to have gone through a record 36 editions till 1979, ibid.

[107]It may be mentioned here that Vir Singh belonged to a family of Chugh Aroras, originally from Jhang in west Punjab. Ganda Singh, 'Bhai Vir Singh and his Times', *the Panjab Past and Present,* 7:2, (1972), p. 241.

at a time close to her going to her husband's house *(muklava),*[108] was also prepared to commit sati, but is saved from the fire by her brother. Equally powerful in his later works was the theme of widowhood. His epic poem *Rana Surat Singh* (1905), and the novel *Baba Naudh Singh* (1921) speak of the glowing love of pativrata wives for their dead husbands, undimmed by the passage of time. Whatever may have been the spiritual content of these works, or their resemblance to established literary genres, there was also a simple message of faultless devotion to the husband that stood out most dearly in these narratives. One can imagine this must have been the lesson absorbed by women who in large numbers attended the recital sessions of his works held above the Wazir Hind Press he owned. Mulk Raj Anand, who himself as a boy used to accompany his mother on such occasions, remembers how the audience was mainly composed of women—married, unmarried and widows.[109] Vir Singh was, therefore, creating a role-model for Sikh women, which had echoes in it of a high caste woman's life, and could only be emulated by her. Vir Singh's concern for the life of upper caste women also comes through in his many anonymously written pamphlets for the Khalsa Tract Society which he set up with Bhai Koer Singh in 1894.[110] Quite often it is the life in the *mohallas* of Amritsar that is depicted here, a life that Vir Singh was familiar with, having lived there himself.[111]

It is the argument here that high caste reformers of various hues in Punjab tried to protect their high born status and social privilege by controlling women's sexuality. This was equally true of reformers bent upon culling a new Hindu or a Sikh identity, such as the Arya Samajis or the Singh Sabhaites, or those Hindus or Sikhs interested in preserving 'orthodox' positions as the Sanatan Hindus and Sikhs, or even those like the Aroras, belabouring to 'uplift' a whole caste from its 'degraded' customs. In Sondha's jhagrra we saw castes apparently proud of their specific social and economic practices. However, the very discussion of these customs can be taken as a sign of their contentiousness. The tendency both to innovate and to fix customs seems to have increased by the late nineteenth century. In a period when the multitudinous pulls of multiple identities, whether demanding loyalty to a caste, community or even a nation, were

[108]Satinder Singh, *Bhai Vir Singh: Jivan Te Rachna,* (Patiala, 1982).

[109]On *Rana Surat Singh,* Anand refers to the story of the '... Sikh queen named Raj Kaur, who was widowed and went in search of her dead husband, almost as Savitri had done to rescue the soul of her dead husband.' Mulk Raj Anand, The Vision of Bhai Vir Singh', *The Panjab Past and Present,* 7:2 (1972).

[110]He is credited with having written more than a thousand tracts published by this society. *A Sikh Spiritual Classic.*

"'ibid.

shaping people's lives, men found it possible to stabilize status through regulating women's conduct. This also released men from owning up to caste-based prerogatives; in fact, they could positively shun its advantages, helping them participate in a political discourse that spoke of equality for all. Thus, one can explain the crucial need to institute reforms at home in order to bind women to the programme of enhancing men's honour. One can also show how a people marked by the colonial state as casteist, tried to safeguard their caste and class advantages while at the same time sought to deny the significance of caste, giving a new understanding of the institution of caste as perceived by an indigenous elite.

CHAPTER TWO

'Killing', 'Gifting' or 'Selling' Daughters: The Pressures on a High Caste Identity

The colonizing British power took the moral high ground as it entered Punjab, its cultural superiority over the natives sought to be made evident in the ringing 'commandments' of John Lawrence, the Commissioner of Trans-Sutlej states in 1848:

'Beva matjalao; Beti mat maw; Kori mat dabao' (Thou shalt not burn thy widows; Thou shalt not kill thy daughter; Thou shalt not bury alive thy leper).[1]

The colonial state, assuming formal power over all Punjab in 1849, and following the lead given by Lawrence, soon became deeply embroiled in 'suppressing' female infanticide in Punjab. For a brief period the plight of native Punjabi daughters became the *cause celebre* for the colonizers seeking to re-employ in Punjab their early favoured policy of attempting to rescue native women from the depredations of native men. The comments of Major Herbert Edwards, the conqueror of Bunoo and Multan, and later a Judicial Commissioner in Jullundur, are especially apt:

The Hindoo no longer feels himself a person of vital importance in his own house. His death will not shorten the days of his young wife.... nor those sacred races who cannot degrade themselves by giving their daughters in marriage to meaner men, be permitted any more to strangle them. In short, British rule has

'J.M. Douie, Deputy Commissioner of Jullundur District in 1895, quoting the biographer of lohn Lawrence to show the early efforts made by Lawrence to suppress female infanticide in Punjab. *Crime of Female Infanticide in Certain Districts of Punjab,* Home-Sani-tary-7/49-B, Sept. 1896. (NAI)

undoubtedly deprived the natives of many of the most valued luxuries of life. It has protected woman from man; and that great reformation is odious as it is honourable.[2]

The changing marriage practices among the high castes of Punjab will be studied here and a glimpse given of what these transformations in customs and rituals meant to the lives of Punjabi daughters. The initial horror displayed by the colonial state towards female infanticide soon waned, and its early meddling with social practices of the high castes gave way to desultory platitudes on infanticide as it was found among a large section of the Jat population. Yet its insidious interference on the question of infanticide and marriage, even as seen in the later banal administrative reports, pushed centre-stage not only the question of social reform, but also of ideal upper caste behaviour as seen in the marriage practices of Punjabi society.

These issues assumed their own importance for the emerging middle classes of Punjab as sections of it struggled to maintain their social dominance, while others sought to establish their elite status by emulating those customs that now came to be seen as morally right, honourable and prestigious. In the 1970s while doing her field-work in parts of Punjab, Ursula Sharma noticed and commented on a massive shift from brideprice to dowry marriage among all but the lowest castes in northwest India.[3] She speculated this shift to have come about rapidly after the First World War and in the two decades before she went to the field. Here I will explore the process of this shift in Punjab. The widespread changes in customs relating to marriages need to be pushed back to the second half of the nineteenth century, while they may have assumed the universality that Sharma commented on in the late 1920s.

Three related points also need to be highlighted. First, changes in marriage practices began among those sections of the society who aspired to be looked upon as upper caste/class, and then spread wider, including among sections of the agricultural Jats. It is, therefore, important to see a continuum of cultural practices within the larger Punjabi society rather than succumb to the pigeonholing of the colonial gaze which insisted upon sharp distinctions dividing the society. Second, it is significant to

[2]HerbertB. Edwards, A *Year on the Punjab Frontier in 1848-49*, Vol. I (London, 1851).

[3]Ursula Sharma conducted her field-work in parts of present-day Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. See her *Women, Work, and Property in North-West India* (London, 1980), p. 138. Also see her article 'Dowry in North India: Its Consequences for Women', in Patricia Uberoi (ed.), *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India* (Delhi, 1994).

note that notions of'ideality' of customs related to marriage were not new, but that these came to be rigidified in certain ways now, as they also acquired a general applicability. In fact, a variety of marriage customs existed among the Punjabis, as there were also forms of secondary marriages. While these did not disappear, there was a move towards recognizing just one form as honourable, and therefore suitable for those conscious of maintaining or enhancing prestige. Third, we need to speculate upon what such changes may have meant to women. Within a cosmos where a daughter was almost universally seen with disfavour, this devaluation surfaced in different ways. On the one hand greater vigilance was adopted over managing a daughter's sexuality, on the other, among some sections of the populace there may have been a greater incidence of what came to be called 'selling' a daughter in marriage. I will be here examining the meaning of 'selling' for the high castes, its relation to bridewealth, the possible increase in such a practice in the colonial period among some, as well as the manner in which the high castes sought to impose their ideas about its incorrectness upon various sections of the society. The social reformers amongst the Punjabi elites came to denounce the 'selling' of daughters, a practice they felt to be dangerously on the increase, and jeopardizing their self-image as the prestigious leaders of the society. The focus will be on the social, cultural and economic processes that dictated the manner in which Punjabi daughters were to be married.

Infanticide, Hypergamy and Marriage Expenses

In 1851, Major Lake, Deputy Commissioner of Gurdaspur, brought to the notice of the British authorities the prevalence of female infanticide among the Bedis of Dera Baba Nanak, the descendants of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith. Major Lake's initiative was followed up by other Commissioners giving reports regarding the prevalence of this 'crime' in their districts. This survey led the British to conclude that infanticide was widely prevalent in Punjab, and that prodigious efforts had to be made to suppress it. It was seen to be an upper caste phenomenon, and among the castes who were indicted were the Rajputs and Khatris (especially the Bedis amongst them), but also the Aroras, Brahmans, Muslims and Jats in some regions.[4]

To what extent infanticide was actually prevalent in Punjab, and whether the initial British reports on this practice were vastly exaggerated,

[4]R. Montgomery, *Minute on the Infanticide in the Punjab* (Lahore, 1853). (OIOC)

remained inconclusive, with some British officers taking a contrary view to that described above. Denzil Ibbetson while compiling the 1881 Census, for example, expressed his opinion that though the practice may have been widespread at a certain moment in history, it was no longer widely followed in Punjab. Quoting Darwin and eugenic theories, he put forward his improbable view that generations of wiping out female infants had left in Punjab a hereditary tendency to produce male children.[5] On the other hand, a few individual accounts describing the horrific practice point to the prevalence of infanticide among the high castes, even if it was put into operation on rare occasions. Munshi Bakhshi Ram Das Chibbar, a Muhiyal Brahman, for example, had remembered how when he was eight years old, he had been wakened one night and taken to the room where his mother had given birth to a baby girl. The child was placed in his arms and then a midwife had poured a jarful of water on her head that had been chilled by putting it on the roof on a cold December night. The baby's face had instantly turned blue, and she had gasped once and died. He also suspected his mother to have poisoned her with the milk of the Ak tree.[6]

The oft-quoted proverb, said to be recited at the time of burying a girl, who was buried with a little *gur* (unrefined sugar) in her mouth and a bit of cotton skein in her hands, further affirms Chibbar's account of the prevalence of infanticide:

GUT khaien, pownee kutteen Aap
na aieen, bhaiya ghulleen.

Eat your gur and spin your thread
But go and send a boy instead.[7]

F.A. Steel quoted the same proverb while documenting death customs of Punjab. According to her, Hindu women when they lost a female child during infancy, or while it still suckled milk, would take the baby into the jungle and put it in a sitting position under a tree. The following day they would return to the place. If the child's body had been dragged by the dogs and jackals towards the home of the mother, it was taken as a bad omen signalling the birth of another girl. If the body had been

[5]D.C.J. Ibbetson, *Census of the Panjab-1881* (Henceforth *COP-1881*) (Calcutta, 1883), p. 373.

•"This account was taken by Hari Kishan Kaul, the Superintendent of Census Operations from Russell Stracey's 'History of the Muhiyals'. *Note on Female Infanticide,* Home-Police-64-B, Feb. 1914. (NAI)

[7]*Minute on the Infanticide.* The translation of this proverb is as it appears in this text.

dragged away from home, it was taken to mean that the next born would be a boy.[8] It is not dear from above account if the female infant had, in fact, been deliberately put to death. What is evident, nevertheless, is that a girl-child was not welcomed in a Punjabi family.

The horrific practice of infanticide and consistent neglect took its toll upon the girl-child in Punjab. This was brought out time and again by the adverse statistics which showed the precarious life of little girls. In 1911, for instance, it was calculated that among the 0-5 age-group, there were only 914 girls per 1000 boys among the Hindu Khatris and 931 among the Sikh Khatris. The figures were much more imbalanced among the Jats, and as I have mentioned earlier, it was the Jats who came under increasing scrutiny for female infanticide as the nineteenth century progressed. Among the Hindu Jats it was calculated that there were only 839 girls per 1000 boys, while the figure plummeted still further with Sikh Jats, the returns showing only 694 girls under 5.[9] However, the issue to which I wish to draw attention here are not the dismaying statistics, nor the appalling mistreatment of girls that they indicate.[10] I will focus on the understanding of the colonial state on the issue of female infanticide, the actions it undertook to 'improve' the moral fibre of the Punjabis, and the consequences of their intervention, as well as inaction.

Most administrative reports on female infanticide, whether those which tackled the issue in mid-nineteenth century, or those from early twentieth, spoke of the existence of the practice in terms of the baneful effect of'pride' and 'poverty' of the Punjabis which egged some to kill their daughters at birth, though one reason may predominate over the other among different castes. Pride, it was felt, did not allow some to marry their daughters beneath their station, while leaving them unmarried was thought to bring disgrace to the girl and her family. This practice of hypergamy, i.e., marrying a daughter into a family of superior status, was seen as an established practice among many castes in Punjab. The unfortunate outcome of this practice was, it was felt, that it left a surplus of unmarried girls amongst the highest castes who were removed through infanticide. The other reason, the reports had suggested was that of poverty, for the marriage of a daughter required parents to spend lavishly on the celebration of the ceremony, as also to provide her with a large dowry.

[8]*Punjab Notes and Queries* (Henceforth *PNQ),* 1:5, (Feb. 1884), p. 51.

[9]*Report on the Prevalence of Female Infanticide in the Punjab,* Home-Police-38/39-A, Jan. 1911. (NAI)

[10]The issue of neglect of the female child has been taken up by Barbara D. Miller, *The Endangered Sex: Neglect of Female Children in Rural North India* (London, 1981).

Thus, to avoid becoming poor, it was concluded, many parents destroyed their girls.[11]

The crux of the issue, as the colonial authorities saw in Punjab, was then that of hypergamy, with which were linked notions of marrying a daughter in the upward direction, as well as what was needed to be spent on such an occasion. The tendency towards hypergamy among the upper castes of north India has been commented upon extensively by anthropologists in recent years, and a brief look at this literature can partially explain why for some high caste Punjabis daughters were considered burdens to be rid of. Castes have been seen as endogamous units, i.e., they marry within themselves. The rules of hypergamy, however, as already suggested, are seen to create a problem on the two ends of the caste, leaving a surplus of unmarried women at one end and that of marriageable men at the lowest levels. The rules of endogamy are often breached at the lower levels, where men may marry women outside their caste.[12] Later, I will show that the rules of endogamy may be broken in some other cases as well. For the present it is important to note that hypergamy is seen as an aspect of societies preoccupied with the question of status.[13] In a recent work Quigley defines hypergamy as a desire to further increase one's status among a prestigious and a powerful group by allying with those established as more powerful.[14] Parents, therefore, looking for a suitable match for their daughters may adopt hypergamy as an appropriate way to enhance their own status by making this alliance. This is what has been called by Bourdieu as reaping 'symbolic profit' by • making a marriage alliance.[15] At the same time it needs to be emphasized that scholars mostly speak of a 'tendency' towards hypergamy in north India. Often, the actual situation may be what anthropologists prefer to call isogamy, that is, marrying within the same status group. Ibbetson in 18 81 did note a tendency towards hypergamy among the highest castes in Punjab, but tried to show that it was isogamy that was the established practice amongst most groups including the high castes.[16] The co-existence

"Minute on the Infanticide.

[12]Dumont, *Homo Hiemrchicus,* pp. 116-18.

[13]S.J. Tambiah, 'Dowry and Bridewealth, and the Property Rights of Women in South Asia', in Jack Goddy and S.J. Tambiah, *Bridewealth and Dowry* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 93.

[14]Dedan Quigley, *The Interpretation of Caste* (Oxford, 1995, first published 1993), pp. 87-113. Quigley also notes that hypergamy is likely to be visible in a society that has access to political power. The case of the Bedis discussed subsequently suggests access to 'spiritual' power, which may have paved the way for close ties with political power. *y*

[15]Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Oxford, 1990), p. 168.

[16]This fits in with Ibbetson's opinion that infanticide was all but wiped out in Punjab. However, his views do seem plausible unless one imagines infanticide to have been wide-

of a hypergamous ideal, with isogamous practice is borne out in the personal reminiscences of Prakash Tandon, of life as it was in the city of Gujrat in west Punjab in the early years of the twentieth century. He spoke with pride of Khatris following the norm of hypergamy while fixing the marriages of their daughters, yet the marriage he described in detail did not seem to be necessarily hypergamous.[17]

Whether a marriage was in effect hypergamous or isogamous, hierarchy was nevertheless built into the rituals of high caste marriage. This was the hierarchy between the wife-givers, the family and dan of the bride, and the superior wife-takers, the relations of the groom. A number of anthropologists have spoken of the establishment of this hierarchy at the time of the marriage itself, as performed in the rituals and ceremonies of the marriage, even if two families of equal status were involved. Thus Hershman in his study of a village in Punjab showed how the ceremony of *milni,* when at the time of marriage the two clans were formally introduced to each other, ritually put the wife-givers in inferiority to the receivers.[18] Gift-giving, before and during the ceremony, was an intrinsic aspect of the rituals associated with marriage, an important obligation that had to be fulfilled by the family of the bride. In such an ideal marriage, the bride herself was the most perfect gift, that of a virgin, whose gifting formed the central ritual in the ceremony of *kanya dan.* The presents given at the time of marriage were of various nature. These included those given to the groom and his relatives, to the conjugal household of the couple whether independently set up, or as was more likely, a joint one shared with the groom's parents and siblings, and to the bride herself, with the term 'dowry' *(daaj)* perhaps inadequately covering the different varieties. These gifts were also meant to flow life-long, in the direction of the wife-taking family, with special care taken to meet this obligation at the time of rites of passage.[19]

Anthropologists studying marriage customs of north India, like the

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spread indeed, which most British officers after their initial enthusiastic reporting were not willing to concede, *COP-1881,* p. 356. '/■"Tandon, *Punjabi Century,* (London, 1963), p. 73.

[18]Paul Hershman, *Punjabi Kinship and Marriage* (Delhi, 1981), p. 194. Also see T.N. Madan, 'Structural Implications of Marriage in North India: Wife-Givers and Wife-Takers Among the Pandits of Kashmir', and Sylvia Vatuk, 'Gifts and Affines in North India', in *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (ns), 9:2 (1975), pp. 217-43 and pp. 157-96 respectively. For a recent and a slightly different perspective see Gloria G. Raheja, *The Poison in the Gift* (Chicago, 1988).

"Madan and Vatuk, op.cit. Also see Lina M. Fruzzetti, *The Gift of a Virgin* (Delhi, 1990, first published 1982).

colonial administrators before them, have obviously concentrated on the higher echelons of caste hierarchy, to come to some general conclusions about society. However, it is important to note that the notions of ideal marriage, the honour and expenses that it involved, and humility associated with being bride-givers, and therefore with the birth of a girl, were notions that were indeed found among a section of the society in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Punjab. For example, Kanwar Nao Nihal, the grandson of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was said to have spent seventeen lakhs of rupees on the marriage of his daughter. The Alhuwalia Raja was said to have spent eight lakhs.[20] Motilal Kathju, an Extra Assistant Commissioner and Mir Munshi in the Punjab Secretariat in 1868 wrote of what was considered the honourable way to marry a daughter. Kathju felt that there was hardly any respectable Hindu family that did not incur heavy expenditure at the time of the wedding of their daughter, and it was important to do so if the security and the happiness of a daughter was desired. Speaking of the significant aspect of garnering honour on such an occasion he wrote:

> It is admitted in all hands that the practice of demanding and receiving presents from the family of the bridegroom for the hand of the bride, on the part of the parents of the latter, is mean and dishonourable. The reverse of this practice, or giving suitable presents on giving a daughter in marriage, is ... honourable.[21]

Kathju went on to speak of how most high castes were, in fact, able to meet these expenditures, especially the Khatris of the province who were a trading class. He also spoke of the easy availability of loans on favourable I terms for the nuptials of daughters and sisters, pointing to the notions |^ of merit associated with their marriages. Despite Kathju's confidence about ' the ability of most high castes to bear the costs involved, indebtedness associated with such loans may have been common. This was brought out by a poignant proverb—*Dena bhala na baap ka beti bhali na ek*—It is not good to owe a debt even to a father, or to have even one daughter[22]—which conjures a situation in which the father of a daughter is seen by the society as one bound to be in debt.

Linked with the question of honour was also that of humility, clearly the lot of the bride's relatives. Hari Kishan Kaul, the Superintendent of

[20]John Cave Browne, *Indian Infanticide: Its Origin, Progress and Suppression* (London, 1857), p. 140.

[21] Pandit Motilal Kathju, *Memorandum on Female Infanticide,* Government Civil Secretariat Press, 1868, p. 2. (BM)

[22]*Note on Female Infanticide,* op.cit. The translation of the proverb is as it appears in this text.

Census Operations in his note on female infanticide in 1914, spoke of the minister of the great Mughal Akbar, the famous Raja Todar Mai, a Khatri by caste. On the birth of his first daughter, he is said to have ceased wearing a *kalghi* (aigrette) on his turban—a decoration that was indicative of his exalted position at the court, 'the feeling being that his pride had been humbled by the birth of a female child.'[23] Whether this statement reflected the attitude of the Raja towards his daughter one may not know, but it certainly spoke of the prevalent attitudes towards girls. It was with characteristic humour that a Punjabi proverb captured the awe mixed with dread with which the society regarded the son-in-law, for he had to be kept in good humour at all times, as he not only represented wife-takers, but was the one on whom the 'gift' of the bride had been bestowed:

Jis nahin dekhea sher oh dekhe bilai
Jis nahin dekhea jam oh dekhe javai.

Whoever has not seen a tiger may see a cat
Whoever has not seen Yama (messenger of death) may see a son-in-law.[24]

This sense of feeling small, an abasement of the self that occurred at the birth of a girl, could in some cases be extremely humiliating at the time of her marriage. The story of Dharam Chand Bedi, apparently used by the Bedis to justify infanticide, illustrates this. Dharam Chand, a grandson of Guru Nanak was said to have had two sons and a daughter. The girl, at the right age, was to be married to a Khatri boy. On the occasion of the marriage, the bride's family was humiliated by the groom's party in many ways. This included the insult to her brothers who went to drop her off to some distance at the time of her *rukhsat* (departure), and were taken much farther than etiquette required, returning weary and footsore. The indignant Dharam Chand, taking this as the last straw in a string of unwarranted humiliations is said to have bade all the Bedis to kill their daughters as soon as they were born, rather than bear such insults. His sons prayed to him to withdraw such a cruel injunction. Dharam Chand is said to have replied that if the Bedis were true to their faith, and abstained from lies and strong drink, God would only gift them with male children, a story among many things, indicative of the popular perception that the birth of a daughter was a punishment. The Punjabi proverb to the effect that a mother watches over the male child, but God alone watches over the female child, further indicates

[n]*Note on Female Infanticide.*

[24]ibid. The translation of the proverb is as it appears in the text.

the low value of daughters.[25] Dharam Chand, the story goes, took the burden of the crime of female infanticide upon himself, and it was said that from that day on, his head literally fell on his chest and he walked about as one bearing a heavy weight upon his shoulders.[26]

The falling of Dharam Chand's head upon his chest can, of course, be interpreted in different ways. While the Bedis, accosted by the colonial state for their cruelty to infant daughters, preferred to present it as a penitent posture for advocating a heinous crime, it can well be taken to show a permanent humiliation that the marriage of a daughter had brought upon the Bedi's shoulders. In a sense the motif of humiliation felt by the bride's family, can be said to be the central symbolism of hypergamous marriages. However, in Dharam Chand's case the question was perhaps a little more complex than that. It is possible that by Dharam Chand's time, the Bedis considered themselves to be higher within the Khatri hierarchy than they were hitherto held, as they were the descendants of the founder of the Sikh faith. In this capacity they may have also benefited in a material sense by bestowal of revenue-free grants as was certainly the case with Bedis on the eve of British rule in Punjab. The Bedis belonged to the sub-section of the Bunjahi Khatris, below the Bari and the Dhaighar. Thus Nanak himself is said to have married within his Khatri sub-division as he married a Chona woman.[27] The attempts by his followers to upgrade tiieir status, one can speculate, may have led to tensions, for in another version of the story, it was said to be Dharam Chand's son Mihr Chand, who fixed the match of his daughter with the son of a Bari Khatri of Batala, and subsequently faced humiliation.[28] This humiliation must have been especially galling since the Bedis may have now considered themselves as foremost among the Khatris. Female infanticide can be said to have been adopted as a strategy for upward mobility, for doing away with a daughter meant never having to bow before anyone, even one nominally held superior. Thus Sondhis too, the descendants of the gurus from the fourth guru onwards, belonging to the sub-division of Sarin Khatris, low in the internal ranking of the Khatris, were said to be following the practice of female infanticide.[29]

As the Bedis and Sondhis cases show, female infanticide could be deployed to make a statement about prestige. Though linked with the

[25]ibid.

[2S]This story is repeated in many reports on infanticide in Punjab. For one example *see Indian Infanticide,* pp. 115-16.

"McLeod, 'Caste in the Sikh Panth', pp. 83-104.

[2s]*Indian Infanticide.*

[29]ibid.

idea of marriage of a daughter, it also spelled a complete devaluation of the female child. Indeed, it can be argued that the notion of such a devaluation could exist independent of the desire for a hypergamous marriage. Thus, in the 1870s and 1880s, when it was discovered that many Jats were practising infanticide, the link with hypergamous marriage practices was not always easy to establish even though it was found that many elite families among them may be practising it for reasons concerned with status.[30] In fact among the Jats, infanticide co-existed with practices like brideprice and polyandry, consistent with shortage of girls, but hardly linked with hypergamy.[31] By early 1900s H.A. Rose, the Superintendent of Census Operations, was speaking of infanticide being practised by all levels of Khatris and Jats.[32]

To whatever extent the practice of female infanticide may have been entrenched among various classes in Punjab, the British authorities from the beginning saw it as a high caste/class practice. Even though during the course of the nineteenth century from being a reprehensible act that a civilized government could not tolerate, infanticide got transformed into an administrative hiccup which had to be explained during periodic censuses, the lethargic measures for change continued to target upper classes. The bulk of the revenue-paying Jat peasantry was left alone by the state, as were the other people after the initial intervention. However, the early attempts at social engineering, of rewriting social customs working within the moral ethos of the 'native' society, pushed the social life of the Punjabis in directions not entirely envisaged by the state. It was a novel situation in which an alien state picked up the leaders of the society, basing its opinion on both caste and class, and sifted through their customs, approving of some and disparaging of others. Such intervention made people more conscious of right caste/class behaviour which was now getting an official recognition, a trend that was further enhanced by social reform in different ways. Though the state opened up the possibility of social mobility, it neither had the means nor the

^*Prevalence of Female Infanticide in the Jullundur District,* Home-Police-27/30-A, May 1884; *Rules for the Suppression of Female Infanticide Amongst Jat Residents of Certain Villages in Jullundur District,* Home Department Proceedings, July 1885. (NAI) Also *Crime of Female Infanticide.*

[31]In the *context* of fats *of* Punjab Alice Clark's analysis with regard to the Leva Kanbi Patidars of central Gujarat, that they practised infanticide to control population and to have security of land, as well as increase control over greater amount of land, can perhaps be applicable. However, unlike the Patidars who practised hypergamy, the same cannot be said of all classes of Jats. ^JifiLCJark. 'Limitation on Female Life Chances in Rural central Gujarat', *Indian Economic and Social History Review,* 20:1, (19S3), pp. 1-25.

[32]*Report on the Prevalence-1911.*

inclination to control it. In the ensuing state of flux there were castes eager to seize new opportunities to move up the social ladder, and others more conscious of maintaining superior status.

Soon after taking control of Punjab, the British began to enmesh themselves with high caste customs in order to put down female infanticide. P. Melville, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Punjab wrote to the Government of India in 1853 about the Punjab Government's activist intention on the question of female infanticide:

> ... we must effect a radical change in the feelings, the prejudices, and the social customs of the people themselves. It must no longer be considered a disgrace to have a son-in-law, to marry a daughter into any but a class socially above that of her family. But, above all, the people must be taught to reduce the expenditure hitherto considered necessary by the bride's family. The personal influence of British officers, the knowledge that they take an active interest in the matter, a desire by the people to stand well in the eyes of their rulers, and lastly, the fear of punishment, will doubtless, from year to year, operate in diminishing the crime.[33]

Bedis were among the first to catch the attention of the British, and therefore the first to be the targets of statist reform. After persuading them to let some female infants survive, the British set about finding matches in the right caste for them. A meeting was presided over by a British officer, held with the backing of the Raja of Kapurthala, a small princely state in Punjab, to secure the consent of Bunjahi Khatris to marry Bedi girls.[34] However, reform was to be implemented within the wider community, and to this end the authorities held a grand meeting of the heads of'tribes' and 'classes' who were known to practice infanticide in Amritsar in 1853, and subsidiary meetings subsequently in many places including Gujranwala, Rawalpindi, Jhelum, Shahpur and Multan.[35]

A grandiose meeting was held in Amritsar on the occasion of Diwali. Many British officers later commented on the grandness of the affair at Amritsar, where many eminent men were present, emphasizing that those not held in esteem by the authorities were snubbed by not being invited.[36] This was an important comment on the nature of the occasion where the new state power acknowledged at a festive time its own feudatories, who probably came to pay obeisance to the new authority. It is significant that the issue of female infanticide, with its high caste

[33] *Minute on Infanticide.*
[34] ibid.
[35] ibid.
[36] *Indian Infanticide.*

credentials was chosen to be discussed at the meeting. It was a perfect opportunity for the British to introduce the natives to the 'higher' ethics of the new state. Among the issues that were discussed, besides making people aware of the crime of infanticide, was the urgent need to cut marriage expenses. Separate agreements were signed with the Hill Chiefs, the Bedis, Zamindars, Lambardars, Khatris, Brahmans and Muslims. For example, the agreement signed with the Lambardars (village headmen) tried to fix the expenditure that could be undertaken by the various categories among them at the time of marriage. Those in 'easy circumstances' were allowed to spend Rs. 1-125; those in middle station 125-250; and 'persons of substance' could spend upto Rs. 500.[37] One can only speculate as to how such gradations may have made some aspire to be called 'persons of substance', and Lambardars were among a low category on the social map of Punjab. The British seemed to add another sign of one-upmanship on an occasion, as already noted, that was meant to reflect the prestige of the parties involved. And since these agreements were only meant as a moral reminder, they were in all probability followed only in the breach.

By the 1880s and 1890s, the needle of suspicion for committing infanticide had shifted firmly from the higher castes to the agricultural Jats, though amongst them too it continued to be seen as a mark of the high born, especially among the Sikhs. T.J. Kennedy, the Deputy Commissioner of Ludhiana in 1895 reported the crime to be present among the Garehwal and Shiru Gil Jats and among the Lahori Khatris. The two sub-castes of Jats he described were the ones held in high esteem, the 'Sahu log'. Similarly, J.M. Douie, the Deputy Commissioner of Jullundur in the same year saw the 'Darbari Jats', who had been allegedly connected with marriage to Emperor Akbar, as especially prone to killing their daughters, even though the practice had already been noted to be quite widespread in Jullundur. Fuming against hypergamous marriages, and trying to control expenditure incurred at the occasion, however, continued to be the favoured policies.[38] For example, in 1870, detailed marriage expenses were worked out for some villages of Jullundur, specifying the amount of money that could be spent on various rites and other events associated with this celebration:

[37] *Minute on Infanticide*

[38] In 1870 certain other rules had also been introduced to suppress infanticide in some villages of Jullundur. These included making it mandatory upon the people to register births and deaths in a family, taking a three-yearly census of the population, and any one suspected of infanticide was to be reported—organizing the village midwives, chowkidars, and lambardars to make these reports. *Rules for the Suppression.*

Milni-Rs. 1; Kamin log-Rs. 2; Laag on occasion of phera-Rs. 2; Marriage feast-Rs. 25; Khat-Rs. 51; Vessels-Rs. 10; Jewels-Rs. 15; Cloth and clothes-Rs. 8; Expenses of the laagis on the occasion of khat-Rs. 15; Muklava-Rs. 30.[39]

The difficulty in making people adhere to such a rigidly laid down scale of expenditure was recognized in due course. Douie, for example, explained the necessity of not only making the parents of daughters in Jullundur agree to curtailing expenses, but also those with whom they intermarried in Hoshiarpur, Ferozepur and Ludhiana,[40] a difficult undertaking. For why should anyone who had the option of getting a bride and a dowry settle only for a bride? Moreover, as already emphasized, the manner in which the wedding was celebrated spoke of the honour of the families involved. Douie brought out the issue of prestige very well:

... what can be more galling to the pride of the Jats in the proclaimed estates than that village menials can, and,in some cases, do spend more on weddings than they themselves are permitted to do. At Kuleta the zaildar complained to me that a blacksmith will now spend Rs. 500 on his daughter's marriage and hire a band to add to the pomp of the nuptial procession.

And Sir Dennis Fitzpatrick, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab in the same year underlined the importance of Douie's point:

At present a man objects to having a daughter, because among other reasons he has to ruin himself in providing the cost of her marriage. In so far as our law took effect he would object to having a daughter, because, when it came to marrying her, he would have to be content with having her marriage celebrated in a manner that would be humiliating to him, unless indeed he chose, in addition to incurring ruinous expenditure as at present, to go to jail besides for disobeying the law.[41]

While presenting justifications for non-action, the problem that the British failed to address was the possible effect of their pointing out who the high born were, who were meant to give large dowries to their daughters and spend extravagantly on their marriages. Did this lead some to emulate the customs of the high castes in order to strut about as men of prestige, as the example of the blacksmiths in Douie's statement hints at? Did this push many to spend lavishly in order to live up to their officially recognized status? In any case, despite laying down rules

[39]ibid.

[w]*Crime of Female Infanticide.*

'"ibid.

to encourage thriftiness, it was clearly not having the desired effect. In 1914, Hari Kishan Kaul suggested to the government to give up the idea of penalizing excessive expenditure on marriage. He perhaps rightly argued that those with more money than they knew what to do with, were likely to spend it on marriages and would find a way of getting round the law.[42] What he should have added is that the others would feel compelled to spend money, so that they too could be counted as men of importance.

'Takka', Vatta', vs. Marriages of 'Pun'

The colonial state's attempt at putting an end to female infanticide was sought to be worked through by persuading the Punjabis to make minor changes in their customs, rather than any overhauling of them through an assertion of punitive power of the state. The idea was to do away with the savagery of natives' worst customs, thereby asserting superior British morality, without disturbing the social order. However, the colonial state's meddling tended to give a fixity to ideal high caste customs, as such behaviour became a symbol of prestige, as indeed the state recognized the high-born through their 'traditions'. Female infanticide itself disappeared in time, especially from among the upper echelons of society as it came to be associated with barbarity, but the desire for social dominance through following the right rituals assumed tremendous importance. This tendency received a further boost by the reformers in Punjab, who were anxious to amalgamate lessons of female uplift learnt from their colonial masters with more indigenous forms of asserting social dominance As the praxis of caste changed, more could clamber up the ladder that bestowed social status by strict adherence to correct rituals, while there grew a need to close the ranks of this broader-based high caste society. Through the study of right customs, whether initiated by the state or driven forward by the reformers who embarked upon a programme of self-improvement by following the ubiquitously quoted ancient laws, a scramble for acquiring and holding on to a nebulous prestige had begun.

I have emphasized earlier that the idea of an honourable, meritorious, as also an expensive marriage of a daughter was present among the upper classes of the Punjabis. However, other forms of marriages also existed and were practised by those who now came to discountenance them. It was towards the end of the nineteenth century when these forms began

[42]*Note on Female Infanticide.*

to be condemned, as they acquired social disapprobation among those who styled themselves, and came to be seen as high castes. The 1905 Gazetteer of Hoshiarpur district spoke of three 'recognized' kinds of marriages among the people. These were *pun*, without price; *takka* for a brideprice; and *vatta* by exchange involving a reciprocal betrothal. It also spoke of an informal form of marriage known as *chadar.*[43] The marriage by *chadar andazi,* practised by large numbers of Jats, especially for remarriage of widows though not exclusively for that, will be discussed in the next chapter. Here I will discuss the first three forms, especially as practised by the high castes of Punjab.

Though marriage of pun was the ideal, *vatta-satta* or marriage by exchange was popular among large sections of the society. Ibbetson commented on how widespread the practice was:

> In the west of the country among all classes, in the hill and sub-montane districts apparently among all but the highest classes, and among Jats almost everywhere except in the Jamna districts, the betrothal by exchange is the commonest form.[44]

Common, and despite the growing disapproval, so very acceptable was vatta-satta, that one reformist author writing against infanticide argued that if daughters were preserved, then they could be married in this way, solving the problem of bachelorhood for some:

> *Mundajo kavara rehnda, je ghar hove larrki bhai, vatte satta ban bahejavai.*
>
> The boy who stays a bachelor, if there was a daughter at home brother, he would become a son-in-law through exchange.[45]

As Ibbetson pointed out, exchange betrothals were found among all sections of the society in western Punjab. In 1890, Mohan Lai Shamepotra published a small book to eradicate from among the Aroras, present in large numbers in western and south-western Punjab, what he called the bad customs relating to marriage.[46] He was concerned with giving the Aroras a higher ritual status in the caste hierarchy, and used the technique popularized by the Arya Samajis of authenticating or criticizing a practice by showing the opinions on it in the old law books. He came down heavily against exchange marriages which many Aroras practised, warning

[^]*Gazetteer of the Hoshiarpur District* (Lahore, 1905), p. 33.

[44]ibid., p. 356.

[45]Bhai Lakha Singh Granthi, *Kurri Maar* (Amritsar, 1912), p. 10. Practices like hypergamy, infanticide, polyandry, and widower remarriage **all contributed to a high** proportion of bachelors in Punjab, especially among the Jats.

[46]Mohan Lai Shamepotra, *Kuriti Nivaran* (Lahore, 1890).

them that it led to sterility upon the couple involved. He condemned those who practised it as *vatels,* stigmatizing the practice as 'Muslim' in origin. He stressed that vatta marriages led to making mismatched couples, and likened the practice to fornicating with one's mother, daughter or sister to arouse the disgust associated with tabooed relationships in Punjabi society. He wrote:

Bhain diye jab aurat aai, aurat nahin goya veh bhain kahai.

When you get a woman by giving a sister, not your wife she will be called your sister.[47]

The marriages of exchange seemed to be especially shameful, as Mohan Lai showed, because they often involved taking money for the hand of a daughter or a sister. This he portrayed by giving the example of two brothers who exchange sisters. The one who married first refused to give his own sister in marriage till the other man produced some money.[48] Mohan Lai showed how relations between them soured, with each referring to the other as his *'said* or wife's brother.[49] Another pamphlet spoke of buying a bride in exchange marriages, especially when one groom was physically disabled in some way.[50] Mohan Lai, while exhorting Aroras to do away with this custom, felt it was appropriate only when a family had earned a bad reputation for some reason and could not procure a bride for their son in any other way, or where a son was a thief or a gambler, or when a son or a daughter were disabled. For the rest, it was marriage of pun that was recommended. It is significant that Mohan Lai did not condemn vatta marriages completely as they were seen to be still applicable for the unfortunate few of society. This perhaps reflected how deeply the custom was entrenched in the society. However, as the century progressed, the tolerance for vatta among the upwardly mobile sections also diminished.

One of the significant reason for which Shamepotra condemned vatta, as I have shown, was the involvement of brideprice in such marriages.

[47]ibid., p. 7.

[48]Exchange marriages often involved the buying of at least one bride and this comes through clearly in a number of instances. Darling gives an example of this in the context of exchange marriages which he refers to as the 'marriage on the cheap'. Darling, The *Punjab Peasant,* pp. 62-3.

""According to Hershman the most taunting abuse in Punjabi culture is to be addressed as *'tun mera sala lagdaV* or are you my wife's brother? This, according to Hershman, had the emotive power of 'are you the man who gave me his sister to violate?' *Punjabi Kinship and Marriage,* pp. 191-2.

[50]Bhai Mansa Singh Master, *Dhian Da Vanaj* (Amritsar, 1910, 2nd ed.), p. 21.

His use of shastras for the purpose of condemnation is also important, for the shastras were used by Dayanand earlier to condemn marriages involving the taking of brideprice. Among the forms of marriages spoken of as 'inferior' by Dayanand was the *arsha* form which referred to brideprice.[51] The constant reference to shastras as well as resorting to quotations from the *Satyarth Prakash* became common among reformers condemning brideprice marriages, and other so-called 'wrong' customs, displaying the tremendous influence Dayanand's ideas had in Punjab. Among the large Jat population of Punjab, marriages involving bridewealth were common and openly acknowledged.[52] Contradictory reasons like the significance of a Jat woman's agricultural labour, as well as a low female ratio within the population, can be seen to be the reasons behind this widespread practice. However, brideprice was present among the higher castes as well. This was especially the case when the groom was older, disabled, or a widower. We are told that when:

> A man of 30 who has never been married, or a widower of mature years, has sometimes to pay among the upper classes of Hindus Rs. 1,500 to Rs. 2,000 for a bride.[53]

It was for this reason that despite the low value of girls, it was the boys' parents who were anxious to find a match for their sons rather than the other way around. The anxiety of a son's parents to find a suitable bride in time was brought out clearly by Rai Mulraj of Gurdaspur:

> Most people have not the courage to refuse an offer of a betrothal for their sons when it comes from the parents of a girl for fear of getting a bad name in the community to which they belong. Others again hasten to get their sons betrothed because if a boy grows up unbetrothed it is frequently considered to be due to some defect in the boy or the family, and then it becomes difficult to get the boy betrothed afterwards.[54]

An older groom meant a bride could be procured only by paying brideprice. In Punjab, then, pressure for a marriage of a young, often a child-bride and groom came from the side of both the parties.

Reformers, by the end of the nineteenth century, came to style marriages involving bridewealth as 'selling' of girls. The idea was obviously to promote dowry marriages as the only honourable form, presented as the meritorious pun wedding. At the same time it is significant to

[51] Saraswati, *Light of Truth,* pp. 104-5.

[52] *Cazetteer of the Ferozepore District-1915* (Lahore, 1916), p. 62.

[53] *Gazetteer of Hoshiarpur,* p. 33.

[54] *Papers Relating to Infant Marriage and Enforced Widowhood in India,* Home-Public-35/1616/26, Oct. 1886, p. 261. (OIOC)

note that condemnation of selling girls in marriage occurred at a time when a trade in women, or *bardafaroshi,* was on the increase in Punjab.[55] By associating bridewealth with commerce in women, the reformers were not only able to show the former custom as despicable, but were able to make a contrast between the inherent baseness involved in profiteering from 'selling' daughters, to the ideal of marrying them in dharma, to earn a non-tangible reward in righteousness.

There are many reasons why bardafaroshi was on the increase in Punjab. At least three related reasons can be discerned which may have led to a rise in this practice. Firstly, the development in the colonial period of absolute proprietary rights in land (allowing buying and selling of land for various purposes including weddings), coupled with increasing prosperity of the peasantry, gave a new liquidity to Punjabi peasantry. Malcolm Darling, investigating the reasons for increasing indebtedness among the agricultural population of Punjab, attributed it to the increasing prosperity of some sections of the peasantry. A manifestation of this prosperity for Darling was that the Jats were not only paying higher prices for their brides, but there was a feeling that the practice of buying brides itself was on the increase, though he was at pains to show that the practice was in existence much before the onset of the colonial period.[56] In fact so commonly acknowledged was the rise in brideprice that many officials looked at it as propitious for bringing infanticide to an end.[57]

A second important reason was the settling of new areas as the canals dug under the aegis of the British made hitherto barren lands productive. The migrant male Jat population of these rich new Canal Colonies gave an added fillip to trade in women. They bought brides not only from among the Jats, but also the lower castes, to the chagrin of some colonial officials.[58] One report spoke of a Jat of Manjha not considering it a disgrace to make an alliance with a Chamar or Jhinwar woman, as long as the fact was not widely known.[59]

[55]It is reasonable to speculate that the practice of selling girls in marriages must have increased in times of scarcity.

[56]*The Punjab Peasant,* pp. 55-61.

"See for example, *Note on Female Infanticide.* Darling in 1925 was puzzling over why there was still infanticide when brides were fetching such fancy prices, *The Punjab Peasant,* pp. 58-9.

[58]Darling, for example, wrote how the physique of the Jat of Manjha was deteriorating because of his allying with the daughters of menials. *The Punjab Peasant,* p. 58.

"Comments of J.M. Douie, D.M. Gurdaspur in the appendix of the *Report on the Administration of Criminal Justice in the Punjab and its Dependencies During the Year 1898.* Manjha refers to the area of central Punjab north of river Sutlej, around the cities of Lahore and Amritsar, which was the typical area from where the Jat migrants were chosen to colonize the Canal Colonies.

Another cause that fed women to the bardafaroshi was the colonial legal structure that systematically deprived women of their meagre rights in land. Widows' life-time rights in land, for example, came to hinge centrally upon their being able to prove their chastity, and many widows of Jats were being forced to marry their brothers-in-law in order to protect patrilineal rights over land.[00] Many widows, in such a situation, some of whom were nominally wed to their brothers-in-law, preferred 'running' away from their homes, adding to the 'crimes' that the colonial administrators referred to as 'enticing' away a married woman.

These reasons coupled with the high prices that women could fetch made the lot of some women piteous. We come across an instance of a girl in Narowal, for example, who was sold into marriage at the age of seven by her father. She was bought for a twenty year old groom who refused to accept a child-bride. Her father-in-law then tried to sell her off to another buyer, but did not find any. He at the same time refused to let her go to her own father's house, who in all probability would have sold her off again, till he had been compensated for what he had initially paid for her.[61] M. Reuther, the lady missionary who brought this case to the notice of the authorities, also showed concern for the new rise in trade in women in the last ten years and its spread among all classes of society.

This case of the selling of a child-bride brought into focus the attitude of the colonial state to the rise in bardafaroshi. Though the authorities were able to rid themselves of worrying for this lone girl when she was married to a suitable boy more her age, the case did bring to notice the attitude of indifference adopted by the state in the matter of this laissez-faire trace in women. If the British worried about the rise in bardafaroshi, they did so on account of the drain in resources the buying of a bride represented to the Jat, as Darling's above described example shows. There was hardly a condemnation of the trade itself, reflecting a shift in the state's earlier morally righteous stand in relation to infanticide, to a more pragmatic attitude. In fact, what one finds in official records is a condemnation of the women involved in this trade, as report after report spoke of the increasing 'liberty' of women, and how a law ought to be devised to punish them, and make their marriage contracts more binding

[60]Prem Chowdhry, 'Contesting Claims and Counter-Claims: Questions of the Inheritance and Sexuality of Widows in a Colonial State', *Contributions to Indium Sociology* (n.s.), 29: 1 &2, (1995), pp. 65-82.

"Article in the 'India's Women' on the Subject of the Practice of Buying and Selling Cirls in Punjab for Sham Matrimonial Purposes, Home-Judicial-148/152-B, Aug. 1918. (NAI)

on them by introducing a novel feature of registering marriages.[62] The practice of bardafaroshi, in other words, according to the officials, loosened the sexual mores of women, and therefore it had to be women who ought to be brought to heel.

It was the high caste reformers in Punjab who chose to express anger against the 'selling' of girls. However, the cause for concern among them was not that trade in women was on the increase, but that it had seriously begun to affect the upper castes. The reformers chose to appropriate the general rise in trade of women to the reformist cause of condemning the selling of girls. They presented upper classes who accepted bridewealth as daughter-sellers. As already pointed out, the trade in women was not new, nor had the high castes been immune to it. In fact older grooms and widowers had regularly resorted to importing women from the hills. As one report had suggested, the most frequent case involving trade in women was:

> The offender or offenders... obtain possession of a low-caste girl by purchase, or otherwise, in native territory, and palm her off as a high caste girl upon some old Khatri or Rajput who cannot get a girl elsewhere, and who is probably a willing dupe. High prices are obtained.[63]

Thus, the notion of 'buying' brides was present, as was the styling of bridewealth as 'buying' by some castes. What needs to be debated is whether the practice of 'selling' daughters was on the increase among the upper classes, or did they chcose to see bridewealth in these terms now? Most contemporary accounts written by reformers seem to depict an anxiety about the rise in selling girls in marriage. However, this could reflect a new disapproval of the acceptance of brideprice in some form or the other, and a desire to wipe it out. At the same time, it must be kept in mind that the pressure to marry with a sizeable dowry was on the increase, and some parents of girls resorted to accepting money from the groom's party in order to display a substantial dowry and a glittering marriage ceremony. In other words, brideprice and dowry could exist simultaneously, and in fact did so in certain old customs like vatta. However, the reformers were driving towards the promotion of dowry, and its association with pun marriage, and a complete disappearance of bridewealth by indicting it as dishonourable.

The complex processes under way and the new reformist attitudes

[62]See the *Reports on the Administration of Civil Justice in the Punjab.* [63]*Report on the Administration of Criminal Justice in the Punjab and its Dependencies for the Year 1872.*

which perceived that the selling of girls was disconcertingly on the rise come out sharply in Bhai Mansa Singh's substantial tract *Dhian Da Vanaj* or *Trade of Daughters.*[64] In his introductory poem he noted that the practice was visible these days among all castes including the Jats, Kalals, Khatris, Suds and Baniyas.[65] He went on to discuss how in the 'olden' days the practice was rare, and whoever succumbed to it was held as a pariah by the people. However, according to Mansa Singh, the practice was so common in his day that it was rare to find a household where a girl had not been 'sold'. He noted that what was really surprising was that it was not confined to the poor any more, and that rich and respectable people like the Khatris and the Baniyas were indulging in it.[66] Thus, there was a genuine concern for the spread of'disreputable' customs among the high castes. In his tract he related the story of two brothers from an old and well respected Sikh family of the *misal* times. One brother who was concerned with preserving the good name of their father prevents the other brother from 'selling' his daughter in marriage by giving in to his wife's advice (who else could be blamed?), even though the deal had been struck.[67] However, Mansa Singh also noted with approval how some biradaris of Vanjahi (Bunjahi) Khatris were taking steps against the continuation of this heinous practice, pointing to a longer and more widespread history of bridewealth. He exhorted biradaris of every caste now to do the same, advocating social ostracism of those who sold daughters by not having *roti-beti* relations with them, underlining the need to cut off social relations with such folk by observing caste strictures against commensality and marriage.[68] Mansa Singh also sought to make a sharp contrast between a marriage of pun with the other prevalent forms, and tried to highlight the shame associated with these 'others'. This shame was expressed in the hesitation of the brother 'selling' his daughter in marriage to own up to it. He is shown to have struck a deal with an old groom at Rs. 750, of which Rs. 50 was to be expended on feeding the groom's party, in addition to which he was to give the girl clothes and jewels, but this was not what the brother exhibited to the world. The bride's father, when accosted by

[64]*Dhian Da Vanaj,* op.cit.

[65]ibid., p. 3.

[66]ibid., p. 73.

[67]Most reformist authors preferred to blame women for arranging such matches and for leading men away from the path of religion, including Mansa Singh and Mohan Lai. This was a device used by men to clear their conscience of any wrong-doing, and fit in with their desire to take on the arranging of marriages in their hands.

[68]ibid., pp. 78-80.

his brother for bringing shame upon the family by striking such a deal, rumour of which he said had reached him, flatly denied any intentions of marrying his daughter in any way other than that of pun. However, when he was confronted with the indelible proof of his guilt, he consented that he had agreed to take some money only to feed the groom's party, money which he insisted they had willingly offered.[69] It was only after his brother confessed to his having overheard the making of the deal, and after he had lectured the erring father on the right religion and morality as seen in the Manu Smriti, the Granth and other texts, that the ignominious 'truth' emerged. The maintenance of this sham of right rituals was however significant, for it showed the pressure being built to follow the prescribed rituals. This is also visible in the arguments put forward in his defence by the brother shown by the author to be in the wrong. He not only commented on the widespread prevalence of the custom of bridewealth, but also accused the 'neo-Sikhs' (referring to the Sikh reformers) of pushing everyone into new customs by their own interpretation of the Granth, the holy book of the Sikhs. That something new was happening, and that the author himself was conscious of it and needed to justify it, comes through significantly.

The author was also able to capture the new mood of expending large sums of money on marriages by various sections of society, which he considered to be wrong and leading to the spread of bad customs. He spoke of the halcyon days when marriages were only performed to get a well-suited girl and a boy together to start a householder's life, and feeding a few relatives was considered enough on such an occasion. However, he observed:

> ... these days if any one invites less than two or four hundred people from the groom's party, and not feed them feasts of all kinds, then others look down upon such a person. Many people to prevent themselves from being humiliated or called small borrow money on interest to show-off for four days ...[70]

It is clear that the pressure that led those who wished to see themselves as respectable folk to follow certain customs while discarding others, also led to spending more in order to achieve that respectability. This was a trend that not only saw a change to a pun marriage among more and more people, but also can be seen to be die beginning of the contemporary phenomenon of the rising costs and demands for a sizeable dowry. The reformers, as we already see in Mansa Singh's tract, began to show

[69] *Dhian Da Vanaj*, pp. 26-9 & p. 47.
[70] *Dhian Da Vanaj*, p. 5G.

disapproval of the rise in expenditure of marriages (like the British before them). However, they were equally determined to push for the approved customs and rituals, making it difficult to draw a line between following what was considered right (spending and giving dowry within limits) and what was seen as exploitative and vulgar (having to expend excessive amounts on marriage and dowries).

This acute dilemma between advocating pun marriage and frowning upon large dowries came out sharply in a 1930 tract published by the Khalsa Tract Society.[71] The trend towards enormous dowries was obviously already creating disquiet. The pamphlet *Daaj* or *Dowry* was a reflection of how much the practice of giving and accepting a large dowry, and other conspicuous exhibition of money at the time of marriage, had established itself by the first few decades of the twentieth century. The tract was written for the express purpose of putting a stop to the giving and demanding of big dowries as a contemptible practice that could bring ruin to the parents of a girl, as the story told in the pages of this pamphlet showed. The narrative moved around the figure of Dharam Das, a Khatri from an old and highly respectable family of Gujranwala. His parents were determined to marry him into a family where the girl could get a huge dowry, and they manage to do so. However, the girl's brother is later shown to commit suicide, for in marrying his sister he had incurred massive debts that he was unable to repay. Through the narration of this story the author, among a number of other things, hoped to reform his readers and take them away from the path of ruinous marriages.

However, the author importantly devoted a whole section to outlining what constituted 'honourable' marriages. These were defined as marriages in which the girls' parents bestowed the new couple with a dowry so that they could begin a life together. The author reached this conclusion after presenting a 'historical' situation in which brideprice was prevalent. This he showed by quoting the *arsha* form of marriage mentioned in Manu Smriti, and which, he noted, Swami Dayanand alluded to in his book, the *Satyarth Prakash*. The author rejected the historicized situation in which girls' parents accepted something for the hand of their daughteras undesirable, for rich old men were married, leaving capable young men in the lurch. The obverse of this custom, that is when a dowry was given, he looked upon with approval:

When the custom of dowry had started it was seen to be meritorious and it was indeed useful ...[72]

[n]*Daaj* (Amritsar, 1930).

[72]ibid., p. 12.

Jhagrras/Kissas and the Spread of the Reformist Message

Through a discussion of the literary genre of *jhagrras[kissas,* I intend to show how reformist ideas on what were considered to be the correct marriage customs were spreading from the city to the small town and the village in Punjab, as also across different classes. Much has been written about the 'classical' romantic kissas of Punjab, the freshness and popularity of the tales of love of Hir-Ranjha, Sassi-Punnun or Sohni-Mahiwal, revitalized through every new rendition. However, there is little understanding of the transformation of this genre in late nineteenth century, when cheaply produced chapbook-type kissas invaded the market. These took as their subject-matter a wide variety of issues, often doling it out in a kitsch of rhymes resembling folk-tunes very similar to the more established metres employed in the 'respectable' genre of kissas.[73] The proliferation of these jhagrras/kissas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Punjab, provide a rich source of materials to a social historian willing to tap them for information, especially as they were a product of, and reacted to, contemporary changes.

Piara Singh Padam is one of the few scholars who has studied 'jhagrras', without relating them in any way to the kissas spoken of above. However, the jhagrras/kissas I have come across, seem to me to be essentially the same popular genre that was ubiquitously available in late nineteenth century Punjab due to the use of the printing press. However, Padam's analysis of jhagrras lends itself to understanding the 'popular' dimension of the genre under study, whether we see this popularity in the issues discussed in the jhagrra or its dose relationship to popular culture. Padam attributes their authorship to rustic, illiterate, folk poets, who used a rough and ready language to speak of everyday social issues that they encountered, often taking up those that were contentious in nature.[74] Though Padam traces the ancestry of jhagrras to the classical *samvad* form, the main thrust of his argument is to depict the jhagrras as a manifestation of the imagination of village poets, and insists upon the rusticity, lack of artifice, and 'naturalness' of their portrayal of village life and their use of language. However, Padam's contentions are not borne out by the jhagrras he discusses. They depict poets who were

[73]A recent work makes brief reference to changes that the genre of kissas was undergoing with the growth of print culture which include a wider range of subject-matter, introduction of more 'Hindu' and 'Sikh' themes, use of new metres, as also writing of recent events, and of even local happenings, among other things. Jeevan Singh Deol, *Love and Mysticism in the Punjabi Qissas of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,* Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, University of London (1996), pp. 67-72.

mostly literate, and moreover, familiar with many literary traditions simultaneously.

However, Padam's depiction of jhagrras as a 'popular' literary form does ring true, and I believe that jhagrras were able to transcend and bridge the gap between the written word and an oral tradition in a very significant way. This occurred, as Padam has shown, because of the choice of the subject-matter, which included the negotiation of everyday social relations, especially those that brought to the fore the conflict in the hierarchies of age, gender and social position.[75] Jhagrras also used verse in a very effective way.[76] The deployment of pithy verses in rhyme, with quick-paced rhythm, made for a lively interaction between the poet who recited it and an audience which participated in its enactment.

It is my contention that kissas, at least of the period under study, were written by male authors, with entertainment and male titillation being intrinsic to the genre. A description of the wiles of women, appearing as *tria chanter,* may well have an established history in the genre of kissas; but I wish to draw attention to the new ways in which women's sexuality became a significant ingredient of the jhagrra as it catered to new mass entertainment, or became a vehicle for reformers messages. Thus jhagrras present a unique opportunity of studying the male, often the reformist, attitudes towards a daughter's/women's sexuality, and how these notions underwrote the changes in social customs being proposed. The message of controlling women's sexuality through resorting to early marriage, avoiding mismatched marriages as for instance when the groom was much older than the bride, or by promoting pun marriages, comes through.

The participatory element of jhagrras, especially as a collective titillation of a male audience, is very clearly seen in the jhagrras that I intend to discuss here. What also stands out in the jhagrras under discussion, mostly authored in the first quarter of the twentieth century, is the astute use of the press to publish these verses. In the explosion of the jhagrras and kissas that occurred, with many running into numerous editions, we see the authors making use of established presses in Amritsar and Lahore, to distributing solitary author-published copies in the market. Another significant aspect of this obviously new breed of jhagrras was that the authors, mostly educated and high caste, were able to exploit the 'popular'

[74]See the Introduction in Padam, *Punjabi Jhagrre.*

[75]Examples of such conflict would be between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law, sister-in-law and her younger brother-in-law, or between a Jat and a Khatri woman.

[76]The verses used metres of *korda, habit,* but also *dohra* and *baint.* Often parts of the kissa were meant to be sung in folk tunes, with a part of the kissa to be sung in *taraz siyapa,* the tune of the mourning dirges.

element of the genre. This was achieved through retaining the necessary orality of the form by writing easy to recite rhyming verses, and by the poets ability to link the village/small town to the big city. These various aspects of the new jhagrras, for instance, emerge in the one written by Kavi Kehar Singh. At the end of the jhagrra, the poet informs his readers that he belonged to village *(pind)* Khaniaan, of district *(zila)* Nabha, and that he learnt the art of writing verse from one Narain Singh 'Surgiyan'. In the beginning he brings to notice how he undertook writing the jhagrra because of the urgings of his friends:

Khas ki piyarian ne kiha sijawor mainu doosri dafe tun kissa buddhe da banaude. ... Dostan da saval manjoor karin Kehar Singha shahar Lahore vich ais nun chhapai de.[77]

Nothing special, but my dear ones had insisted a second time that I should make a kissa of an old man. ... Accept the request of your friend Kehar Singh by getting it printed in the city of Lahore.[78]

The author also releases other information about himself in the denouement of the kissa:

Janam Khatri ke liya, hor suno ik baat, jab se amrit chakh liya hua Khalsa zaat

Born in the house of a Khatri, but listen some more, since tasting amrit I have taken the Khalsa caste.[79]

The author through this intrusion in the text is able to establish an immediacy with his audience, as also advertise his high caste credentials, along with the appropriate reformist tone adopted by the Sikh reformers that among Sikhs, especially the Khalsa, there was no caste.

Similarly, another poet who hailed from Miyani Loon of Zila Shahpur, and published his kissa from an established publishing house of Amritsar, tells his readers that he wrote the jhagrra sitting in the company of his friends Ram Bheja Mai, Dhanpat Rai, Lakhmi Das, Ram Rallaia and others.[80] He too tells his potential readers that he belonged to the Bobal 'caste' of the race *{kaum)* of Khatris.

Though by no means were all the jhagrra writers Khatris, it is clear

[77]Kavi Kehar Singh, *Buddhe Di Naar* (Lahore, 1903), p. 4.

[78]I wish to draw attention to the difficulty in translating such rhythmic verses written in spoken Punjabi to English, which exceeds the usual problems associated with translating the verve and flavour of one language into another. My attempt at translation here is crude to the extreme and 1 apologise to my readers whose sensibilities I may be testing.

[79]*Buddhe Di Naar,* p. 40. Amrit refers to the initiation ceremony into Sikhism.

[80]Lala Diwan Chand Jargar, *Navan Kissa Kartul Kwri Vechan Di* (Amritsar, 1926), p. 55. Note the names of friends mentioned are all high caste names.

that they belonged to the higher layers of the society, which explains their facility with a literary tradition. What is important to note is that these village poets were very influential in our period in spreading the reformist ideas at various levels of the Punjabi society. In this sense they can be looked upon as a second level of reformers, having stakes in new strategies of social dominance. At the same time they shared a very ambivalent relationship with the puritanical reformers. This ambivalence was a product of the prurient nature of jhagrras, which even as they resorted to popularizing the morality of the reformers, did so while indulging in lascivious talk of women's excessive sexuality or men's legitimate sexual needs. Such talk was, of course, anathema to the high-minded reformers who we often come across condemning the kissa writers and worrying that women's education would lead them to the reading of such corrupting kissas.

Yet many *pracharaks, updeshaks,* and other preachers of the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha readily used the jhagrra form to carry forth their message. While many such preachers—though by no means all—drained the genre of its sexual content, it was an especially suitable genre to popularize the reformist message. This was the association of jhagrras, as Padam has shown, with issues that bespoke a potential conflict, and certainly reformers wish to reconstruct tradition can be seen to be contentious. Also the jhagrras catering to male titillation, often found female sexuality, and men's fear of it, a suitable subject-matter. Establishing a renewed control over female sexuality, especially as it was feared to spill out of bounds in times of change and loss of patriarchal authority, were agendas and issues close to the heart of the high caste reformers. The easy orality of the jhagrras, and their frequent use of folk tunes and rhymes to take it to its audience were the additional reasons why they were an attractive form for reformers to use. However, jhagrras can also be said to represent the attempt of the rustic authors to appropriate and make their own the cause of the reformers. In this sense they can be seen to represent the triumph of the hegemonistic designs of the new high caste, middle class patriarchy. In the voluntary adherence to the new values they propagated lay the claim of the middle classes to social dominance.

Relevant to our discussion here are three varieties of jhagrras, a crude attempt at classification of a genre that expanded enormously in our period. In the first type a daughter speaks to her mother of her sexual needs. The *saval-javab* (literally question-answer) between a mother and a daughter was an established aspect of the genre and makes an appearance in a number of jhagrras. Through this dialogue the poets introduce and

elaborate on the theme of women's large sexual appetites, with the mother accusing the daughter of being a hussy and the daughter brazenly replying that she too knows of her mother's secret lovers. It is important to note that women, especially young girls, never spoke of their sexuality in the company of elders, let alone exhibit it. By putting these words in the mouth of women, the authors tried to highlight the society's view of women's intense sexuality, and thereby underwrote the need to control it. In the second set of jhagrras, the lascivious content of the jhagrras is enhanced by ostensibly bringing in the reformist message against mismatched marriages. The authors contend that such unsuited matches led to women going completely astray, losing all sense of proportion in an effort to gratify their sexuality. In the third set, the jhagrra is emptied of its prurient content at the hands of reformers who try to drum in the message against 'selling' girls. Interestingly, in these jhagrras, the sexuality of a daughter is sought to be sublimated by emphasizing her vulnerable, serving character, like that of a cow, which also helped in associating her marriage with gaining merit.

In the immensely popular *Jhagrra Mavan Dhian* or *Quarrel Between Mothers and Daughters,* the author makes a young girl speak of her sexual frustration to her mother, cursing her for marrying her to a child-boy.[81] Betrothals in infancy, polyandry, and buying brides often meant that an older girl was married to a younger boy in Punjab. In some cases brides were susceptible to be sexually abused by their fathers-in-law, a consideration for the man in another jhagrra where he fixes the match of his young son to an older woman with this in mind.[82] Gurdit Singh, while he exults in the girl's licentious talk and behaviour, nevertheless, does wish to underline the threat posed by a girl's sexuality to her parents' prestige:

Kurri mutiyaar mai naal larrdi, kise de na vas jan javani charrdi
Palkejavan munda karojhat tan, nahin badnami kurri lau khat tan.[83]

The nubile girl fights with her mother, saying no one can control it when youth advances Quickly bring up the boy to youthfulness, or the girl will earn a bad name.

[81] Gurdit Singh, *lhagrra Mavan Dhian* (Amritsar, 1901). This jhagrra was very popular and spawned many copies. Among these was *Kissa Mavan Dhian* written by one Kavi Kahla Singh who advertised his kissa by announcing on its cover that he was a friend of Gurdit Singh.

[82] Bhai Amar Singh Gyani, *Nikka Khasam Te Vadi Vauhti* (Amritsar, 1918). In another jhagrra the wife of the son fights off the advances of her father-in-law by beating him up and reminding him of her pativrata religion. Bhai Dalip Singh, *Jhagrra Nunh Sauhra* (Amritsar, 1929).

[83] *Jhagrra Mavan Dhian,* p. 5.

In another kissa, once again, the author delights his male audience in the description of a young girl's beauty and sexuality:

Kajal dhar gadke, chalen tu chhati kadke, madan naag chhadke ...[M]

Underlining your eyes with kohl, you walk thrusting out your chest, like a snake on the ground ...

However the author is quick to point to the danger that could emanate from such uncontrolled sexuality, and therefore the need to rein it in through marriage. The conflict between the necessity of maintaining social norms as represented in conjugality, and the desire to transgress them through extra-marital union, have been seen as a central tension in the classical kissas.[85] While the tension emanating from this conflict is evident in the two jhagrras discussed above, it is the move of the genre towards social conformism, specially the manner in which it was deployed by the reformers or those who adhered to their ideology, that needs to be underlined. The father of a girl is shown to be so scared that the girl will turn disreputable, metaphorically presented as the staining of his white turban, the mark of his honour, that he marries her off in an unseemly hurry:

Hoi jo badkar hai kariye jhat biah, ujjal meri pag nun na kar deve siah.[S6]

Now that she is turning depraved, let us quickly marry her off, or she may stain my white turban.

This obsession with keeping vigilance over a daughter's sexuality was an aspect of high caste society, where the 'purity' of a woman's womb determined the purity of caste. Women, as Veena Das has aptly pointed out, were the 'gateways' to the caste system, for as reproducers they were crucial to the castes maintaining their ritual status.[87] The sexual maturation of the daughter meant that she had to be both protected from undesirable sexual advances of possible suitors, as well as kept under watch to prevent her from giving in to temptation. The need for constant surveillance of an unmarried daughter is brought out by the following proverb which compared a daughter to a lamp made of flour:

[84]Kavi Variyam Singh, *Kissa Allar Naar Da* (Amritsar, 1917), p. 4.

[85]Neeladri Bhattacharya, 'Pastoralists in a Colonial World', in D. Arnold & R. Guha (eds.), *Nature, Culture and Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia* (Delhi, 1995), p. 81. Also see *Love and Mysticism.*

[8S]ibid., p. 14.

[87]Veena Das, 'Indian Women: Work, Power, and Status', in B.R. Nanda (ed.), *Indian Women: From Purdah to Modernity* (New Delhi, 1990), pp. 134-5.

Atte de dive, bahar rakhan tan kan ghinn vanjan; andar rakhan te chuhe khavan.

Lamps of flour, if you put them outside, the crows fly off with them; if you keep them indoors, rats eat them.[88]

This proverb is especially interesting as it draws attention to the possible violation of a girl's precious chastity even inside the home, normally seen as a refuge from the depredations of the outside world. It is also a measure of the surveillance a high caste girl could expect to go through in her young life.

In the second type of jhagrras that discussed mismatched marriages, the authors reformist intentions come out clearly. For example, Lala Diwan Chand wrote *Kissa Kartut Kurri Vechan Di* or *The Kissa of the Deeds of Daughter Sellers:*

Vekho yaaron aaya zamana ban paye naven vapari jag de bhari Kurriyan
vechan mape lag paye daya dharam sabh hari kahi mat maari Papi vekh
buddhe lar lavan zar de lobhi bhari kurri vechari.[89]

See friends a time has come when a new type of traders have emerged Parents are selling daughters taking leave of their senses, kindness and morality The sinners greedy for money tie their daughters to old men, the helpless girl...

The author, however, also uses the pretext of this arranged marriage to speak of the girl's beauty, and her old husband's and her own frustrated sexuality. In fact the readers are entertained by describing the sexual adventurousness of a woman unhappy in her marriage. She is shown to turn shameless, willing to strip her parents and in-laws of their honour by becoming a bazaar woman:

Mera vali koi na jagte main kis da dar khavan te sharmanvan
Kahe Chand dial baniye kanjri yaar naven nit pavan maje udanvan.[00]

I have no master in the world of whom I'd be frightened and keep my shame Says Chand lets become a prostitute, have new lovers everyday and enjoy life.

Here, the fear of a woman's sexuality that brings disrepute to her family co-exists with a voyeuristic pleasure in it. At the same time the author makes his point against making matches wherein women's sexuality would remain ungratified, making them 'inevitably' fall into bad ways. Similarly in another kissa where a young girl is shown to be sold off

^*Gazetteer of the Multan District-1923-24* (Lahore, 1926), pp. 84-5. The translation of the proverb is as it appears in this text. [m]*Navan Kissa Kartut,* p. 4. [9O]ibid., p. 43.

to an old man by an unscrupulous father, the author while exhibiting empathy with the old groom's sexual needs, is equally keen to speak in the language of the reformers. Thus the girl tells her father that he should not be selling her, for that was described as sin in religious books, rather he should earn merit through her pun marriage.[91]

In the jhagrras and kissas written by reformist preachers, the contrast between selling a daughter and giving her in *kanya dan* is brought out even more sharply. These authors spoke of the religion taught in holy books and its emphasis on the marriage of a daughter as a meritorious deed. Kartar Singh 'Pracharak', for instance, condemned parents who pretended to accumulate honour by celebrating their girl's wedding, while all the time having taken money for her hand. He warned them that such a gift did not bring any honour to them—*ah daan lagda nahin.* He further told them that by selling their daughter they had fallen from their caste into the ranks of the Shudras, emphasizing the association of right rituals with a high caste status:

Dhi nun vech jerre rotian khande, dharam te jarmon doven gavande
Phir oh Ms taran Hindu sadande, Chuhrra phir sadvain.[92]

v, Those who eat by selling a daughter, lose (the significance of) their religion and birth
Then how do they call themselves Hindus, they should be called Chuhrras (sweepers).

Such parents were often likened to the Kanjars, the caste from which the professional prostitutes and pimps came, the term itself used as a form of abuse in Punjab.[93]

Kissa writers increasingly resorted to use of religious idiom to popularize the reformist values on marriage. As noted earlier, daughters came to be described as cows, embodying the same generosity and vulnerability that was seen to be intrinsic to that animal:

Kahe Chand dhi gau barobar kar seva phal pavan bhala manavanP^A Says
Chand daughters are like cows finding happiness in serving.

The importance of the cow in the Hindu cosmic world has been well documented.[95] By drawing parallels between a daughter and a cow, the

[m]*Buddhe Di Naur.*
[92]Kartar Singh Pracharak, *Dhian Di Pukar* (Lyallpur, 1914), p. 7.
"ibid., p. 5.
[94]*Navan Kissa Kartut,* p. 53.
[55]For the importance of religious imagery of the cow in Punjab **see Paul Hershman,**

sacredness of a virgin daughter was sought to be reminded to the readers, and the girting of a daughter in kanya dan was seen as a meritorious deed as was the gifting of a cow. Thus 'selling' her came to be equated with the taboo of eating the cow's flesh, and parents were shown to be fattening themselves on the proceeds of such sales. However, parents were warned that their ill-gotten gains will quickly disappear, and that they would have to pay for their misdeeds. To quote an author of one kissa:

Jerre dhian vechde, khan dhian da mas
Dozak dhoi na mile, kiya swag di aas.[9&]

Those who sell daughters, eat daughters flesh They
won't find a place in hell, leave alone heaven.

Interestingly, while speaking of the manner in which girls ought to be brought up and married, the kissa authors drew attention to the extraordinary manner in which parents were bringing up their daughters. Parents who earlier treated their girls badly, indeed were not meant to treat them like sons, were now shown to be bestowing them with unreserved care and affection, a social anomaly evocative of humour:

Kurri vechan ghar kurri je jammi, lakh lakh khushi manande vaare jaande
Has-has lori devan mape mishri makhan chatande laad ladandeP[1]

When in the house of the daughter-sellers a girl was born, they were very happy
and blessed her Smiling her parents sung her lullabies, gave her sugar
and butter to lick and
humoured her in other ways.

Having realized the monetary value of their girls, they were shown not unwilling to spend some money on them to ensure that they grew up healthy and matured fast. The irony of bringing up a girl as a boy in her childhood, only to sell her later was not lost on these writers. The same author showed how the parents of the little girl he described had new clothes and jewels made for her, obviously in the hope of reaping rich

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Virgin and Mother', in loan Lewis (ed.), *Symbols and Sentiments: Cross-Cultural Studies in Symbolism* (London, 1977), pp. 269-92; and especially for Sikhism see Harjot_Oberoi, 'Brotherhood of the Pure: The Poetics and Politics of.Cultural Tran.sgre^icin'^Moderri A5!fln ^*Studies*, 26:1, (1992), pp. 157-97. According to Hershman, Punjabis liken the cow to a mother, in whom qualities of chastity and sexuality are reconciled, with the cow being the perfect, ever-giving mother. It is in the sense of a pure virgin, however, that these authors discuss the cow-like daughter.

[96]Bhai Sohan Singh Pracharak, *Navan Kissa Bhandi Kurri Vechan* (Amritsar, 1916, 3rd ed.) p. 2.

[97]*Navan Kissa Kartut*, p. 5.

CHAPTER THREE

Ascetic Widowhood or Widow Remarriage? Dilemma for the New Punjabi Elite

Bhai Amar Singh, an established shopkeeper, publisher, and a well respected novelist, has two characters of widows in his novel *ChotiNunh* (The Younger Daugter-in-Law).[1] Rup Kaur is the ideal widow, long-suffering, immersed in prayers and pativrata in spite of the death of her husband. While her father advises Rupo to practice asceticism in this life-time so that she could release herself from the cycle of births and deaths, she herself prefers to pray to God for a longer association with her husband in the next birth. She obviously knows her womanly religion better than her father. The other widow is Gango, described variously as wanton, a demoness, and a witch. She is shown to boss over her brother's young and vulnerable wife, and does not hesitate to spoil her sister's domestic happiness. At one instance in the novel she is shown to lose self-control, and in a frenzy sets her sister's house with its store of grain meant for commercial use on fire. Gango the witch was a woman out of control, furious, unreasonable, and destructive.

Rupo was the embodiment of all the qualities that the high caste male reformers wished for in a widow. Gango, on the other hand, represented their fear of a woman outside male authority, sexually aggressive, and

[1] Bhai Amar Singh, a Singh Sabha sympathizer, owned a shop called 'Amar Singh and Sons-General Suppliers' at Sutarmandi in Lahore. His publishing house, Khalsa Agency, regularly brought out his own books and novels of which he wrote a bewildering variety. However, his favourite novels were those that dealt with the reform of women, for which he was often commended by the government. *Choti Nunh,* published in 1908, was a part of this set.

potentially dangerous. Rupo and Gango were the two parallel images of sexually independent women one encounters in the classical Hindu texts, either benevolent or malevolent, as Wadley has shown.[2] These women were in opposition to the wife who transferred control over her sexuality to her husband and was consistently benevolent. The oppositional figures of Rupo and Gango were also representative of the contrariness of women as seen in the Hindu tradition. Their *strisvabhava,* as Leslie points out in her study of an eighteenth century text from Thanjavur, made women inherently wicked, while their *stridharma,* or the duties of a virtuous wife, curbed their intrinsic depravity.[3]

It is significant that reformers in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Punjab grappled with these 'traditional' images of women, especially the widow. Historians in recent years have drawn our attention to how the figure of the widow troubled the high caste reformers in different parts of India, and the various reforms, whether genuine or those lacking sincerity, that were instituted in order to ameliorate a widow's lot.[4] In this chapter I will attempt to show how the fear of a widow's sexuality continued to haunt men, even as they idealized the ascetic widow who had managed to suppress her sexual self. The solutions to the 'widow's problem', in the hands of upper caste male reformers plagued by the fears of losing status if the widows question remained untadded, moved around the axioms of widow remarriage and an ascetic widow dedicating her life to public service. The contradictory pulls of effecting humane emancipation for widows, and protecting recognized ways of maintaining caste eminence, meant the Punjabi high caste, middle class, male elite

[2]Susan S. Wadley, 'Women and the Hindu Tradition', in D. Jacobson & S. Wadley (eds.), *Women in India: Two Perspectives* (Delhi, 1992), pp. 111-35.

[3]I. Julia Leslie, *The Perfect Wife: The Orthodox Hindu Woman According to the StridharmapaddhatiofTryambakayajnan* (Delhi, 1989). The high Hindu tradition, of course, is not alone in seeing women in oppositional ways. The tussle between an 'Eve' and a 'Madonna' figure has remained central to depictions of women in the West. Nead has pointed to the ways in which the English Victorian society was quick to denigrate a failed house-wife as an 'adultress' or a 'prostitute'. Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (London, 1988).

[4]Rosalind O'Hanlon, Issues of Widowhood: Gender and Resistance in Colonial Western India' in D. Haynes & G. Prakash (eds.), *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia,* (Delhi, 1991), pp. 62-108.; Uma Chakravarti, 'Gender, Caste and Labour: Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood', *EPW,* Sept. 9, (1995), pp. 2248-256; idem., 'Social Pariahs and Domestic Drudges: Widowhood Among Nineteenth Century Poona Brahmins', *Social Scientist,* 21: 9-11, (1993), pp. 130-58; Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, 'Caste, Widow-Remarriage and the Reform of Popular Culture in Colonial Bengal' in Bharati Ray (ed.), *From the Seams of History Essays on Indian Women* (Delhi, 1995), pp. 8-36.

could not hope to resolve the widow's question in terms in which it conceived the problem.

Chakravarti has shown how the brahmanical patriarchy of Maharashtra looked at widowhood as social death, denying personhood to the widow.[5]1 wish to further develop this analogy by pointing out that the social death of the widow that put her outside the parameters of socially 'valued' roles for women, also made the widow, hanging on the margins of domesticity, very 'available'. The widow, not tied to a man, nor bound to domesticity, cut a tragic figure in the imagination of men, ready to be changed, reformed, emancipated. The question, however, was in which direction the reform should progress. Here too, her 'surplus' sexuality and labour were sought to be harnessed, in the name of protecting caste, instituting reform, and building a nation. Furthermore, not only the upper caste reformers, but also the colonial state, and the missionaries in Punjab viewed the high caste widow as a problem. She was seen to belong nowhere, a woman without moorings who could be utilized for various tasks. The desire of the state and the missionaries to better the widow's lot were as suspect as those of the reformers, coloured as they were by the high caste society's perception of the widows.

While the popular image of the high caste widow depicted her as tragic and pathetic, the colonial Punjabi society set about realizing that image by making a widow's material and emotional condition further fragile. Colonial law colluded with patriarchal proclivities of enhancing status by pushing the widow on to the edges of the society where material sustenance became more difficult as the society became more vigilant of her sexuality. It was therefore left to the widows, the few who seized the opportunity to do so, to assert their selfhood and subjectivity, by living their lives by their own values. Without courting revolt, or seeking deliberate subversion, some widows nevertheless were able to reframe their own value system that gave meaning to their lives.

The Widow and High Caste Status

Tawarikh Qaum Khatrian or *The History of the Khatri Race* noted that the Khatris began to split into sub-sections at the time of Shah Alauddin Khalji. When many Khatris were killed in a particular expedition, the Emperor took pity on their widows, and with the help of his *diwan,* Udhar Mall Khatri, called a meeting of Khatris around the neighbourhood of

[5]'Gender Caste and Labour[1].

Delhi to make them sign an agreement permitting widow marriage. The Delhi Khatris who signed the agreement protested that the decision should not be binding until the Punjabi Khatris had been consulted. The story of the split among Punjabi Khatris was based on the various groups that were formed to go to Delhi to meet trie Emperor. However, all the Punjabi groups rejected the idea of widow remarriage. The Delhi Khatris who accepted the decision, it was related, came to be called Shara'ain, or those who followed the Islamic Law, whose corrupt form was popularly known as Sarin.[6]

The circulation of this 'historical' anecdote in late nineteenth century Punjab shows how the high caste Khatris of Punjab at this time based their elevated status upon refusal of marriage to their widowed women. Compulsory widowhood was specially perceived as a matter of great significance by the high castes, as almost two-thirds of the population of Punjab regularly practised widow marriage. Denzil Ibbetson, at that time Officiating Director of Public Instruction in Punjab, while responding to the Government of India's query on the suitability of legislation to tackle the problems of 'enforced widowhood' and 'infant marriage' (undertaken as a result of Behramji Malabari's campaign in its favour), spoke of the importance of the former custom for the high castes, by emphasizing that'... [it] is ... commonly used as the test, and spoken of as the mark of their superiority...? Clearly, both the careful redefinition of high caste status, and along with that the question of widowhood for their women, became matters of concern in late nineteenth century Punjab.

Widows entered the arena of debate and discussion for another reason. Their marginal position in high caste society was recognized by both the state and the missionaries, who for various reasons highlighted the tragedy of the widows' lives. For the missionaries, the widows were sad figures, crying out for help, their very pathos making them fit candidates for a Christian way of life. As Reverend Robert Clark of the Church Missionary Society put it while speaking of the large numbers of widows present in Amritsar:

In Amritsar District there are 56,181 widows; that is, one in every eight is a widow. Not only a vast, but a very special field for usefulness is thus marked out amongst those to whom this world is already dead, and who from their very helplessness

[6]*PNQ,* 1- 10, (July 1884), p. 119.

[7]*Papers Relating to Infant Marriage and Enforced Widowhood in India,* Home-Public-35, Oct. 1886. (OIOC)

and destitution may perhaps be more ready than others to give attention to the Saviour's message. ...[8]

Accordingly, the Church of England's Zenana Mission gave work to 150 widows in and around Amritsar to help them support themselves, while at the same time they received Christian instruction.[9] Similarly, the Ludhiana Mission of the American Presbyterian Church opened a school for widows in Jullundur, besides targeting them in other ways, which included giving scholarships to study, or sometimes a sewing machine to make a living.[10] Through the widows the missionaries also hoped to enter the sacrosanct arena of upper caste life, as the missionaries in nineteenth century Punjab concentrated their efforts in winning high caste converts, those perceived as capable of setting an example for the rest of the native society. It was only when this policy met with a limited success that the missionaries turned towards mass conversions among the lower castes in Punjab.[n]

The upper caste Punjabis were quick to *realize* the threat that the missionaries posed both to the sanctity of their lifestyles and to their social dominance. Widows, because of their liminal existence on the fringes of high caste society, were especially suspect, and were seen to compose the vulnerable underbelly of that society which could lead to its destruction. It was for this reason that indigenous schools for girls and widows ranked high on the agenda of the reformers. The apocalyptic vision of the high caste society's destruction through the combined efforts of girls and widows on the one hand, and the low caste converts on the other, at the behest of the missionaries, was displayed in the Khalsa Tract Society's pamphlet called *Jo Iho Haal Riha Tan Asi Dube*[12] *(We are Sunk if the Situation Remains the Same).*

The author of the pamphlet constructs an imaginary dialogue between Ram Kaur, an upper caste woman, and Bhagan, a low caste woman of Chuhra or scavenger caste, recently converted to Christianity following the example of her husband. Bhagan displayed an ambivalent attitude towards Christianity. While conversion to the *Isai* faith was perceived to elevate her and her husband to *'sahib log',* her husband even beginning to earn well for a time by distributing medicines in the village (high

[8]Clark, *The Missions of the Church Missionary Society,* p. 54.

[9]ibid., p. 53.

[w]*The Sixty-First Annual Report of the Lodiana Mission* (henceforth ARLM) *for the Year 1895* (Lodiana, 1896), p. 33.

"Webster, *The Christian Community and Change.* [u]*Jo Iho Haal Riha Tan Asi Dube* (Amritsar, 1902).

castes receiving medicines from the hands of an Untouchable!), it also made him fearless, and a drunkard, who lost his job and began to live off her earnings. Bhagan's ambivalence mirrored that of the author, who both wished to win the Chuhras over to the Sikh faith, and also wished to preserve the given hierarchies of his society. But Bhagan was, despite her ambivalence, very aware of the power that her new faith bestowed upon her. Unlike the Muslims, Bhagan warns Ram Kaur, who converted at the point of sword (a popular myth that came to be accepted as a truism), the Christians used a sweetened knife. They gave scarves, dolls and clothes to the daughters of the upper castes, and spinning wheels to their widows to lure them into the *karani* faith. Further more, she warned her, amongst the converts, there was no difference between the women of the Chuhras, and the Khatranis and the Bahmanatis. And in the time to come, Bhagan continued, the Chuhri women would marry the Eurasians, and the Chuhra men the upper caste Khatranis and the Bahmanatis! On Ram Kaur's asking her that in such a situation who would work in the upper caste homes, Bhagan promptly answers that that would be the lot of the Brahmans. In her disturbing prophecy, Bhagan goes on to tell Ram Kaur that political power in the future also lay with them, as they shared the religion of the rulers—*Isai sahib de bhai*—The Isais are the brothers of the sahibs. By the working of this convoluted logic where the powerless in society, whether the low castes or the widows, were seen as the repositories of potential subversive power, the high caste society prepared to gird itself up to exercise greater control over those who were seen to threaten their dominance.

If the widows came to be perceived as a threatening presence by the patriarchal upholders of high caste norms, it was no comfort to them to be told how many widows there were amidst them or that their numbers were on the increase. The Punjab Census Reports from 1891 regularly enumerated the ages of marriage among the various religious communities of Punjab, as also helpfully provided the figures of those widowed and their ages. The issues of early marriage, enforced widowhood, and low levels of fertility among the (high caste) Hindus, were inextricably linked with these concrete, 'unchallengeable' statistics. Utilizing the dormant sexuality of the widow, therefore, as we will see later, became an attractive proposition, undertaken in the name of the numerical enhancement of the Hindu community. So also the child and youthful widows captured the imagination of the reformers. The Punjab Report of the Census of India of 1921, for example, noted that in Punjab there were twenty-seven widows under the age of five; 2835 under the age often;

8963 under fifteen; and 26,400 under the age of twenty.[13] Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, a leading spokesman of the Singh Sabha,[14] in his pamphlet *Vidhva Virlap (Widow's Lamentations),* quoted the 1901 Census to display horror at the vast numbers of widows among the Hindus in Punjab.[15] The spectre of encountering one widow among every fifty women frightened him, and their large presence in Amritsar made him urge reformers to hasten to rectify this situation.

Containing a Widow's Sexuality

The Arya Samaj in Punjab became the leading organization that took upon itself the responsibility of resolving the problem posed by the widows. While there were other reformers, notably among the Sikhs, who were equally perturbed by what seemed like a conspicuous presence of the widows, no one quite matched the propaganda drive launched by the Arya Samaj, drawing attention to the widow's plight. However, the Arya Samaj towards the end of the nineteenth century had to explain away in embarrassment the doctrine of *niyog* advocated by Dayanand in *Satyarth Prakash,* or re-interpret it to mean widow remarriage. Though there were hardly any takers for the particular form of levirate marriage spoken of by Dayanand, nevertheless, the scandal that the extensive discussion of niyog in the post-Dayanand period created (he died in 1883), ensured that the question of the management of a widow's sexuality assumed an urgent centrality.

The *Satyarth Prakash* of Dayanand Saraswati was a strangely archaic text mixed with elements of modern intentionality. Premised upon the infallibility of the *Vedas,* inspired by a number of *Dharmashastras,* notably the *Manu Smriti,* it was driven by a desire to reorganize the Hindu/Arya community into a muscular, manly nation. Ideas of reproduction culled from brahmanical texts, were put to use to make the Hindu nation populous, teeming with Aryas of the 'superior' type.[16] Concerned with contemporary issues, including that posed by widows, Dayanand tried

[13] *COP-1S>21,* p. 246.

[14] Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, a Singh Sabha reformer, was a practitioner of Ayurved.a based in Tam Taran. He wrote extensively on medical issues as well as on reforms for women. He also translated books on these issues into Gurmukhi, as he espoused the cause of Punjabi through his Swadesh Bhasha series. He also published in other Singh Sabha presses. Though devoted to the cause of promoting a distinct Sikh identity, Mohan Singh's writings reveal that he was not altogether willing to give up a wider Hindu identity.

[15] Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, *Vidhva Virlap* (Amritsar, 1918).

[16] Saraswati, *Light of Truth,* pp. 105-6.

to combine the need for a higher Hindu fertility with containing and utilizing a widow's sexuality, by advancing the idea of niyog for widows.[17] Ruling out the idea of widow remarriage for the twice-born, as destructive of patrilineal property, he put forward that of niyog, which envisaged once-a-month sexual congress with suitable partners chosen by the community elders. A niyog relationship could be sought eleven times or until the birth often children, with the community deciding in advance to whom the children will belong, whether the perpetuation of the line of the dead husband or that of the niyog partner.[18]

Though Dayanand may have discussed notions of sexuality with the naivety of a *brahmachari* sanayasi, his followers, who revered the *Satyarth Prakash* and implicitly believed in the doctrine of Vedas as the store of all knowledge, and Vedic religion as the most rational of all,[19] faced the brunt of his advocacy of the scandalous doctrine of niyog. From the late 1870s till the next fifty years at least, the detractors of the Arya Samaj portrayed the movement as lax in morality. The Arya Samajis were often depicted as cuckolded men, having little control over their women's ferocious sexual hunger, or as impotent men, tamely suggesting to their women to seek sexual pleasures elsewhere.[20] For example, the *Mujaddad* of Lahore referred to the wives of the Aryas as 'niyogans', and its April-May issue of 1910 carried a poem which accused Hindu women of absolving their sins by practising the 'legitimate' niyog, while'... they (the men) find consolation in this/One sends one's wife to another

[17]J.T.F. Jordens has shown how on his visit to Calcutta in 1872 Dayanand met a number of leading reformers, including Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar, Debendranath Tagore and Keshub Chandra Sen, who inspired him to concern himself with contemporary issues. Jordens, *Dayananda Saraswati,* pp. 75-98.

[1a]*Light of Truth*, pp. 130-8. For a discussion of the idea of niyog in brahmanical texts see Wendy Doniger, 'Begetting on Margin: Adultery and Surrogate Pseudomarriage in Hinduism', in L. Harlan & P.B. Courtright (eds.), *From the Margins of Hindu Marriage: Essap on Gender Religion and Culture* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 160-83. Doniger points to the discomfort of Manu with the idea of niyog, and his concern with establishing paternity in case of such a union. For the consideration in Dharmashastras in utilising a woman's reproductive potential while containing her sexuality see Julia Leslie, 'Some Traditional Indian Views on Menstruation and Female Sexuality", in R. Porter & M. Teich (eds.), *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes Towards Sexuality* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 63-81.

[19]Gurudutt was one such follower of Dayanand who through his writings tried to establish the superiority of the Vedas. As a professor in Government College, Lahore, from 1880 till his death in 1890, he commanded tremendous influence over the young generation of the Aryas. For his defence of Dayanand's ideas on marriage, see 'Grihastha', in *Wisdom of the Rishis or Works of Pandit Gurudutta Vidyarthi* (Delhi, n.d.).

[20]See the *Selections from the Native Newspaper Reports* published from Punjab (Henceforth *SNNRP)* from the late 1870s.

man of one's own accord/Witness the civilization of the ancient (Hindu) race.'[21] While many of the journals of the Arya Samaj argued that niyog was not a central doctrine of the Vedas,[22] others accused the Muslims of harbouring greater immorality by purportedly sanctioning customs like *Lala'la* (remarriage of a woman allegedly with her first divorced husband after she had been divorced by a second), and *Muta* (temporary marriage apparently undertaken to satisfy lust).[23]

Undoubtedly, such abusive and vulgar literature must have contributed to ill-feeling between religious communities,[24] but the message of affirming manliness by stringent management of women's, especially widows' sexuality was also explicit.[25] It was surely such association of communal pride with control over women's sexuality that legitimized rape of women at the time of'communal disturbances' by emphasizing - the lack of control (in this case temporary) over 'their' women by men of the 'other' community. In any case, the controversy around the issue of niyog gave a special urgency to finding ways to manage the widowhood issue in Punjab. The inability of men to be vigilant enough of women's sexuality could, of course, also spell the danger of losing caste purity, the eternal fear of high caste patriarchy, and the one Dayanand had sought to combat by first of all mooting the idea of niyog. Umed Hari's prurient novel *Hai Hai Niyog (Fie to Niyog)*, was published by the respectable publishing press of the Singh Sabha, the Wazir Hind Press, not only because it made fun of the various tenets and institutions of the Samaj, but also because it touched the sensitive issue of loss of caste due to women's aggressive and non-discriminating sexuality.[26] In a fantastical story Hari

[n]*SNNRP*-1910.

[22]*Sat Dharm Pracharak* of Jullundur, whose editor was the prominent Arya leader Munshi Ram (later Swami Shraddhanand), of 25 April 1902 argued along these lines. SNNRP-1902.

[23]*Arya Musafir Magazine*, also from Jullundur, for Jan. & Feb. 1902, *SNNRP-1902*.

[24]Sikh reformers were also abusive of Arya Samaj doctrine of niyog. Mohan Singh in his *Dayanandi Dharm Ka Natnuna* (Amritsar, 1900), spoke of the shameful institution of niyog. Bhagat Lakshman Singh spoke of his conversion to Sikhism, even though he hailed from the famous 'Bhagat' Hindu family of Rawalpindi, whose contemporary members were all followers of the Arya Samaj, because of his disgust with the 'filthy doctrine of niyog.' Bhai Lakshman Singh, *The Principles and Teachings of the Arya Samaj—Some Aspects of the Samaj* (Lahore, 1890).

[25]While men accused women of prurience, it is ironical, though entirely in keeping with reformist ideology, that women Arya Samajis knew nothing of niyog, as literature they read was strictly approved in advance by men. One woman Arya Samaji, bom in 1909, whose natal and marital family were followers of the Samaj told me that she heard of niyog very late in her life. Personal communication with Mrs. Vidya Malik, 15.6.90, New Delhi.

[26]Umed Hari, *Hai Hai Niyog-Arthat Satyarth Prakash (Krit Dayanand Sahib) Vale Niyog Diyan Buriyaiyan Di Photo* (Amritsar, 1905).

painted in lurid colours the fate of those determined to practice niyog (he alleged the doctrine was taught in the highly respectable Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College of the Arya Samaj in Lahore, and in its orphanage for girls in Ferozepur). This included the breaking of the taboo against incest as well as high caste men getting trapped by the lures of low caste women who assumed false respectability in cities like Lahore, and unashamedly practised 'niyog', the term being used synonymously with prostitution. The idea of niyog, despite the serious intention of Dayanand, was received by the Punjabi society with a sense of moral outrage. Yet, the problem of a widow's sexuality remained, and the most serious of journals discussed it with an increasing sense of panic. A youthful widow, it was assumed, was incapable of handling her sexual urges, whether a widow's sexuality was viewed as a 'natural' instinct (a 'scientific' rendition of the more persistent idea of strisvabhava), or it was assumed that a widow's voracious sexuality could not have enough surveillance. This loose, wanton, unpurposive sexuality of a widow, unlike that of a married woman which was tied to reproduction, was seen to work against society by swelling the ranks of dissipated prostitutes. One author analysing the social consequences of widowhood for the serious-minded journal, *The Regenerator of the Aryavarta*, wrote:

Do not the evil consequences... which are the outcome of a system of prohibition (of remarriage), bring any substantial disgrace to the family? The widows, no longer able to withstand the control of the animal propensities that are natural to a human being, incline to follow the shameful-nay indescribable-practice of forming illegal connections with some men.[27]

Another put it more bluntly that when widows were left unsupervised by their mothers and mothers-in-law, they:

generally yield to temptation, and many of them become women of abandoned character and thus swell the ranks of prostitutes, leaving thereby an ineffaceable blot on the honour of those who ever claim any relationship with her.[28][sic]

For Lala Mathura Das, it was difficult to envisage a woman successfully keeping her passions under control. As he put it, women had ten times more sexual drive than men, and therefore not more than ten widows in every hundred would be found living up to their pativrata dharma.[29] It is noteworthy that a widow in most of the reformist literature continued to

[27]K.B.X, 'Our Society', *The Re'generator of the Aryavarta*, 1: 49, (Dec. 1883).

[28]'Widow Marriage', *The Arya Patrika*, August 1, (1885).

[29]Lala Mathura Das, *Jagadpurush-Chatvan Bhag- Vidhva Niyog Ke Vishay* ***Mein*** **(Amritsar,** n.d.)p. 56.

be unproblematically called a *randi*, a term synonymous with a prostitute.

It was in this context that the remarriage of a widow seemed such a good option. On the one hand it tied up a widow's sexuality to one man, the husband, through whose agency patriarchal control could be redeployed on the widow, as some of the older ways of managing widowhood were no longer felt to be viable, as I will presently show. On the other, the reforming male, whether the benign husband who condescended to marry a widow, or the one who helped him come to take such a decision, could pretend to be enlightened, progressive men, conscious of promoting women's rights. In this way the mantle of championing women's causes could be taken away from the colonial state. Also, if due consideration was given to maintaining the proprieties of caste, it was hoped the opposition to widow remarriage based upon the fear of loss of caste could be diluted.

Punjabi society by late nineteenth century began to feel uncomfortable with the recourse to religious pursuits resorted to by some widows in their path to asceticism. There was a new disapproval of widows going on pilgrimages, reading religious literature unsupervised, or seeking the mediation of holy men in order to achieve detachment from the world. *Sadhus* and other holy men themselves came to be visualized as violators of a widow's chastity, with perhaps the tacit consent of the widow. Sardar Ajmer Singh in his pamphlet *Vidhva Bivah Da Mandan (Proof of Widow Marriage),* whose one task, as the title suggests, was to prove Shastric approval of widow marriage, also implicitly drew attention to 'unholy' liaisons between holy men and women.[30] His pamphlet depicted the plight of a father having to take on the surveillance of four daughters who were in their natal home due to various reasons, whether widowhood, divorce or the otherwise absence of husbands. The author relates a saga of complete depravity on part of the daughters, including one of them 'enjoying' sexual relations with a resident sadhu! The 'decent' holy man to whom the father turns for advice to help him out of his predicament, tells him to remarry his widowed daughter, and bring up the other girls on a strict diet of stories of pativrata women.

Another article that appeared in a popular journal warned against widows being allowed unfettered access to religious literature:

One of the greatest evils that exist even in this age of improvement... is the study of vedant by our widowed sisters and particularly by those who are in the prime of their youth. It is injurious to them, both because, if they know the

[30]Sardar Ajmer Singh, *Vidhva Bivah Da Mandan Arthat Gurbani Te Purana Aad Ugityan Yugtiyan Naal Vidhva Bivah Nun Sidh Kite Hai* (Ludhiana, 1911).

spirit of the Shastra ... they commit many disgraceful and shameful acts (he was apparently referring to niyog) and... if they do not understand the meaning of the Shastra, they become quite idiots by hearing many verbal proverbs and nonsenses specially composed by the self-interested Sadhus to misguide them.[31]

Whether women themselves read religious material or understood it through their choice of intermediaries, power over the woman in either case was seen to have slipped out of the hands of the middle class man. The Arya Samaj movement that invested so much in re-reading shastric literature to re-create what it saw as a perfect age, obviously did not wish to grant women the right to their own interpretation of the shastras. Knowledge for women had to filter through the interpretative sieve provided by men. It was this overriding concern for establishing adequate patriarchal control that promoted widow remarriage rather than, what men saw, a widow's bogus religious pursuits.

By seriously considering remarriage for widows, the upper caste society allowed itself the comfort of posing as the champions of just causes that sought to enhance women's status in society. The self-image of conscientious youth, eager to grapple with problems facing the nation, with which issues concerning women were so inextricably linked, was consciously engendered by the reformers. The question of widow remarriage was portrayed as one which encouraged equal rights for men and women in one article entitled 'Widow Marriage'. It depicted an educated Punjabi writing a letter in favour of the Ilbert Bill. He is accosted by his widowed sister who shames him by remarking that while he was waxing eloquent on the anomaly existing in the judicial process in the country, he was blissfully unaware of another anomaly in his own home. On being queried, she asks of him:

is not this an anomaly, dear brother, when you allow the privilege of remarriage to the members of one sex and deny the same to those of the other?[32]

By speaking of'privileges' and 'rights' equally applicable to both the sexes, the new elite was comforted by the thought of really offering new freedoms to women.

However, to make remarriage acceptable while at the same time allowing men a self-indulgence in the belief of their own magnanimity, a widow was sought to be transformed into a pathetic creature. While the fear of her potential sexuality always loomed large in the background, men were encouraged to think of themselves as saviours of widows

[31]'Our Widows and the Vedant,' *The Arya Patrika,* April 26, (1887).

[32]*"The Regenerator of the Aryavarta,* 2: 6, Feb. 11, (1884).

notoriously ill-treated by their female relations. This meant men could view themselves as heroic rescuers of widows in plight, while at the same time wash their own conscience free of the taint of collusion with widows' oppression. Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid condemned women of the neighbourhood for the misery of widows.[33] Lala Mathura Das especially pointed out the sad condition of widows doomed to live in widowhood from a young age.[34] Lala Jiwan Das, in a similar vein, in his short tract on a dialogue between two widows focused upon how utterly unbearable they found their life.[35] One of the widows, for example, comments on how it was better to commit sati than to suffer the taunts of relatives. Progressive men could ensure that widows did not suffer such a fate.

Despite the propaganda in favour of widow remarriage, it was difficult to reconcile people to its need because orthodoxy that equated widow marriage with loss of caste and religion was fairly strong. As one Kaka Ram, a defender of old, *sanatan dharma,* put it:

Kshatriyas, sudras and vaishyas should not call themselves pandits
Leaving the true caste they should not call themselves casteless. ...
Becoming shameless one should not get a widow married.[36]

Nor did the idea of widow marriage trouble only those opposed to reformers such as the Arya Samajis. Rai Mulraj, an Extra Assistant Commissioner in Gurdaspur at the time the government solicited opinions of officials on Malabari's proposals, spoke against widow marriage, even though he agreed that some reforms were necessary. Widow marriage, he felt, was likely to convulse Hindu society and offend all its upholders.[37] It was for this reason that the advocates of widow marriage tried to prove its approval in shastric literature, as for instance the attempt earlier referred to by Sardar Ajmer Singh. Similarly, the *Adhikari Vidhva Vivah Sahayak Sabha* or *Widow Remarriage Association* set up under the auspices of the eminent philanthropist Sir Ganga Ram bent backwards to give appropriate references from the shastras that proved its existence in the ancient times.[38] It was an irony, then, that the one organization that

[33]*Vidhva Virlap.*

[34]*Vidhva Niyog Ke Vishay Mein.*

[35]Lala Jiwan Das, Pradhan, Arya Samaj, *Do Hindu Beva Aurton Ki Baat-Chit* (Lahore, 1891).

[36]Kaka Ram Jas Rai, *Sanatandharmaupdesa* (Lahore, 1892).

[37]*Papers Relating to Infant Marriage.*

[35]*Adhikari Vidhva Vivah Ki Taid Mein Ved, Mantra Aur Shastwn Ke Praman Gurmukhi Arth Samet* (Lahore, n.d.). Other books published by the Sabha included *Baal Vidhva Ke Vivah Par Desh Punjab Ki Rai,* and *Ved, Mantra Aur Shastwn Ke Praman* in Urdu.

swore by the hoary Indian literature could not use it to give examples from the past of the institution of widow marriage. The Arya Samaj tried to get over this problem by observing scrupulously the caste-based pattern of marriage, giving up any pretension whatsoever of understanding caste in terms other than one determined by birth. *The Arya*, a monthly journal belonging to the Arya Samaj carried the following notice in its issue of June 1882:

Young gentlemen of every caste who may volunteer to marry widows of their own caste and guardians of widows who are philanthropically disposed to help their helpless proteges are requested to communicate.[39]

Nor was the Arya Samaj alone in assuaging fears that widow marriage may involve upsetting the working of the caste system. The Widow Remarriage Association too promised its prospective clients that due consideration would be shown to the right caste and lineage while making a match, even though it invited all castes to make applications. Additionally, the Arya Samaj adopted the policy of advertising conspicuously its success at arranging widow marriages amongst the high castes, perhaps hoping to underline that no loss of status followed the completing of such nuptials, as also trying to encourage other upper castes to follow suit. *The Arya Patrika* of 12 September 1885 congratulated the Widow Marriage Sub-Committee of the Amritsar Arya Samaj for successfully arranging a second widow marriage among the upper castes, in this case the bride and the groom belonging to the Arora caste.[40] Similarly, Lala Jiwan Das in his pamphlet on widow marriage told his readers of such a marriage celebrated between Khatris on 21 January 1885, the bride belonging to the Malhotra sub-dan and the groom to that of the Chopras.[41]

Lala Mathura Das had a more ingenious way of convincing the high castes of the need for widow marriage. He hoped to strengthen high caste society itself by promoting widow marriage. He did not expect eligible bachelors to scale down their expectations of marrying a chaste unmarried virgin. Rather, if the high caste widows represented a surplus and useless sexuality, they could be utilized as wives for those unfortunate males of poor means, who for various reasons like widowerhood, or older age, had to resort to finding low caste brides from *the* hills for themselves.[42] Mathura Das, following the example of Dayanand, bewailed

[35]77ie *Arya*, 1: 4, June, (1882).

[40]*TheArya Patrika*, 12 Sept., (1885).

[41] *Do Hindu Beva.*

[42]See Ch. 2 for references to such marriages.

such inter-mixing of castes, as leading to the weakening of upper castes, and destruction of a lineage. So pernicious, according to him was the practice, that over time it was difficult to distinguish a low caste woman of the hills from her upper caste sister from the plains. He complained:

... Paharon se chali Chamrani Jalandhar hui Mehtrani Amritsar bani Kapoorani Lahore mein saat ghar ki rani.

The Chamrani (leatherworker) from the hills becomes a Mehtrani (Watercarrier) in Jalandhar, a Kapoorani in Amritsar (one of the higher Khatri sub-castes) and a queen of seven houses in Lahore.[43]

According to Mathura Das, upper caste widows could be used as a plug to shore up the gaping hole through which infiltration of the high caste society took place, thereby ensuring its exclusivity.

The high caste Sikh reformers, depending upon where they stood in relation to the question of whether the Sikhs belonged to Hindu society or not, used a variety of arguments in their campaign to institutionalize widow marriage. Sardar Ajmer Singh, as already shown, preferred to convince through Shastric examples. Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid used both brahmanical literature and examples from the Sikh history of the gurus' apparently more enlightened views on women, to make his case for widow marriage.[44] But the extent to which widowhood was perceived as a high caste problem, which ought not to be obfuscated by religious differences, comes out sharply in the pamphlet titled *Sukh Marag* or *The Path of Happiness.*[45] Obviously written after the Anand Marriage Act of 1909 had come into operation,[46] which legally recognized a separate Sikh marriage ceremony, the author underlined the need for Hindus and Sikhs together to meet the challenge of tackling the widows problem. The author explicitly stated that 'this bad custom (of not marrying widows) should be ended by Hindus and Sikhs.'[47] In the story of this pamphlet Maan Kaur, a Sikh widow, is given refuge in a Hindu household. While the daughter of the house Devki is married according to Vedic rites, a Sikh groom is found for Maan Kaur who remarries according to the Anand rites. The notion of the distinct identity of the Sikhs is explicit, but equally strong is the message of shared values and culture of upper caste Sikhs with their Hindu counterparts.

[43] *Vidha Niyog Ke Vishay Mein,* p. 58.

"Vidhva Virlap.

[45] Bhai Sundar Singh Manchanda Saudagar, *Sukh Marag* (Amritsar, n.d.).

[46] For controversy around the Anand Marriage Bill see Harjot S. Oberoi, 'From Ritual to Counter-Ritual: Rethinking the Hindu-Sikh Question', in J. T. O'Connell et al. (eds.), *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (Delhi, 1990), pp. 136-58.

[47] *Sukh Marag,* p. 16.

The cause of widow marriage increasingly acquired symbolic importance for the educated and 'nationalist' elites of Punjab. Identifying with issues of women's reform imparted a progressive image to those who espoused it. The facade of reform, in fact, was meant to strengthen the claim of domination, as it gave the reform-espousing elite the desired feeling of doing something in the face of an obstinate orthodoxy. The extent to which the issue of widow marriage became a cliche emerges in a play by Ishwar Chander Nanda. A young playwright, and the principal of Government College of Multan for a time, Nanda went on to become a known literary figure, who picked up the theme of widow remarriage to write one of his early plays.[48] In the preface to the play, *Subhadra,* he tried to establish his nationalist and democratic credentials. (The foreword to the Gurmukhi version of the play was written by the eminent Singh Sabha reformer Bhai Vir Singh). He spoke of the new movement in theatre which had begun to concern itself with the 'people'. Yet his play unashamedly considered only the upper castes as people who mattered, and dealt with their fears regarding the widows. Other castes that do appear in the text—Jats, Jhinwars, Mirasis—are completely peripheral to its plot. The hero of the play is the brother of the widowed Subhadra, Parmanand, representative of the new, educated, enlightened man. He is instrumental in marrying Subhadra to his friend in secret. He incurs the wrath of both his parents and Subhadra's in-laws for his impetuous act, but counters their argument with the predictable invocation of evil that might befall the family if she is left a widow. The image of a sad, unhappy widow, with nevertheless sexually explosive potentialities is construed. The reforming male could feel both pride, and relief, at marrying off this troublesome, yet pathetic creature. The image of a widow, frozen into one of pathos by numerous authors, completely at the mercy of liberal male intervention in her life, is the one Nanda wrote of:

> Such is the story of girl Subhadra whom widowhood overtakes at an early age and reduces to the position of the persecuted slave in her own house. We feel sincerely pleased when we see all her troubles rounded off with a happy marriage[49]

Economic Marginality of a Widow

Rounding off a widow's troubles with a 'happy' marriage had also meant that a widow would no longer be an economic liability, whose rights for physical sustenance and economic maintenance had to be perforce

[48]S.S. Sekhon & K.S. Duggal, A *History of Punjabi Literature* (Delhi, 1992). Amongst Nanda's other reformist plays were *Dulhan* (1913) and *Lily da Viah* (1928). [49]I.C. Nanda, *Subhadra Natak* (Multan, 1921), p. xiv.

recognized. Marriage, by making a widow's sexuality auspicious rather than dangerous, geared towards reproduction rather than self-gratification, removed the stigma of 'economic burdensomeness' from her person. Lalas Mathura Das and Jiwan Das, referred to earlier, made this argument clearly in favour of remarriage of a widow. If a widow was seen to be economically piteous, not only was this situation perpetuated, but new conditions were created in our period to increase her penury.

Historians have discussed the confusion that prevailed over the codification of Hindu Law, and the melange of laws and their ad hoc application that went into its making in colonial India.[50] In the case of Punjab, the colonial government in its recognition of the overwhelmingly agrarian nature of the population, and in order to secure the patriarchal rights of the agricultural classes (and its own revenue), announced that 'custom' was to be the first rule of decision, equally applicable to the non-agriculturists.[51] In time, the upper caste Punjabis, one presumes in order to emphasize their elite status, managed to make the colonial government recognize their claim to be governed by the Hindu Law.[52] In any case, the manner in which Customary Law was recorded in Punjab in the *Rivaj-i-Am* of various districts, or the application of Hindu Law, worked against the interests of the high caste widow, by binding her already meagre rights to the question of her sexuality. In fact, both the colonial state and the upper caste elite were conscious of maintaining distinct sexual mores for the high castes. This situation pressed upper caste widows to a more chaste life than seemed to be the norm, especially in the countryside, and threatened them with impoverishment if these new codes were not adhered to.

According to the Customary Law as it came to be applied in Punjab, a widow succeeded to the estate of her dead husband only for her lifetime in the case of the absence of male lineal descendants.[53] However in time, as precedents accumulated, she forfeited her right to the estate if proven to lead an unchaste life. That this custom was really an innovation comes through from the life of Geli Bai, an Arora widow from Multan.

[50]Lucy Carroll, for instance, has shown that Hindu Law as administered by the British Indian courts was a mixture of shastric law, custom and case-law, accompanied with English legal concepts and meanings. Lucy Carroll, 'Law, Custom and Statutory Social Reform: the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act of 1856', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 20: 4, (1983), pp. 363-88.

[51]Rattigan, *A Digest of Civil Law.*

[52]In 1923 it was held that high caste Hindus living in a town and working as traders were presumably governed by the Hindu Law, ibid., p. 7.

"ibid., p. 68.

In 1881 Geli Bai had to defend her share in her husband's property which was challenged by her dead husband's three brothers on the grounds of 'unchastity' of a Hindu widow according to the 'custom' of the area.[54] Not only did Geli Bai lose her husband's share of ancestral property, but in 1882 after she appealed to reconsider the former decision, she also lost control over the property acquired by him, having now to content herself with a maintenance for herself and her three daughters. Geli Bai, not only showed no remorse for allegedly being 'unchaste', but she also felt that there was no 'established' custom that could use this reason to dispossess her. However she lost the battle once again, the court being satisfied with the existence of such a custom, basing its judgement on a number of witnesses that spoke of its existence. What especially went against the interests of Geli Bai was the fact that her husband, Jehangiri Mai, being a *lambardar* or a headman of a *taraf* (a small administrative unit), had himself signed for forfeiture of property on ground of unchastity of a Hindu widow. This was a reflection of the manner in which *Rivaj-i-Am* was framed, recording the opinions of the 'leading men' of Punjab, along with the sensibilities of what the settlement officers of various districts considered to be equitable.[55] Geli Bai's defence pointed to the lack of precedence in her case, as also the fact that she was being used as an example for future conduct of widowhood:

> The defendant's pleader objects to the Rivaj-i-Am inasmuch as precedents are not quoted, and the custom appears to be laid down rather as a guide for the future than a result of the past experience.

What Jehangiri Mai was hoping to achieve through the recording of the 'custom' was not the shared values with the agricultural classes, whose widows were expected to remarry, but the distinguished status of the upper caste Aroras who from now onwards must frown upon the 'unchaste' behaviour of their widows, to establish their social supremacy. What was worth noting, and even invited the comment of the judge, was that within the same family three cases came up, in each of which the widow ended up losing her share in property because of 'proven' unchastity. One of these widows was Jehangiri Mai's own sister. The judges felt that each time because the widow lost, it established a 'custom' against the rights of the unchaste widow. However none bothered to find out the significance of the fact that on each occasion a widow not only established relations with another man, but also did not feel this fact to

[54] *Punjab Record* (Henceforth PR) No. 158, 1883 (Lahore, 1928, 2nd ed.). [55] *A Digest of Civil Law*, pp. 22-5.

be a reason enough for forfeiture of property. What this perhaps points to is a situation prior to this period when sexual options other than an austere widowhood were available to Arora women, and in material terms, the possibility of a more secure life. Obviously the Arora males found an opportune time to lay out a new social code for their women.

What becomes evident as one goes through the record of colonial judicial intervention in the nineteenth century is the variety of formal and not-so-formal sexual relations (some that came to be recognized as marriage and others not so) that existed in Punjab. As far as the state of widowhood was concerned, there seemed to be simultaneously present a wide spectrum of its condition, from celebrating sati to a widow's degradation as a prostitute. Both the writing of Customary Law and a chance to establish greater control over women created a legal grid that worked towards circumscribing women's rights, and defining more precisely, and in a conformist manner, the relations between people, especially the sexes. I will discuss the case of a *dharel*, a peculiar state in which an upper caste widow could find herself, to show how the state and society were pushing towards acceptance of distinct moral norms for different sections of the society.

In 1899, the nephews of a deceased Khatri from Majitha in Amritsar district sued successfully to take over his agricultural property, being able to exclude not only the female offspring of his widow, but also the sons of his dharel, a Khatrani widow. Some evidence seems to suggest that the term *dharel* was used for any bride for whom a brideprice was paid, and who was married through the informal *chadar andazi ox kareva* style, and her children were considered to be legitimate.[56] On the other hand, perusing through the legal cases in the Punjab Record, the word seemed to imply a high caste widow who established sexual relations with a man, whether through marriage of an informal type or without it. However, it is possible that the term carried both meanings. The question that came to be debated in the case was whether a Khatri's sons by a dharel woman could succeed like the Jat offspring from a *kareval* As noted earlier, widow marriage or kareva was common among the Jats of Punjab, especially with the deceased husband's younger brother.[57] A

[56]*Gazetteer of the Hoshiarpur* DistricM 904.

[57]There is very strong evidence, as Prem Chowdhry has suggested, **that** Jat **women** were forced into kareva marriage with the husband's brother in colonial Punjab, in order to preserve patriarchal rights over land. When Jat women chose to marry men other than their husband's brothers, the colonial law worked towards depriving them of their share of property in their first husband's estate, **with** the widow being accused of unchastity,

kareva among the Jats was normally recognized by the state, even when there was an absence of a ceremony.[58] However, a dharel woman, a term which seemed to be used for a high caste widow who sought 'socially recognized' sexual relations with another man, was deemed to be a concubine, and her sons were therefore declared to be illegitimate, as no marriage ceremony had occurred, which might have given her the status of a wife. Even though it was recognized that the Khatris of Majitha practised widow marriage that resembled the kareva of the Jats, and though there were examples of succession by a dharel's children (albeit there having been no contestation in their case), this case was set apart because the dispute was between the high castes:

> ... it makes no difference in the right of the widow of a Hindu Jat to a life-interest in her husband's estate... whether she was a kareva wife or otherwise. But we have the parties to the union in the present case, Khatris, acting on the dear understanding that according to the law which they hold to be binding on them, there can be no marriage between them and forming a connection which is not marriage

In fact, it was further alleged that the parties in question, being aware of their personal Hindu law, deliberately did not enter into marriage, because their law forbade them to do so! Even though custom of a region was meant to be the decisive factor in a dispute, it was clear that the state expected the high castes to be ruled by different norms, even though in this case the disputants themselves followed agricultural pursuits. The insistence upon a formal ceremony, especially for the high castes followed from an understanding that the high castes must conform to more brahmanical/textual practices. It is in this context that the Punjab courts in the 1920s recognized the Hindu Law as applicable to high castes rather than the Customary Law.

Setting apart the question of inheritance, I wish to concentrate here upon what this case tells us about the ambiguous position of a dharel, and of the options, if any, available to high caste widows. Punjabi society demonstrated a very complex attitude towards a dharel. A sense of its disapproval of a dharel, for example, is visible in this proverb:

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e.g. PR 40 1899. Prem Chowdhry, 'Customs in a Peasant Economy: Women in Colonial Haryana', in Sangari & Vaid, *Recasting Women*, pp. 302-36.

[58]Pi? 74 1893. The state was driving towards encouraging a formal ceremony even among Jats for a kareva, or at least its registration, as this made administration an easier task, and discouraged women from running away with lovers, for a husband in such a case could sue successfully for restitution of conjugal rights. See the *Civil and Criminal Justice Reports* of Punjab.

Dh(a)rel ran khari buri, Dane muke uth turi.

A dharel woman whether good or bad, off she goes when the grain bin is empty.[59]

While the proverb speaks of the lack of fidelity of a dharel, driven as she is by crass materialism (this could be a reference to the fact that such a bride had to be bought), it could equally point to a situation where a widow found survival difficult, and for her material sustenance took precedence over everything else. Yet the society also demonstrated acceptance of a high caste widow's remarriage,[60] or recognized her entering into a relationship other than marriage with a man. As demonstrated earlier, there were different grades of marriages with secondary marriages requiring little formal ceremony, as in the case of Jats. However, with the new insistence upon recognizing different customs for various castes, there seemed to be a move towards pushing high caste widows to a lifetime of asceticism (for example the Additional Commissioner in the above discussed case said that such a relationship was viewed with reprobation by those who affect orthodoxy, which seems to suggest, in fact, a new orthodoxy). The state's indictment of a dharel, a term that carried shades of meaning, into a concubine, must have contributed to closing the option of secondary alliances for these widows. A strictly chaste upper caste widow, and a widow increasingly in more straitened conditions (with Arora widows their chastity became a condition of their economic well-being) were, it seems, a new experience for at least some sections of the 'high caste' society.

Even among the professional classes and the residents of towns and cities, there are indications of the growing precarious situation of a high caste widow. For the widow in the tract *Istri Dukh Dashi (The Woes of Women)* suspicion over her chastity, again, becomes a reason for her destitution.[61] She is turned out of both her marital and natal homes because they suspect her to be a woman of loose morals. Her only recourse is her *stridhan* (her movable property, here her jewels), which she loses as well to the machinations of a wily brahman. This turn of events also reflected the author's bias against women's control over property by portraying their inability to preserve it. Her jewels are restored to her by the help of a Sikh reformer, who is also able to persuade her parents to take her back. In another Sikh reformist tract, the girl who had been

[59] *Hoshiarpur Gazetteer, p.* 33.

[60] In PR 21 1882 & PR 4 1905, Khatris marriage to Khatrani widows or dharels was declared legal because a chadar andazi between them was proved. [61] *Istri Dukh Dashi* (Amritsar, 1905).

married to an old man by her parents, on becoming a widow is fraudulently deprived of her jewels and house by her husband's nephews. The widow is shown not to claim back her property even after encountering Sikh reformers, for she is too scared to go back to her marital village.[62] The 'dependent' widow as an economic drain and a burden was how the high caste society increasingly viewed the widow, while pushing her into a situation of marginality.

What is even more striking is the story of another widow's destitution that comes from the highly respectable, reform-inclined section of society from among the new professional people. A lot of well-to-do Hindus at this time, it seems, took to donating money to their 'own' reformist organizations, a new channel for charity always seen as a mark of social eminence. The Dayanand Anglo Vedic College, the premier educational institution set up by the Arya Samaj in Lahore, was a special favourite as it invited the 'natives' to take pride in the college where modern education was to be combined with ancient Aryan sensibilities. One such donee to the DAV college was Lala Amar Chand Parti, a sub-engineer in Kanpur, hailing from Hoshiarpur in Punjab.[63] He was a man with considerable assets, which included money invested in shares in insurance companies, banks, life insurance policy and provident fund. When the Lala died in 1915, he left all his money to the DAV College, asking the college committee to decide on the allowances to be made to his two widows. The management decided on the meagre sum of Rs. 25 per month to be given to each of the widows. While the younger widow Ishar Kaur for unstated reasons did not (need to) accept the allowance, the senior widow Parbati Devi regularly corresponded with the management, including its illustrious ex-principal, Lala Hans Raj, about the allowance.[64] Residing with her brother in Jullundur in Punjab, she must have perceived herself (as may have her relatives) to be an economic burden on her natal family. In one particular pathetic missive sent to Lala Hans Raj, written in broken Hindi mixed with Punjabi, she complained about the late release of her allowance, and of her having to incur a debt. She pleaded for her allowance to be sent on time, and appealed to the brotherly instincts of the Lala to treat her as his sister.

[62] *Agyakar* (Amritsar, 1911).

"Records of the DAV College Managing Committee, File No. 229. (NMML) [64] Lala Hans Raj Bhalla was a very prominent Arya Samaj leader. He became **the** honorary principal of DAV College from its inception in 1888, and refused to take a salary, living instead on the monthly allowance made to him by his brother Lala Mulk Raj. In 1911 he retired from the principalship of the college. In 1912 he became the president of the DAV College Trust and Managing Committee.

Parbati Devi resorted to making the Lala her fictitious brother, and with the help of the 'charity' of her two brothers sought to meet her survival needs.[65]

Why should a man with considerable means leave his widow in such a condition? Of course, one plausible argument could be that being the first wife, Parbati Devi was also the unfavoured one. But what needs to be highlighted is that she felt herself to have no legal or other recourse to ensure her economic well-being. In fact, how very important may have been these 25 rupees to her and her family is discernible at the time of her death in 1946. Although she died on 6 March, the college in a magnanimous gesture let her sister Basanti Devi, another widow also living with the same brother, withdraw the money for that month. That the small amount of money may have sustained the two widows, or at least allowed them a modicum of independence and respect is the inescapable conclusion one reaches. What is evident from this example is the extremely precarious condition of a widow's existence, having to rely upon the generosity of her natal or marital family, without any secure means of existence. Perhaps only by putting in excessive domestic labour could she justify her reliance upon the family that chose to keep her.

This may not, of course, have been the experience of all high caste widows. From the files of the DAV Management Committee we also come across the case of the widow Karam Kaur of Batala, a well-off woman, who in a manner reminiscent of Amar Chand willed some money at her death to the college to institute a scholarship for a brahman boy in 1899.[66] However, unlike Lala Amar Chand's, her will was contested for a long time. While a widow like Karam Kaur could also lay claim to a status of eminence by giving charity, it was much more common for men to experience such dignity. Thus we come across many more men instituting scholarships in the name of their dead or living wives in the Arya Kanya Pathshala, the local Lahore Arya school for girls.[67]

The Attractions of Asceticism and Public Service

Remarriage for a widow continued to be the official propagandist line favoured by the reformers hoping to resolve the widow's problem. However, the high caste society, as we have seen, was deeply discomfited

[65]On widows' dependence upon relatives, especially brothers see Susan S. Wadley, 'No Longer a Wife: Widows in Rural North India', *From the Margins of Hindu Marriage,* pp. 92-118.

[66]*Records of the DAV,* Fife No. 213. (NMML)

[67]ibid., File no. 216. (NMML)

with widows who sought remarriage. In fact, the ideals of chastity and asceticism seemed especially attractive when assertion of caste and class status was at issue. Also, it was the pativiata wife who was promoted as the ideal for women to emulate, an ideal which was meant to dictate women's lives even after the death of the husband. Remarriage for widows involved making a mockery of that ideal, as it could only be pushed at the cost of the logic of a devoted wife, for how could a woman who was married to two men be a faithful pativrata?[68] It was also evident that despite the high sounding propaganda in favour of remarriage, it rarely was put into practice. That is why the reformers needed to advertise their scanty achievements, for acceptance of remarriage was hard to come by. The ambivalence of the reformers themselves regarding widow marriage comes out sharply in Lakshman Singh's indictment of the Aryas Samajis for moral weakness. He felt disgusted that while they preached widow marriage, hardly any of them got their widowed daughters or sisters married.[69]

Many reformers, therefore, began to espouse a reworked notion of ascetic widowhood, suitable to changed circumstances. This was the widow devoting her life to public service, especially as a teacher. The ascetic widow spending her time in activities promoting public good was a remarkable model, as it seemed to take care of the most troublesome aspects associated with remarriage. The widow not only remained chaste and a pativrata, but also seemingly endorsed the ideal of pativrata by teaching it to young girls while exemplifying it in her own life. Also a widow, if she found the means to sustain her body and soul need not be condemned as an economic liability, nor need she threaten patriarchal property.

At the heart of turning a widow into a social worker was also society's attitude that saw her labour as surplus and inauspicious, as well as readily available.[70] While society could extract a wife's labour by fixing it within domestic relations and giving it the aura of auspiciousness,[71] a widow's hard and often incessant labour was seen as peculiarly self-serving, for it kept the widow's sexuality suppressed. 'A widow was made

[68]On the choice between sati and asceticism for pativrata women see Julia Leslie, 'A Problem of Choice: The Heroic Sati or the Widow Ascetic', in Julia Leslie ed., *Rules and Remedies in Classical Indian Law,* Vol. IX, (Leiden, 1991), pp. 46-61.

[69]77ie *Principles and Teachings of the Arya Samaj,* p. 9.

[70]For the high caste brahmanical society's attitude towards the widow's labour see 'Social Pariahs and Domestic Drudges'.

[71]Kumkum Sangari, The Amenities of Domestic Life: Questions on Labour', *Social Scientist,* 21: 9-11, (1993), pp. 3-46.

to work very hard so that she would tire and sleep' is how one widow explained the logic of extraction of her labour to me.[72] And so her mother-in-law justified telling the servant only to wash the utensils, while her widowed daughter-in-law cooked, cleaned and washed for the whole family, including churning 20-25 litres of milk daily.

Despite the drudge labour a widow performed, a widow was merely seen to be earning her upkeep and lived on sufferance, as Chakravarti has shown. This made her labour mobile, a widow being sent wherever her labour was needed. It was this lack of fixity and belonging in a widow's life, her very availability, especially if she was childless, that the colonial government in Punjab first sought to utilize. Shortage of teachers was a perennial problem with girls schools set up by the government. The teachers initially came from low castes, worked for very small salaries, and were seen as a deterrent against the upper castes sending their daughters to school.[73] It needs to be stressed that the Punjab government worked within what it saw as the caste prejudices of the native society. Thus, it constantly felt anxious to render 'respectable' the institutions it built, by ostensibly 'pandering' to the demands of caste propriety of the natives. A high caste widow, with a rather precarious reputation in her own community, was viewed by the colonial government as a possible tutor who could lend their schools respectability by virtue of the fact that she belonged to the high caste. While the state may have misread a widow's reputation in her own society, it did perceive correctly her marginal status that made her disposable. In time, the male reformers themselves tried to settle the 'problem' of widows' dangerous sexuality by projecting an austere widowhood as respectable, especially when utilized to serve the community. To the government Hindu widows seemed to represent a cheap alternative to give dignity to their schools. Normal schools to train Hindu widows as teachers were opened, and initially they were given stipends to make the proposition attractive.[74] However by the second decade of the twentieth century the government had no longer to offer stipends, as both education for girls, and teaching for widows gained acceptability.[75]

"Personal communication with the late Mrs Ram Rati Ghai in New Delhi, 3.11.90 & 20.6.92. She became a widow at the age of 27 in 1934.

[73]Madhu Kishwar, 'The Daughters of Aryavarta', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 23: 2, (1986), pp. 151-86.

[74]See, for example, *Report on Public Instruction in the Punjab and its Dependencies*, 1896-97, p. 53.

[75]Miss M. Bose, 'Note on the Progress of Female Education in Lahore During the Last Thirty Years', *Report on the Progress of Education in the Punjab During the Quinquennium Ending 1916-17* Appendix C, p. 5.

Among the social reformers too there grew a stream of thinking that found 'sublimated' sexuality and dedication to social service a better guide to widowed life. Lala Devraj, a respected Arya Samaji from Jullundur, was among the first to rework the ideal of asceticism for widows, advocating education for them to fit them for roles of public service. Though a firebrand Arya Samaji in his youth, his life changed its course after he struggled along with his brother-in-law Munshi Ram to open a school for girls in Jullundur in 1893, in spite of the opposition from a large section of the Arya Samaj.[76] From then on he dedicated his life to the running of the school, taking active part in its daily activities and administration, collecting funds for the school, shaping its syllabus as well as writing books for study, editing the school journal and the like.[77] In time Kanya Maha Vidyalaya (KMV) became a prestigious school, which attracted students from not only Punjab, but also other parts of the country. Its method of teaching was regularly endorsed in the reports of the government on female education, and many new schools copied its curriculum, and modelled themselves on KMV. As such, Lala Devraj's influence on a new generation of Punjabi girls was especially powerful, and the Punjabis were equally receptive to his ideas on widowhood.

From fairly early after its establishment, KMV showed inclination to provide education to widows. In 1900 a Bhagwati Widow Relief Fund was started in the memory of Mai Bhagwati, one of the first eminent women reformers of the Arya Samaj.[78] It promised a scholarship of Rs. 5 per month to the widow, to be stretched to Rs. 6 in special cases. The widow had to be at least twelve years of age, and had to have passed the lower primary standard to qualify. However, the old fears of a widow's sexuality had by no means been erased. One of the conditions for admitting the widow was that her character had to be certified by at least two (male?) members of the Samaj, one of whom also had to be her

[76]The famous split between the two wings of the Arya Samaj in 1892 took place on a number of issues which included a power struggle between leaders, questions of diet, and importantly that of education. While the DAV wing supported 'modern' education, Munshi Ram and his followers favoured a 'traditional' style of education which fructified in the 'Gurukula' system. Significantly, the DAV group was also opposed to education for women, till the time education for boys was well established. The impetus for girls education, however, came from the other group.

[77]Vidyalankar, *Lala Devraj.*

[78]Mai Bhagwati had met Swami Dayanand at a Kumbh Mela in Haridwar, after which she was recruited by the Swami as a preacher to carry the message of the Samaj to women. It is significant that the Samajis identified her as a widow, even though she seemed to have rejected marriage, leaving her husband and marital home at the age of twenty-six. However, the Samaj literature remained quite vague about her early life. 'Jiwan Charit Mai Bhagwati)i', *Panchal Pandita,* (Henceforth *PP)* 5: 2, April, (1902), pp. 17-8.

guardian. Further, the widow was expected to stay in the hostel, one presumes to facilitate vigilance over her, and only in very exceptional circumstances was allowed to reside outside. Indecent conduct' on her part was also liable to lead to the withdrawing of the scholarship.[79]

Despite the general surveillance of girls, and perhaps a special one for widows, what the school was hoping to achieve was to grant a 'useful' life to the widows. The school, according to its own propaganda, hoped to mould widows into teachers, preachers for the Samaj, editors and social workers.[80] It was to encourage these ideals in the school that a special *Vidhva Bhavan* (Widow's Home) was opened in 1905, modelled on the one built by D.K. Karve in Poona, Maharashtra.[81]

Lala Devraj took special care of the education of the widows. Apparently he expected the widows to be much more dedicated in their studies than the ordinary students. He also asked them to follow the ascetic ideal, demanding that a widow conquer her sexuality through both bodily mortification and mental concentration. Satyadev Vidyalankar quotes the personal diary of the Lala for the year 1899, to show his mild disapproval of the child-widow Sumitra Bai who was clever, but lacked concentration *(sadhna).* He told her, and other widows in the hostel to reflect every evening at the time of prayers on:

> ... a dead body to note the end of every human being and ... on a leper to think that the outward beauty on which we take so much pride, is only momentary and easily destructible.[82]

He thereby asserted a very different goal and a social and physical code of conduct for the widows. In the pages of *Panchal Pandita,* school magazine of the KMV that he edited for a long time, one comes across an article on how she ought to behave and dress in a manner different from that of married women. A widow is advised not to use perfume, flowers or make-up like married women. At the same time she is told not to stay dirty like the widows of yore. She is strongly advised to give more attention to studies than the other women, assuming that unlike them, their life was meant to spread education and *dharma.* The key to life of a new austerity was to conquer the senses through concentration: *indriyan daman karo,* vanquish the senses, was the advice Devraj proffered to the widows.[83] Thus what Devraj and others were moving towards

[n] *PP,* 4:1, 15 Nov., (1900), p. 21.
[80] 'Kanya Mahavidyalaya Aur Us Ka Kaam', *PP,* 14: 9, July, (1911), pp. 5-8.
[m] *Bharti,* 1: 6, Sept., (1920), p. 163.
[82] *Lala Devraj,* p. 200.
[83] *PP,* 6:9, July, (1903), p. 21.

was a reworked version of the hitherto held concept of the upper-caste widow, religiously inclined, and maintaining an austere lifestyle. She need not be remarried and thus be seen to be emulating the ways of the lower castes, or disturbing the ideological weight the reformers chose to put on the pativrata ideal.

If the danger of a widow lay for some in her 'unsupervised' sexuality, then the school could act the part of the absent male. Also, Lala Devraj's position was different from that of his predecessors and many of his contemporaries, in that he felt that a widow through an ascetic life was capable of controlling her baser instincts. Of course, the danger of a widow's sexuality exploding at any time still loomed large. However, if it was suppressed under right guidance, a widow, normally perceived as a burden on society, could be put to better use. It was in this context that his diary of 9 January 1901 spoke of his disappointment in Sumitra Bai, because she remarried one Dr Gurudutt. He felt that he had wasted his teaching on her, and was unhappy at her inability to keep her resolve to remain celibate, even though he acknowledged her remarriage to be a good propaganda for the Samaj.[84]

The new model for a widow gained widespread acceptance, not least for the reason that it offered widows a modicum of economic independence and self-respect. Some others too, like Devraj, preferred a self-reliant widow over a remarried one. Sir Ganga Ram, for example, finding that remarriage for widows was not popular, worked on the alternative idea of making widows self-supporting. With this idea in mind he made an offer to the government to build a Widow's Home, if the government would finance the scheme. The Hindu Widows Home was opened in 1921.[85] Taran Rani did her training to become a teacher living in this home.[86] Married at the age of eleven, she became a widow at the young age of twenty-two. She went to stay with her natal family along with her children, but like a number of other widows of the time, Taran found herself in^a materially and socially vulnerable situation. Unhappy with the attitude of a sister-in-law, an Arya Samaji widowed aunt came to her rescue. She sent her to Lahore, to the Hindu Widow's Home to study. There she received a scholarship of Rs. 12, which saw to her needs. Significantly, her aunt's offer of remarriage (though she was neither a virgin nor childless) was rejected by her. She deemed teaching and a measure of economic independence as better options.

[M]*Lala Devraj*, pp. 200-201.
[85]N.B. Sen, *Punjab's Eminent Hindus* (Lahore, 1944), p. 57.
[86]Interview with Taran Rani, Delhi, 16.12.89.

Assertion of Agency: Widow Savitri Devi

The onset of widowhood for women had meant coping with a personal loss along with experiencing an existential crisis, for widowhood brought with it an unequivocal understanding that they were now on the margins of caste, class and gender roles that they had so far been embedded in. We gather this from diverse sources where women are little more than passive receptacles of male reformist largesse. The few words that seemingly encapsulate the lives of widows like Sumitra Bai, snatched from master narratives that celebrate male reformers and their contribution to nation-building, point out that exigencies of occasional propaganda allowed some women to escape the rigours of a widowed life. They tell us little of what widowhood meant to women, or how they perceived the apparently radical measures initiated by the reformers to transform their lives.

Yet women's will and agency can seep through the most one-sided of accounts that seek to tell another story, of another's subjecthood. From missionary literature, for example, written to demonstrate the heroic work undertaken by them in the most difficult of circumstances, one can hear the faint murmur of widows voices, telling us not about their upliftment from abject misery, but their own initiative in seizing opportunities that came their way. Conversion to Christianity, a proclamation of such an intention, or even a pretence of sustained interest in its tenets was enough to make some resources available to the widows. We hear of a widow in Ferozepur who managed a wholesale business in wheat and flour, besides, money-lending (the professions typical of the high castes in Punjab). She came to the missionaries to learn Urdu and Hindi to add to her knowledge of Punjabi, and enjoyed reading scriptures despite her sons frowning at her association with the missionaries.[87] Similarly a widow called Viro is referred to, herself a convert from Hinduism in Jhelum, who attracted a number of middle-aged widows to herself because she taught them to read.[88] We also hear of the high caste Sahib Dei, who turned to teaching in a missionary school after her son lost all their property. She continued despite the opposition of her own community. She also attended Sunday Church regularly evincing a desire to convert, but we do not hear of her actual conversion.[89] To whatever extent possible, then,

[87]*The Sixty-Fifth ARLM—1899,* (Lodiana, 1900), p. 74.

[88]*Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions of the United Presbyterian Church of North America 1914,* (Philadelphia, 1914), p. 180.

[89]M. Rose Greenfield, *Five Years in Ludhiana or Work Amongst Our Indian Sisters* (London, 1886), p. 94.

widows tried to shape their own lives, improving its quality as far as they could. It is important therefore to read between the lines, if only for vignettes that affirm women's selfhood.

We can piece together Savitri Devi's life from the school journals of KMV meant to teach young, impressionable girls their lessons in the roles the society would expect them to fulfil. Savitri Devi both exemplified ideal behaviour in the way she conducted herself as a widow, and herself participated unabashedly in tutoring girls to fit them for the role of pativrata wives the school was training them to become. The tone of the narratives from which threads of Savitri's understanding of her widowhood is gathered, therefore, is one that is driven by the wheels of the new patriarchal ideology. Yet, Savitri, despite having moulded her life in the way her mentor Lala Devraj expected her to (there is no doubt that she was a favourite student of the Lala, who wrote a play *Savitri Natah* dedicated to her, and renamed the Widows' Home *Savitri Bhavan* in her memory after her death), had her own understanding of her life and widowhood, distinct from that of the reformers.[90] She was also able to use the opportunities that came her way as a result of putting the new ideals into practice to make a career for herself within the hierarchy of KMV. And in the process of giving value to her life, both in terms of the expectations of the reformers and her own, she, at times, threatened to snap the ideological constructions of the new patriarchy in relation to women.

Named Kakiyanwali at birth (meaning one with many sons) in 1883 by her not very well-off parents from rural Muzaffargarh in Punjab, Savitri Devi did not live up to her name, for she became a widow at the age often. She was brought to KMV in Jullundur at the age of fourteen, with the help of a local official, Shri Hemraj (he was a Superintendent in the Deputy Commissioner's office) who took interest in educating her, and had helped her initially through a Putri Pathshala. However, two years later, when she went back to Muzaffargarh for a visit, her guardian withdrew his patronage, she having incurred his wrath by attending a death ritual for which she had to go out of her village (some women's mourning rituals had come under attack by reformers). She was brought back to KMV five months later by an uncle, and she came prepared with a small sum of money after she had sold her jewels to carry on with her studies. She was instead awarded a scholarship and was able to continue

"The story of Savitri Devi's life is reconstructed here through an article 'Acharya Savitridevi' that appeared in *Bharti*, 1: 3, Sept., (1920), pp. 161-5; and *Lala Devraj* pp. 233-9.

her studies. The only other hitch that came in her long association with KMV was when she once again visited Muzaffargarh four years later. At the behest of her former patron, Hemraj, she began to teach in a government school. When Lala Devraj heard of it, he personally went to fetch her from there. From then onwards Savitri Devi stayed in KMV, and thus ended what seems like a minor tussle of patronage over this widow. The conflict over shaping and controlling Savitri's life is significant. It demonstrates Savitri's ideality for the reformers keen on looking for child widows whom they could educate and mould according to their impulses. It also shows the tremendous amount of power the male philanthropist could wield over a widow's life, his benevolence dependent upon the degree of her pliability to his commands. It is therefore remarkable that in spite of these odds Savitri displayed a discerning mind that refused to be cowed by propaganda.

When Kakiyanwali came to Jullundur she was an unhappy girl, mournful and living in *parda.* Lala Devraj drew her out of both mourning and parda, and gradually began to prepare her for the life he had chosen for her. Savitri proved to be a particularly adept pupil and lived up to his expectations. From an early period in her career she started writing for *Panchal Pandita,* and in 1903 became its sub-editor. In 1905 she travelled extensively in South India delivering many lectures, established a Stri Samaj in Bombay, and admired the Widow's Home set up by D.K. Karve in Poona. On her way back she attended the sessions of the Congress and the Social Conference in Benares. In 1905 a home for the widows was set up in Jullundur, and Savitri Devi became its first superintendent in 1906. From now on she travelled often and the contemporary newspapers carried accounts of her lectures. The *Hitkari* of Amritsar, for example, after her successful tour of south India, wrote approvingly of the career of widows as preachers. In 1907, after her visit to Karachi with Lala Devraj, the *Karachi Chronicle* compared her to Mrs Annie Besant. In 1913 she became the principal of KMV. She was affectionately referred to as the 'elder sister' *(barri behanji)* by her pupils, and retained this post until her death at the age of thirty-five in 1918.

Savitri's career graph shows a widow earning respect in a world whose norms were authored by male reformers. It also demonstrates the gains to be had by emulating the official line. Savitri successfully tried to live up to the image of an ascetic widow, with frugal needs, dedicating her life to the good of the community. The iconography of Savitri Devi in KMV magazines presents her as covered in a *chadar* or a long piece of cloth, which included a fold over her head, though it left her face bare. Below she is shown to be wearing a sari. The only other portion of her

body that is left uncovered are her hands, while she sits in a yogic posture. We are told that she had a tremendous thirst for religious knowledge and studied religious books on her own. She is also said to have practised yoga and controlled breathing. In her own articles she ridiculed those widows who ran to sadhus and other religious men bringing the names of their families and their own into disrepute. She urged widows to lead a religious life and be careful not to spoil their reputations.[91] In fact, controlling sexuality, the central concern of the reformers was well imbibed by Savitri, and well propagated by her too. In 1903, she wrote a book entitled *lndriya Daman* (Vanquishing the Senses), miming the lessons learnt from Lala Devraj. Though I have not been able to find a copy of this book, an article with the same title was written by her for *Panchal Pandita,* which explains what she meant by it, and what a widow could achieve through it.[92]

It was not important, according to her, to inflict torture on the body in order to control the senses. Giving examples from the life of the Buddha and from stories of Mahabharata, she underlined the importance of suppressing the ego through meditation. This, she clarified, was the right path for a widow, instead of running behind false sadhus and ending up losing respect as well as wealth, as the reformers were so keen on demonstrating. In fact, the senses, according to Savitri, had to be put to the use they were meant for—a tongue that ought not to lie, hands to make effort, eyes to see the religious path and feet to walk that path. One ought to go to Samajes, hear *bhajans* (devotional songs) and good speeches instead of going to see dances or parodies *(swang).* The idea was to utilize the faculties to accept the 'right' path chosen for a widow, which included service to the nation and devotion to one's religion. It was quite obvious that Savitri Devi herself followed this innovation of a religious life for a widow and in the process gained the respect that she did, and 'respectability' for the new ideal.

However, in spite of living within the parameters of a life etched out for a widow, Savitri Devi endeavoured to imbue it with her own value. After all, it was the devoted wife who formed the picture of ideal womanhood. Though Savitri at many places endorsed this ideal, she refused to do that at the cost of denigrating a widow. She sometimes tried to assimilate the essentials of wifeliness, and a mother's duty to the life of the widow, thereby emphasizing the centrality of the pativrata as the ideal woman. For example, she advised widows to look at god as

[91]Savitri, Vaidhavya Dharma', *PP,* 5:2, Dec, (1901), pp. 6-8.
[92]Savitri, 'lndriya Daman', *PP,* 4:12, 15 Oct., (1901), p. 13.

their husband, and the childless widows to see the world as their children towards whom they had a duty.[93] However, significantly, she went on to refute even the need for such pretension thus putting to tremendous strain the ideology that she ostensibly supported. She stated that unlike married and householder women, who had little time to spare outside the cares of running their homes and looking after their children, implying the necessarily narrow sphere of their activity, the widows could spend a lifetime in a more meaningful way, serving the larger family of the community or the nation. She pleaded,

I pray to my widowed sisters that they should not view the happiness of the *grihastha ashram* as the only source of joy ....

The value ascribed to the life of a widow by Savitri transformed the meaning imputed to it by the male elite. That the life a widow was capable of leading was important to Savitri further comes through in another article on 'singlehood'. In a culture that was suspicious of single women's sexuality, and chose to honour only the married, Savitri Devi spoke firmly in favour of a more fruitful life that a woman unencumbered by the cares of the world could lead.[94] She ridiculed those who believed that an unmarried woman was self-centred as compared to the married woman who lived to serve her family. Giving the examples of mythological figures of Gargi and Madhavi, Savitri felt the single woman could aim higher and achieve more than the constrained life of a wife or a mother would allow.

Thus Savitri, while mostly staying within the ambit of the established discourse, could, at times, break its barriers, to proclaim her own independent voice, giving esteem to her own and other widows' lives. Though careful about keeping a check over sensuous desires, she, unlike the male reformers did not simply condemn the widows for a supposedly ravenous sexuality. She blamed men as well for taking advantage of widows (a notion that never entered male discourse except when speaking of the discredited sadhus), and pleaded to men to stop spoiling their honour. She also told those reformers, who felt widow marriage to be the only way out of the problem of the 'unbridled sexuality of the widow', that they were wrong, and that the widow could remain chaste, if men did not take advantage of her.[95] Thus, Savitri Devi ridiculed the notion of dangerous sexuality of a widow or that of her 'spare' sexuality, concepts

[93]Vaidhavya Dharma'.
[94]Savitri, 'Avivahitva', *PP,* 5: 5, March, (1905), pp. 12-13.
[95]'Vaidhavya Dharma'.

behind many male reformers' understanding of the widows problem. She also overturned the idea of a widow as representing 'spare' labour. By asserting that a widow could make her life more worthwhile than a wife or a mother ever could, Savitri Devi emptied the precious ideology of ideal womanhood constructed by the male elite of its meaning and held it up for ridicule. However, these moments of assertion were few, and straddled between those of active compliance with the new ethos. But these moments of rebellion are important, for they represent self-affirmation for Savitri Devi, an estimation she chose to put to her life. However, there were too few widows like Savitri Devi. While there was little interest in the widow as a person, the figure of the widow continued to be a powerful symbol of patriarchal imagination. Lala Lajpat Rai, for example, the hero of social reform in Punjab, evoked the image of a suffering but completely pativrata widow to counter the vilification campaign unleashed by Katherine Mayo in her book *Mother India.*[96] If for Mayo it was the depressed condition of Indian women that represented the East, for Lajpat Rai it was their ability to suffer and remain true to their ideals that marked the distinctiveness of India.[97] Such images left the widow at the mercy of living up to symbolic constructions. In a period when a widow could signify caste distinction, social progress or national honour, it was widows like Savitri Devi who at times cut loose from the ideological shenanigans of the new patriarchy to assert their selfhood.

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[96]Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* (New York, 1927).

"Lajpat Rai, *Unhappy India* (Calcutta, 1928).

CHAPTER FOUR

Controlling Women: Recreating the Pativrata Wife as the Ideal Upper Caste Woman

A parable appeared in the pages of *Punjabi Bhain* in its August 1907 issue, the monthly journal of the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya of Ferozepur, which related the story of two Khatris, a king and a woodcutter. Intrigued by the disparity in the material situation of the two, the king asks his queen the reason for their different circumstances. The queen replies that the poverty of the woodcutter was due to his wife being unaccomplished. When the king makes the two wives exchange places, the woodcutter begins to prosper.[J]

The universal appeal of such a fable with its timeless characters was nevertheless expected to have a contemporary meaning in the lives of the pupils being taught correct conduct. Appearing under the title 'Obedience to Husbands', the story was meant to combine the age-old qualities of the pativrata, her auspicious devotion to her husband and her prosperity-bestowing ability, along with her newly learnt traits including budgeting the household expenditure and running it according to time-bound schedules. The parable is noteworthy as it highlights the idea of the pativrata wife's devotion and obedience to her husband with the economic well-being of the household. In the shastric literature the pativrata was of course associated with many other qualities. However, I wish to illuminate how the re-conceptualized pativrata was expected to be the fulcrum around which a middle class life could be built by the high castes in our period. The constant invocation of the pativrata

"Pati Dj Agya Palni', *Punjabi Bhain,* (Henceforth *PB),* August, (1907)

now shows not only the timeless appeal of the mythological pativrata, but also the manner in which the notion was recharged and made to fulfil the ambitions and needs of contemporary society. Indeed the idea of the pativrata grew into an ideology on the basis of which a familial (" life giving due deference to the hierarchies of gender and age could be organized in changed circumstances.

The age-old concept of the pativrata has been especially prone to be moulded at various times in accordance to the needs of different social groups. Leslie, for example, has studied how an orthodox pandit expounded on the ideal of the pativrata in the eighteenth century state of Thanjavur, as the courtly elite of the Marathas perceived a social threat from local Tamils, Muslims and missionaries. Sangari has shown how the ideology of *suhaag* naturalized a polygamous Rajput patriarchy in sixteenth century Rajputana. Chakrabarty has located in the icon of the 'grihalakshmi' the 'difference' in the nationalist imagination of the home and its unique negotiation of modernity, while Harlan has highlighted the contemporary relevance of pativrata ideology in Rajasthan.[2]

It is this pliability of the concept that was used by the high castes in colonial Punjab to suit it to the aspirations of a middle class life and to marry women to certain roles. The manner in which the service gentry and the shopkeeping castes adapted themselves to the British Raj has already been noted. Though seen to present boundless opportunities to begin with, in time the limitations of working under the Raj surfaced. This, in conjunction with the perceived prejudices of the state in favour of Jats and Muslims gave rise to a deep insecurity among them. However, what also needs to be highlighted is the struggle to maintain caste status and to achieve respectability among those people on the lower end of the scale. Sarkar has rightly drawn our attention to the constricted world of *chakri,* inhabited by upper caste, not very successful men, struggling to enter the hallowed precincts of a middle class.[3] The deployment of the ideology of the pativrata by the upper castes of Punjab, and its association with certain strategies of economic improvement and status generation will be examined here.[4]

[2]I. Julia Leslie, *The Perfect Wife;* Kumkum Sangari, 'Mirabai and the Spiritual Economy of Bhakti', *EPW, 7* July, (1990), pp. 1464-75; Dipesh Chakrabarty, The Difference-Deferral of (A) Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal', *History Workshop Journal,* Issue 36, (1993), pp. 1-34; Lindsey Harlan, 'Perfection and Devotion: Sati Tradition in Rajasthan', in J.S. Hawley, (ed.), *Sati: The Blessing and the Curse— The Burning of Wives in India* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 79-91.

[3]Sumit Sarkar, 'Kaliyuga', 'Chakri' and 'Bhakti': Ramakrishna and his Times', *EPW,* 18 July, (1992), pp. 1543-66.

[4]Sangari's demystifying discussion of the way in which the emerging Indian bour-

There were a number of ways in which the motif of the pativrata now came to envelop the multiple demands of high caste men, and of families straining for social recognition. The necessity of earning a livelihood, and the narrow confines of the 'work' space allowed little room for manoeuvre. It was by controlling and reorganizing the structures of the world of the family and the household, where re-writing familial, especially gender roles was envisaged, that social mobility became a possibility. It was also because in this 'private' world women had considerable power that persuasion had to work with coercion in order to make them fall in line.

There were at least four remarkable innovations through which patriarchal power was reconceptualized and economic strategies to improve the material status of the family envisaged, ail of which required a special exertion on the part of women. Firstly, the subservience of the wife to the husband, a central ingredient of the idea of the pativrata, was spelled out anew. Much effort was put to underscore to women the necessity of'serving' their men. The notion of service was polyvalent—men performed *naukri,* they were the *naukars* of the sarkar, while women were barred from undertaking such *naukri*—they were nevertheless expected to take on rigorous and unrelenting service inside the home. This service was specially directed towards the husband, for whom the importance of the performance of physical labour was underlined. This servitude of the woman was cloaked in the garb of meritorious *seva,* and the iconization of the husband was undertaken afresh. It may also be noted that the insistence on this service rendered the idea of conjugality and companionship in marriage, notions which did develop in our period, complicated and often devoid of mutuality. In fact power was intrinsic to the husband-wife relationship. Men often suspected women of conniving to wrest power from them by resorting to incantations and magic. Women were now told that the best way of'controlling' their men was by serving them. If women were willing to accept their subordination, ' then, they could be invested with an artificial power and a moral authority.

Another development that put a strain on the notion of the conjugal couple in colonial Punjab was the emphasis on the preservation of the joint family, composed of brothers, their wives and parents. It was the joint 'incomes' of this household, whether earned from serving the government or from shopkeeping, that gave economic and social stature

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geoisie sought to appropriate women's domestic labour, and her comment on the ease with which Manusmriti became 'a primer for embourgeoisment and class management' is interesting in this context. Sangari, The 'Amenities of Domestic Life'.

to the family. For men, women seemed to be specially set against the harmonious working of this joint household. It was by constantly teaching women lessons in their duties, specially pointing to the *nunh* or the daughter-in-law her low status in the hierarchy of the house and her many onerous tasks, that the successful working of this institution was contemplated.

The third way in which the domestic labour of women was emphasized was by re-writing the relationship with the low castes and others *Z* who traditionally performed menial or ceremonial services for the high *j* castes. The tension between those designated 'low' and 'high' was visible in the new avenues of education and conversion to Christianity that became available to the former group. However, there has been little understanding of the manner in which middle class life set itself against the intrusions of the low castes in it. And it was not only that those struggling to establish their credentials of a high status wished to spell out sharp differences from the lower castes. In many ways middle class life defined itself in terms in which the low had a limited space, preferably outside the household with little access within it. This was not a rejection of low caste labour, for that was utilized whenever required. This stress arose because women's caste, religious and class identity was re-considered. Indeed, a middle class identity hinged upon incorporating women within a high caste status, but which ironically also meant to an extent making women perform chores hitherto undertaken by the low castes.

Women, as already pointed out, occupied an ambiguous position within a caste identity. Though their labour and reproductive potential were appropriated by the high castes, their own beings were often condemned as low, shudra-like, and a woman was seen as a 'slipper of the feet' *(pairan dijutti).* The idea of the pativrata with its connotations of auspidousness and prosperity,[5] now worked towards raising women's r caste status, placing them within middle class homes and curbing their " relationship with the low castes. The menials and the ceremonial *laagis* came to be viewed as consumers of the already stretched resources of the high caste homes, and the pativrata was expected to replace the need for them by putting in constant and incessant domestic labour. The insistence, in the literature under view, that women work *apni hathi* or 'with their own hands' is remarkable not only for its persistent appearance, but also that it became a defining attribute of a middle class life. Thus,

[5]For an analysis of the concept of auspiciousness in the Hindu tradition see Frederique A. Marglin, 'Female Sexuality in the Hindu World', in M.W. Atkinson et al. (eds.), *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality* (Boston, 1985), pp. 39-60.

the wife came to embody the polarities of a servant-like shudra, and the goddess of riches Lakshmi *(lachhmi),* in her person. The corollary qualities of financial management, budgeting and economizing the household expenditure were not a simple imbibing of Victorian attitudes. Rather, they worked in consonance with the idea of the pativrata, blessing her family with good fortune.

Lastly, we have to consider the emotional and material pressures working on the young pativrata in her reconstituting the patriarchal marital family. The new trend towards inflated dowries has been examined earlier. As the endogamous block of high castes broadened, and as government jobs came to be coveted in colonial Punjab, the new criteria of looking for suitable grooms became the number of'incomes' in the joint household and the educational qualifications of the prospective groom, among other considerations. Dowry, at times, came to be seen as a compensation for the high educational qualifications of the groom and the expenses incurred therein, besides being a reflection of the high status of the families involved. It became a legitimate means of raising the economic status of a family. However, a new fear that emerged in the process was that a large dowry may enhance the position of the daughter-in-law in her marital household when patriarchal power was stressing her low status in the familial hierarchy. The literature of the period not only emphasized the gender and age hierarchies operating within the household, but also dwelt at length on the ephemerality of the relationship between a daughter and her parents. The involvement and interest of the natal family in the welfare of their daughter was projected as a negative value, whose consequence was disharmony within the family. Again, this apparently 'ancient' notion must be seen in the context of the weakening of the old biradaris, and the beginning of the emergence of the concept of 'private'.

As the men of the household tried to increase the resources under their control, women's access to even their meagre assets came under threat. A woman's *stridhan,* a necessary composite of a larger dowry, consisting of mostly her jewels and clothes, over which a woman 'traditionally' had control now became a contested issue.[6] Women were shown

[6]In the contemporary controversy over the issue of dowry, many feminists have rightly suggested that women do not have control over the varied constituents of a dowry. This is consistent with the cultural locus of dowry within a system of exchange that defines prestige and power of a caste-class patriarchy, as I have shown in Ch. 2. However, my evidence also suggests that women did have some measure of control over their stridhan/jewels, a right that came to be attacked and sought to be abrogated by the early twentieth century.

to have an inordinate love for jewels, an attraction that could lead to financial ruin of a precarious middle class life. Women were also depicted as fools easily duped of this precious possession by cunning theives. And in keeping with the rational arguments of the age, jewellery was shown to be harmful for the body, besides being sexually provocative. As societies banning the wearing of jewels came up, many women did see this as a motivated attack on their paltry security. In very significant ways, then, the emotional and material succour of women came under attack.

Pativrata and the Iconization of the Husband

Ralla Ram Chaddha of Malakwal employed a quasi-religious idiom in his booklet titled *Istri Dharam Vichar* or *Thoughts on Women's Religion.* He used a verse form similar to the *chaupai* of the popular epic Ram Charit Manas, and a mix of Hindi and Punjabi, to write this easily accessible moral instruction explaining to women their religious duty of being pativrata. It repeated the same message in pithy passages:

No other deed or another God/Women's religion is only service to her husband *(pati seva).* A woman who serves her husband with her heart/Must think her worship
complete *(puran samjhe ih bhagtai)* There is no greater love than that for her husband's feet/She must worship her
husband in her heart.[7]

Khalsa Tract Society's early, important and successful pamphlet, *Patibrat Dharm,* which ran into at least five editions, made the same point. Establishing a basic hierarchy between the genders, and more specifically between a man and his wife, it brought home the message, that for a woman of any class in society, her primary religion was to be a pativrata which basically involved 'organizing the house and serving the husband.'[8] The June 1916 issue *of Punjabi Bhain* again emphasized the ingredient of service as the most important duty towards a husband when it noted that only sensuous men were pleased with good looks and make-up of a wife, and that service had to be performed to make the husband happy.[9] The point was perhaps best made by Bhai Amar Singh in his novel *Choti Nunh.* In a conversation between two pativrata women, the author spelt

[7]Ralla Ram Chadha, *Istri Dharam Vichar* (Amritsar, 1906), p. 7.
[8]*Patibrat Dharm* (Amritsar, n.d.), p. 15.
[9]'Mata Di Sauhre Jandi Dhi Nun Uttam Sikhya', *PB,* June, (1916), p. 16.

out the difference between a successful pativrata, one who could please her husband, Sushila; and the unhappy Jamna, whose husband sought solace in women of the *bazaar*. Sushila explained to Jamna the difference between the husband and other gods:

> A husband is a god, but unlike the other deities, this god is not pleased by good deeds, concentrating on, or remembering his name in one's heart—he has to be unequivocally served (is *di sakhiyat seva karni paindi hai).*[m]

The pamphlet *Patibrat Dharm* described the labour that went into serving the husband in graphic details. The wife of the ideal Sikh couple here tells the Rani, the queen with the wayward husband, the many tasks she performed for her husband happily and willingly. These involved waking up before him and completing her ablutions so that she could fetch water for him, bathe him, cook and serve him, taking her meal after he finished his. Looking after the house, stitching and spinning were to be organized in the afternoon so that she could again prepare his meal in the evening. She followed this regimen in addition to obeying his every command, not wasting his money or keeping secrets from him, the other attributes of a good wife, in line with a mode of thinking which saw the wife as the consumer of the hard-earned money of the husband, and which feared women's knowledge and cultural practices.[11] Similarly the pamphlet *htri Bharta* or *Wife-Husband,* the other major tract of the KTS devoted solely to the ideal of the pativrata, shows in detail how the perfect wife Gyanwanti, the woman of knowledge, looked after every need of her husband, and earned respect from all for such an ideal behaviour.[n]

Thus a woman's salvation was routed through her seva or the performance of daily domestic chores, especially those undertaken to please the husband. This may seem an aspect of the 'original' idea of the pativrata, but the innovation soon becomes apparent in the additional agenda of purifying language, purging it of vulgar phrases and informal modes of address. Introducing a dicta of exaggerated respect for the husband, Ralla Ram Chaddha soundly condemned women who were disrespectful to their husbands. He complained that some women whose husbands were old often abused him saying: 'This pimp *[bharrua)* and good-for-nothing *(makhatu)* man's bed should be thrown out,' and were so rude as to suggest burning his legs in the *chulha* rather than wood. Such women, Chaddha assured his readers/listeners, 'will burn in hell, be

[10]Amar Singh, *Choti Nunh,* p. 127.
"Patibrat Dharm, pp. 8-10. *[u]htri Bharta* (Amritsar n.d.).

re-born again and again as she-asses, bearing burden and getting beaten' *(Pati niradar jehrri kare/marke ghor narak vich pare/punh-punh janarn gadhi da pave/chuke bojh maar nit khave).*[13] The barely concealed threat of physical violence, surprisingly, made an appearance often to ensure women's submission. Similarly the author of the article on 'Pativrat Dharm' in the pages of *Panchal Pandita,* the monthly journal of KMV, frowned upon women who denied their husbands due respect. She fumed against women such as those who far from respectfully addressing the husband with a 'ji', were not averse to using base language with their men. Such women would never be able to accomplish their religious duty of being pativrata.[14] This was also a situation that almost every tract of the KTS written on the subject tried to redress. To quote from *Patibrat Dharm* once again, in which the wife of the fifth guru reformed the erring queen earlier referred to, by pointing out her mistake in calling her husband-king with a pejorative 'tu', 'oye' or 've'. *Swami* (literally master), according to her, ought to be addressed with a 'ji', 'maharaj' or 'aap',[15] which were considered appropriately respectful. Many of the *jhagrras* took up this innovation with enthusiasm. Very often the husband, in these 'quarrels' was referred to as 'swami' and then the meaning was clarified for a less educated public by explaining its meaning in parenthesis with the more popular Urdu word of *khavindl* A man was now to be the recepient of extraordinary honour, and a restructuring of the everyday relationship between a husband and a wife was being contemplated.

It is in this context that it is important to put into perspective the analysis put forward by some historians, that there was a new desire for 'companionship' in marriages of our period.[16] No doubt there was an investment in the concept of conjugality, and there was to some extent an expectation of companionship in this relationship. This is, for example, visible in the personal reminiscences of Munshi Ram (later Swami Shraddhanand), when he noted his disappointment at being married to a very young girl who was not likely to be a companion. He wrote, 'I thought I would get a young girl as a life partner. But she was in her childhood.'[17] And such examples can be multiplied. However, operating within a new power structure which emphasized a husband's superiority,

[li]*Istri Dharam Vichar,* p. 9.

[14r]Pativrat Dharm', *PP,* 5:2, Dec, (1901), p. 27.

^*Patibrat Dharm,* p. 17.

[16]Madhu Kishwar, The Daughters of Aryavarta'. For certain personal histories of women emulating the model of the companionate wife see, Partha Chatteriee, 'Women and the Nation'.

[17]Munshi Ram as quoted in K.N. Kapoor, *Swami Shraddhananda* (Jullundur, 1978).

whether in respectful verbal address to him, or in caring for his needs, the idea of companionship existed at the whim of the husband. In a simple sense this was of course an assertion of the power of the man in the home, a reversal of his subordination in the world outside. However, the simultaneous working of the notion of service and subservience, along with companionship sought from a wife, made the whole issue much more complex.

The diverse and often contradictory demands made on a wife surface sharply when one studies the emerging notions of sexuality of the pativrata wife. The middle class project of cleansing—whether clothes, home, language, literature or culture—tended to also excise any overt reference to sexuality in its sweep.[18] Unfortunately, historians too have concentrated on the making of the icon of the chaste wife, and have not attempted to unravel the many ways in which the sexuality of the chaste wife was available to the husband. The Victorian trope of the desexualized housewife, and the sexually loaded harlot, that gave the Victorian man a legitimate access to both as an outlet for his 'natural' sexuality, has tended to colour the world of middle class sexuality in the colonial context as well.[19]

It needs to be noted that the new middle class morality also put restraint on the sexuality of men as it developed the monogamous ideal. This occurred partially because of the social and cultural distancing from the low castes and classes being urgently encouraged, including the prostitutes, both as aspects of high caste cleansing as well as financial management. Also the ideological investment in the pativrata caused strain on the unimpeded sexuality of the man, demanding some degree of reciprocity. The desire for *strivrata* men, of course, did not actually create them, and men's sexual wanderings came to implicate the inadequacy of a wife's sexuality, justifying men's sexual adventurousness.[20] However, the ideal of monogamy coupled with the need to establish men's mastery in the home, loaded the sexual expectations from a wife in new ways. On the one hand, men asserted their own sexual control over the body of the

[18]A multifaceted project of cleansing was for instance undertaken in the KTS tract *Pavitrata* (Amritsar, n.d.).

[19]On the making of the icon of the chaste wife and the mental anguish any deviance from it caused see Pragati Mohapatra, *The Making of a Cultural Identity: Language, Literature and Gender in Orissa in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, Ph.D Thesis, University of London (1997). For the growth of Victorian ideology see J.F. McMillan, *Housewife or Harlot: The Place of Women in French Society 1870-1914* (Brighton, 1981).

[20]Janaki Nair has argued that though there was a contraction of the legitimate sphere of male sexual fulfilment, men's promiscuity did find outlets, while notions of companionship and mutual respect maintained a sham of respectable middle class conjugality. /Janaki Nair, The Devadasi, Dharma and the State', *EPW*, 10 Dec, (1994).

wife; on the other, the wife was expected to combine the accomplishments of a courtesan with the domesticity of a wife to please the monogamy-bound husband. While the wife had to make herself sexually attractive and available to her husband, her relations with 'other' men were first sexualized, and then that sexuality sought to be excised by 'covering' the woman and banishing her within the home.

The husband quite clearly had rights of possession over the wife's body. A graphic statement of this came from a mother, advising her newly married daughter the duties that awaited her in her marital home, also pointing to the passing of the ownership rights over the body from her natal family to her husband. The mother advises:

> Do not show your body to any one other than your husband, for we have given your body to him. Now this body is a possession of your husband, and you do not have a claim over it. It is up to him to be good with your body, or to spoil it, to nurture it, or beat it, even we have no control over his actions.[21]

While the husband mastered a wife's body, she had to sexually serve him, giving another dimension to the 'service' demanded from a wife within the home. An article in *Panchal Pandita* urged women to focus their sexuality on the husband—'Whatever the husband may be like ... service to a husband can be rendered if one frees oneself of immorality and does not desire other men.'[22] Sexual service to the husband, in fact, meant arousing and sustaining the sexual interest of the man. In the novel *Choti Nunh*, Sushila and Jamna are both pativrata women. However, unlike Sushila, Jamna is unable to retain the sexual interest of her husband, and he resorts to the company of prostitutes. The inadequacies of Jamna are explained by the author—she was very young, would take a long time to complete her chores before going to her husband, and would then lie quietly, frustrating Madho, her husband:

> He wanted that his wife, like other educated women should help him in all his work, and should talk to him freely so that he should know that she was his i best friend in this world and that she loved him deeply.[23]

Educated, free, friend, love are the key words here, conjuring an image of a modern, western/ized, elusive, forbidden woman that men now demanded of their pativrata wives in the realm of sexual desire. The inability of women to match up to men's sexual fantasies legitimized

[21] 'MataDiSauhre', p. 16.
[22] *Pativrat Dharm*, p. 28.
[23] *Choti Nunh*, p. 52.

their flouting of the monogamous ideal. In the KTS' **pamphlet *Pativrat Dharm,*** the fifth Guru's wife tells the errant queen:

> Queen, the woman who is incapable of keeping her man happy, such a woman's man automatically loosens up his stribrat dharm. The man whose stomach is filled with bread, his heart will not wander towards sweets, but a hungry man will find it difficult to control his desire.[24]

In the demand to sexually serve their husband, women were encouraged to educate themselves in courtesanly attributes. Mohan Singh Vaid, in one of his many writings directed at the ideal behaviour of women in the home, gave a list of services women should perform for men. Besides cooking and serving his food, Vaid also mentioned entertaining the husband with singing or narrating some anecdote, accomplishments normally associated with courtesans, when he returned home tired from work.[25] Courtesan/Western/Muslim women as categories were conflated in the titillating novel *Pati Sudhar,* with the vile, money-grabbing prostitute Moti Jaan, responsible for the downfall of the high caste hero Chaman Lai. She combined in her person various qualities like gaza/-singing with eating with a knife and fork, going out on a carriage, and visiting the theatre.[26] Though Moti Jaan is presented as the opposite of the good wife Kamla, Kamla has to mimic some of her attributes, including twice stepping into the forbidden world outside the home in order to reform her husband.

While encouraging women to appease the husband sexually by flirting with certain forbidden qualities, there was also a paranoia that the sexual control of the husband over the wife was not infringed, throwing into jeopardy the articulation of his powerful mastery within the home and in the interiors of the realm of desire and fantasy. An aspect of this frantic concern is visible in the efforts to rearrange women's *parda* (a term that covered both the veil that covered women's faces as well as their seclusion in *the zenana).*

High caste reformers, including the Arya Samajis and the Sabhaites, encouraged women to discard the veil. Parda came to be attacked for various reasons ranging from its apparently Muslim genesis to its cloistering suffocation that did not allow women to walk free and healthy. Srimati Pandita Vidyawati compared women in seclusion to a plant kept bereft of fresh air and sunlight at the annual function of the Arya

[24] *Patibrat Dharm,* p. 19.
[25] *Grihastha Nirbah,* p. 19.
"Bhagwan Singh 'Das', *Pati Sudhar* (Amritsar, 1920).

Samaj at Lahore in 1905.[27] The point was made more explicitly in an article, probably written by the founder of KMV, Lala Devraj. He noted that sickly women gave birth to unhealthy children, which was the unfortunate result of the continuing practice of parda.[28] Parda, it was further stated, was inconsistent with the educated Arya women of yesterday, or the older glorified Sikh women of the battlefield. It made women foolish and unaware of happenings in the outside world, making them easy victims of cunning men. *Punjabi Bhain* related the story of a man taking his wife for the first time to his home where the veiled woman, not having seen her husband, went off with another man pretending to be her husband. The editor then soundly rebuked women who refused to give up this custom.[29]

Yet despite the furious rhetoric against parda, men hardly wished to abrogate the sense of honour they accumulated by dressing women in a particular way, or indeed by veiling them. The concern for unveiling, uncovering certain parts of women, was paralleled with a desire to re-attire them. As Lala Devraj put it, 'it is from the everyday and ordinary appearance that the difference between the respectable and unrespectable, civilized and uncivilized can be made.'[30] The middle class project of respectability among other things envisaged withdrawing women from the gaze of 'other' men, while directing women's sexuality exclusively for the pleasure of the husband.

Reformers came to attack the traditional notion of Hindu parda that expected women to cover up their faces in the company of their senior affinal kinsmen, and even their husbands in public.[31] Women, the reformers claimed did not need to observe *parda* from their own relatives, ,, rather it was the stranger's and especially the low caste men's gaze against f which protection was required. ^

... the *ghund* (face veil) that is worth burning ... is adopted only for one's own relatives, *ghund* from the father-in-law, *ghund* from the elder brother-in-law who have brought you home like a daughter, from other elders who think of you as a daughter, but look at this ... girl of her mother, the girl on the *muklava* (the ceremony performed after marriage to take the girl to her marital home,

'"Parda Rakhane Se Stri Jati Adhogati Ko Pahunch Jati Hai', *PP,* 9: 4, Feb., (1906).

[28]'Parde Ki Haniyan', *PP,* 4:13, Nov., (1901).

[M]'Muklave Valiye', *PB,* Nov., (1910).

[30]Lala Devraj, 'Striyon ka Pahirava', *PP,* 4:6, April, (1901).

[31]On traditional notions of parda see Hanna Papanek, 'Purdah: Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter', in H. Papanek and G. Minault (eds.), *Separate Worlds: Studies of Purdah in South Asia* (Delhi, 1982), pp. 3-53.

which can take place even a few years after marriage) who is keeping a *ghund* from her husband![32]

Lala Devraj was more explicit in his condemnation. By keeping parda from their relatives women in a sense insulted them, he wrote. Women seemed to trust the low caste men like the *dhobi, nai oijhinvar* more than their own relatives, for they did not feel the need to cover themselves in their presence. He gave the example of the shameless women of Lahore and Amritsar who roamed uncovered through the bazaars, presumably full of strange men, but covered up as soon as they passed before a relative's shop![33] The code of sexual morality which had allowed inter-mixing of women with low caste men (as they were in no sense the potential competitors for a woman's sexual favours) now came to be frowned upon. There was no occasion', one of the KTS' tract opined, 'for daughters and daughters-in-law of great and respectable houses to laugh with and tease the street vendors.'[34]

While women were to be prevented from promiscuous interaction with low caste men, they were explicitly encouraged to dress up for their husbands. The KTS' pamphlet *Eh Tan Garki Aai* or *Now Destruction Has Come,* expressed anger over women who dressed up for the bazaar and reverted to dirty clothes as soon as they reached home, which it took as a sign of disrespect for the husband:

When you sit at home you dress like a *chuhri* (the sweeper woman) and when you go out you dress like a fairy. When the husband comes home at night, tired and irritable from work, firstly because you are basically foolish you do not know how to show respect to him, second you look just like chuhris. You stink as if you have tied dead rats around your ears.... God forbid if you are grieving, then you cover yourselves with a sheet full of ashes, and keep your hair untended like a witch for about four years. Some men angered by this go astray. And some burn up but become quiet. But when you go to the bazaar then you do so with complete make-up, this obviously means that your husband is your enemy, while you are friends with the bazaar men.[35]

The pamphlet envisaged a whole programme of re-dressing women in order to de-sexualize the woman in public as well as render her sexually appealing to the husband. The high caste woman in need of reform here is shown to pass through the bazaar dressed only in the lower garment, the loose trouser *(suthan)* and her jewels, covered with a thin *maimed bhochan*

[32]'Muklave Valiye', p. 11.
[33]'Parde Ki Haniyan'.
[M]*Eh Tan Garki Aai* (Amritsar, n.d.).
[35]ibid.

or a wrap. The idea of such a dress, the author pointed out, was more to reveal the body than to conceal it, as the 'timely' arrival of monsoon rains expose the sacrosanct body of the woman to bazaar men to the consternation of the woman. It was unfortunate, the author maintained, that high caste and respectable women dressed thus. The author emphasized how women ought to wear clothes with parda *(parde vala).* He recommended a new attire suitable for the market:

> Below a suthan and over it an ordinary but nice skirt *(ghagri),* above a long shirt *[kurta)* topped by a face-covering, heavy cloth wrap.[36]

Here the author even maintained the face veil in order to invisibilize the woman in the public— '... as far as possible walk so as to not draw any one's attention to yourself.'[37] Again, the feeling that something new was occurring not only in terms of the changing apparel of the women, but also in arranging the relationship of the conjugal couple emerges when one sees the author haranguing men against buying their wives thin fabrics for clothes, and advising the *bimdaris* to impose a dress code on women. Asking men to assert their authority the author even gave the example of a man who beat up and sent to her natal home the wife who dared to get a garment stitched of a thin cloth.[38]

Lala Devraj combined high caste respectability with nationalist aspirations that sought to transfigure women into suitable patriotic icons when he re-worked on Punjabi women's dress. The fetish for covering women co-existed with the middle class need to ensure efficient labour from modern women, conscious of the significance of time. He asked women to wear a *choli* or a brassiere dose to their bodies as it was shameful to leave the breasts free. Above that he recommended the wearing of a long and loose shirt, on top of which a small coat ought to be worn which was buttoned up to the neck and had sleeves up to the elbows. These garments ensured that the body of a woman was well covered, for as he put it, 'no part of a woman's body ought to be bare except for her hands, feet and face,' a dictum that closely resembled the ideal dress code of the much-abused Muslims. The coat on top of the shirt especially ensured that even a breeze would not expose women's body, while the short sleeves left women's arms free for work. Further, the coat ought to have pockets so that women could carry handkerchiefs and a watch, important tools in an age which emphasized cleanliness and proper management of

[36]Ibid., p. 11.
[37]ibid., p. 22.
[38]ibid., p. 21.

time. On the legs women were told to wear a loose *pajama,* over which a sari had to be worn. The purpose of the pajama to be stitched of a thick cloth was, once again, to make sure that the legs were never bared. The sari, which had to be long and till the feet, and was to serve as both a lower garment and a wrap, was additionally important as a national dress. The sari, too, had to be of a thick doth, and Devraj even suggested materials like khaddar and *latha* to be used for the purpose. He forbade women to wear a thin *dhoti* or a sari, as it would not serve the purpose of maintaining parda *(beparad).*

The problem that the newly covered body of women still presented was the disrespect a bare-faced woman could pose to familial patriarchs. The reformers tried to tackle this problem by insisting that women maintain a sense of shame by adhering to its code through inscribing it on their bodies, or acting it out in their behaviour. Just as women had to become invisible in order to protect themselves from men's gaze by covering their persons, similarly women had to continue to imbibe the code of shame. Lala Devraj, asked women to carry shame in their eyes rather than sit with their backs to the elders to hide their faces.[39] Pandita Vidyawati wanted women to display their sense of shame through general good conduct *(sadachar).*[40] The editor of *Punjabi Bhain* insisted that women can replace the need for the face veil by showing respect and obedience to elders, and always speaking softly.[41]

It is apparent, then, that a woman's relationship was being re-worked with her husband, his family, and the world outside, a restructuring, in other words, of the daily business of living. In order to stem the ensuing conflicts, a woman was told to make her husband an idol and give him unquestioning obedience, whether he demanded companionship or he treated her badly. In a conversation between two women Saraswati and Lakshmi, Navinchandra Rai of the Lahore Brahmo Samaj told women that it was no great feat to love a good husband. The test of a pativrata woman lay in loving the husband for his own sake, as a religious duty.[42] The same point was made in an article in *Panchal Pandita* which reiterated that only women who loved their husbands were true Arya women, whether he be a bad character or poor.[43] A woman who loved her husband thus became the embodiment of moral and spiritual power. Gunwant Kaur, a heroine of one of the acclaimed novels of Bhai Amar Singh, is

[39]'Parde Ki Haniyan'.
[40]'Parda Rakhne Se Strijati', p. 14.
[41]'MuklaveValiye', p. 11.
[42]Navinchandra Rai, *Lakshmi-Saraswati Samvad,* (Lahore, 1873), pp. 13-14.
[43]'Pativrat Dharm', p. 18.

shown to retain her devotion for her husband despite the reprehensible manner in which he treats her which included beating and kicking her. Indeed it is this characteristic in her which ultimately saves her husband from financial ruin and a sojourn in prison. The debt of the husband to the wife is brought home to him by one of the characters of the novel—'... you have escaped unscathed only because of the force of your chaste woman's *sat*. ...'[44] She was also the source of physical power of the man, a point made by Sumitra Devi in an article. The man, according to her, increased his physical strength and preserved his health if he had the fortune to have a pativrata wife.[45]

To become celebrated pativratas and achieve the nobility associated with it required women to give up a sense of their own selves, just as the worshipping of the Lord in the *bhakti* mould expected the devotee to efface oneself. One Shamsher Singh 'Khanjar' advised women to come under the control of their husbands instead of trying to control them. He gave women lessons in humility whose real meaning lay in giving up their ego:

> By wiping away a feeling of I' or mine one can do away with all unhappiness... follow this 'mantra of love,' give up your individuality and come under the control of the 'crown/master of your head' *{sir da sain)* and with love contemplate his feet. ...[46]

Numerous articles spoke of the three important words in a woman's vocabulary—the three *bhabhas* of the Punjabi alphabet—*bhulgai, bhala ji, bhana rab da*, i.e. 'I made a mistake', 'whatever you say', and 'I accept things as destined by God'.[47] These were important lessons in achieving the malleability required by the restructuring patriarchal order.

The Serving Lachhmi—Placing the Pativrata in the Family

The significance of the denial of one's needs and individuality must have served a young woman well once married, for marriage not only tied a woman to a husband, but also invariably to his family. The idea of companionship, however diluted and unidimensional, posed a challenge to the existence of the joint household, and the reformers of

[44]Bhai Amar Singh, *Sulakhi Nunh Yan Suchaji Gunvant Kaur* (Lahore, 1912), p. 95.

[45]Sumitra Devi, 'Stri Dharm', *PP,* 9:9, July, (1906), p. 27.

[46]Shamsher Singh 'Khanjar', 'Pati Vas Karan Da Jaadu', *PB,* Feb. (1918), p. 6.

[47]I came across this lesson in at least three articles. 'Nunh Da Dharm', *PB,* April, (1918); 'Gunwant Sikhya', *Sughar Saheli,* Dec. (1918); 'Lachhmi Kaun Hai', *Bhujangan Patr,* Dec. (1917).

our period expended their considerable energy in ensuring that this institution worked. For the reformers the expanded household was the foundation of a middle class life which typically required the submission of its womenfolk in order to make it function. This was of course because women spent maximum time and labour within the house, and as already posited, the demands for the same were increasing. Ironically, the idea of conjugality was seen to give sexual power to the wife over the husband, even though the notion of companionship, as I have shown, worked in accordance to the needs of the husband. In order to make the joint household a success and diffuse tensions, infusing hierarchies within it became necessary. This essentially amounted to spelling out with clarity the many and onerous duties of the daughter-in-law.

The patriarch of this marital family was the *sauhra* or the father-in-law, described as the master of the house. He was responsible for the welfare of the household, and had its financial management in his hands. This makes sense when one keeps in mind the fact that both girls and boys married at a young age. Men were often still studying, frequently in the big cities like Lahore or Amritsar, while they had wives at home. This situation occurs in at least two of Bhai Amar Singh's novels.[48] As the head of the household, the sauhra was expected to look after the interests of its various members and was the rightful recipient of the service of all the household members, especially of the daughter-in-law. In the KTS pamphlet *Sushila,* written with the purpose of teach young, educated girls the important task of cooking, the husband remains a shadowy figure, while the nunh hones her culinary skills to serve the sauhra.[49]

The inter-personal relationship between the women of the household, as postulated, was a cause of worry for men, for they saw in women's quarrels not only an erosion of patriarchal authority (a lack of male control), but also a possible scuttling of the ambition of social and economic dominance. The image of women as quarrelsome made them shoulder the responsibility of the difficulty encountered in living up to a household's class ambitions. Men were, therefore, inevitably presented as the victims of quibbling women, while a home that witnessed too many quarrels was no longer a sanctuary and a refuge for men.

These days some men are burning over their wives' sour nature and foolishness, some express regret at their daughter-in-laws' quarrelsome nature, some are unhappy about the rough treatment meted out by their mothers to their wives,

[48]Bhai Amar Singh, *Sulakhi Nunh,* and idem., *Char Da Nirbah* (Lahore, n.d.).
[49]*Sushila: Rasoi Di Pothi* (Amritsar n.d.).

some cry over the problems between their own and their brothers' wives, and some beat their breasts over the sisters-in-laws' squabbles.[50]

A daughter-in-law was especially feared, for if she succeeded in splintering the common hearth, she could dissolve the economic base of a middle class patriarchy. As the author of a tract explained, using a popular proverb—*Aun paraian jaian, vichhormn sakian bhaian* (When they come the other's daughters, they separate real brothers),[51] emphasizing the 'outsider' status of the nunh.

A number of pamphlets, of course, spoke of badly behaved mothers-in-law. One of Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid's books was, for example, titled *SugharNunh Te Larraki Sas, i.e., A Capable Daughter-in Law and a Quarrelsome Mother-in-Law.*[52] Though the rubric of 'Istri Sudhar' or 'Reform of/for Women' included in its project reform of all women, it was the vulnerable position of the nunh which allowed for her transformation. This was the agenda of the KTS' two part tract, *Sudeshi Nunh* or *Daughter-in-Law of Our Land.*[53] Though the tract begins by showing the cruelty of mothers-in-law towards young, newly married wives of their sons, so much so that their behaviour at times also led to the girl's death, the author changes tack in the middle of the pamphlet. Written in an essay form, the authorial voice attempts reform by ostensibly speaking of the everyday situation in the lives of his potential readers. Thus, when the author exposes the selfish and uncaring behaviour of wives towards old mothers, he is making a case for control over the daughters-in-law. Young men, for the author, ought to be aware of the danger of wives who bring them under their thumb, and should not risk diluting patriarchal power by letting the woman's natal family exercise undue influence over them. Equally, they should be respectful of, and grateful towards the sacrifices their mothers made for them. This meant that the mother of the son and the mother-in-law of the nunh ought to be treated with respect, served in her old age, a requisite in the maintenance of familial hierarchy especially nuanced between women.

At no time was the daughter-in-law to forget that, as long as her mother-in-law was alive, it was she who was the mistress of the house. This is how Mohan Singh Vaid put the daughter-in-law in her place in his book on household reform.[54] Far from thinking in terms of being

[50]*Sade Ghamn Di Dasha* (Amritsar, n.d.), p. 7.

[5t]*Kalhini Deurani* (Amritsar, n.d.), p. 7.

"Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, *Sughar Nunh Te Larraki Sas* (Amritsar, 1920).

[5i]*Sudeshi Nunh 1 & li* (Amritsar, n.d.).

[54]Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, *Grihastha Nirbah* (Amritsar, n.d.), p. 46.

the mistress *(malkin)* of the house, the nunh had to think of herself as a servant, whose duty it was to serve her parents-in-law. This was explicitly stated in an article in *Punjabi Bhain:*

> No one should think that having come on a palanquin to my marital home I can spend the rest of my time here as a wax sparrow. Rather one should think that in my natal home I used to roam about carefree, but here in my in-laws' house I can not think of my own happiness or comfort, it is my duty to please my father and mother-in-law and other relatives, sitting on the palanquin I have not become a queen but my parents have sent me as a slave girl *(dasi).* ...[55]

The ideal home for the reformers, then, was one in which the nunh willingly and happily occupied her lowly position in the household. It was a home in which men were respected, mothers-in-law were benevolent and the daughters-in-law bore their burden of service with pleasure. Such was the daughter-in-law Sushil Kaur of the pamphlet *Ghar Vich Surag* or *Heaven at Home,* who was obedient to her mother-in-law, served and laboured without a qualm, and had very good relations with the rest of the family.[56] Another ideal type was the nunh of the pamphlet *Nunh Sas Da Sambad* or A *Dialogue Between a Mother-in-Law and a Daughter-in-Law,* for she was willing to learn and put into practice the behaviour expected of her.[57]

Training to be good daughters-in-law was a primary lesson parents were meant to teach their daughters. An attempt at translating the ideal into reality is visible when parents started giving elaborate, often printed advice to their girls on the normative and expected behaviour in the marital family, at the time of their marriage. Vaid, the indefatigable reformer, gave his newly married daughter Satwant Kaur 'advice' at the time of her departing for her marital home.[58] This advice included her duties to serve her husband and parents-in-law, be soft spoken and respectful of everyone, do the various household chores, and always stay smiling. Similar advice was proffered by one Mela Singh to his daughter at the same crucial moment in her life.[59] Most such booklets carried this advice also in the form of an easily digestible capsule, a song to be memorized by the girl, which probably came to be very popular as it appeared in a number of pamphlets and journals. It carried nuggets like:

[55]'Nunh Da Dharam', *PB,* April (1918), p. 11.
[56]*Char Vich Surag.*
[57]*Nunh Sas Da Sambad* (Amritsar, n.d.).
[58]Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, *Sauhre Turdi DM Nun Matan* (Tarn Taran, 1915).
[59]Sardar Mela Singh, *Mapian Valon Putri Nun Matan* (Amritsar, 1924).

Mother and father-in-law, husband's sister, his **brother's wife**
Treat them like your parents and sisters Keep your eyes low and
your voice sweet Never frown, daughter[60]

The harmonious working of the joint family, as suggested earlier, was the cornerstone for economic and social advancement. Tensions appeared to be specially acute among the not-so-well-off, those lodged between the desire to do better and the reality of low-paid jobs. The family, as a whole, needed to work out various strategies to enhance its financial status. In such a situation, a repetitive theme that surfaced in our literature was the discussion of the relative merit of service in comparison to setting up independent businesses, with the latter increasingly depicted as the desirable goal. Vaid, in one of the stories meant to portray ideal familial behaviour, focuses on this problem when a young educated man's brother and sister-in-law debate whether he ought to embark upon a career of service or set up a business. The two brothers decide on the latter course and the author informs his readers that, within two years of being in business, they were able to save Rs. 100 per month, the figure climbing to Rs. 1000 in a matter of five years. The opting out of service in favour of business was also shown to be a decision that surprised many who laughed at the fate of the protagonist—*pane farsi veche tel, eh dekho karman da khel* (he reads Persian but sells oil, look at the play of destiny) .[61] The proverb belonged to a world-view which associated high education with governmental service. The new emphasis on business can be seen to be a symptom of both aversion to clerkdom under a colonial regime, and a measure of the possible accumulation of wealth that could be accomplished if the new economic circumstances of the early twentieth century could be exploited. In the dreams of setting up independent businesses one can perceive the desire to escape the ignominy of colonialism, even though most reformers, especially the Sikhs belonging to the Singh Sabha movement, continued to advocate loyalty to the Raj. Another KTS pamphlet that reflected the self-perception of the Sikhs as poor, and sought to redress the situation, also explicitly condemned the servitude of *babugiri* among the educated, and used the propaganda of swadeshi to enthuse the less well-off to take to business.[62]

In this ongoing effort to secure material well-being it was important to prevent the splitting of the joint household, and this message was

[60] *Choti Nunh*, p. 84.
[61] *Sade Charan Di Dasha-Sushila Bharjai*, p. 51.
[62] *Garib Kaur I & II* (Amritsar, n.d.).

sought to be relayed to women who were inevitably blamed for bringing rift between brothers, leaving men with a clean conscience. In *Kalhini Deurani* or *Quarrelsome Younger Sister-in-Law,* the deurani rues separating from her older brother-in-law and his wife. Her husband's business in the shop begins to decline, while the brother-in-law's salary as a teacher remains steady, allowing them to save the amount that was earlier sent to the joint household.[63] Similarly in the pamphlet *SansarPar Hi Narak Surag* or *Heaven And Hell Is In This World,* it is the oldest sister-in-law who regrets having forced the partition of the jointly owned shop of the family and move away with their share. While the younger brother-in-law's business booms, their's faces setbacks, forcing them to seek help from the rest of the joint family.[64] The message that staying together makes financial sense comes through again.

Corresponding to the image of a wicked daughter-in-law was that of a good nunh, associated with prosperity and abundance. The wife was presented as determining the ability of a man to prosper, and was also responsible for his poverty, as an *updeshika* taught Garib Kaur in the pamphlet of the same name.[65] In the novel *Choti Nunh,* the capable Sushila is able to overturn the declining fortunes of her marital family, while at the same time training her simpleton husband in business. With her own initiative she establishes a flourishing business of hoarding and selling wheat, and like an ideal daughter-in-law retreats into happy domesticity when it is established, relinquishing its control into the hands of her reformed elder brother-in-law. The material help from her own father only helps in this effort, and so it should be, the author tells us, for it was the correct way for girls from good families to be married and sent to their marital homes.[66] The emphasis here was on the girl's natal family providing the means for material prosperity of her affinal family through provision of adequate dowry, or enhancing the prospects of their son-in-law. In the story *Kaleshni Sas* or *Quarrelsome Mother-in-Law,* the father of the girl Saraswati helped her groom Narain Singh to acquire a better paying job, and his income increased from the paltry Rs. 40 per month to Rs. 80, thanks to his efforts.[67] Also in the pamphlet *SansarPar Hi Narak Surag,* the younger and ideal daughter-in-law, not only gives moral support to her own husband and encourages him to set up independent business of his own, but also capably manages the finances

[63]*Kalhini Deurani.*

[64]*Sansar Par Hi Narak Surag* (Amritsar, n.<±).

[65]*Garib Kaur,* p. 5.

[66]*Choti Nunh.*

[67]*Sade Gharan Di Dasha-Kaleshni Sas.*

of her needy neighbours. She encourages a neighbourhood widow to buy doth and invest in an old sewing machine, working out its economics for her, so that she could make an independent livelihood possible.[68]

From financial management to economizing as an essential ingredient in the make-up of the ideal nunh was but a small step for the reformist ideologues. Cutting corners, without letting the family feel the pinch of it was an aspect of good house management, even if that meant self-denial or extra labour for the woman. In the tract *Ghar Vich Surag,* the mistress of the household, the *sas* Agya Kaur explains in minute detail the salaries her husband earned through his life as a naukar of the government, as well as that of her son, to her son's friend's wife, Bhani. Though the household had a very small income, they managed well within that amount, primarily because the women of the house did not waste any money and managed to perform most of the household chores on their own. Besides that, Agya Kaur stitched the clothes for everyone in the house, and also knitted socks, sweaters and ribbons. She spun and wove sheets for the use of the family. All this meant that they not only lived well but also gave the impression of being a rich household, suitable to their caste status. As Bhani put it, 'Your home looks like that of the rich, everything being neat and clean, and use of things as that of the rich. ,..'[69]

The notion of an auspicious Lakshmi responsible for accumulation of wealth for the depressed high caste was depicted in a crudely literal way in KTS' tract entitled Garib Kaur. This tract is especially significant as it tried to rewrite the relationship of a high caste household with the 7 castes who served them in various ways, drawing a parallel between \ women's labour willingly given, and the resulting affluence of a home. The author tried to teach worthless/workless *(nikamian)* women the way to become rich *(dhanvantian)* and make their husbands prosper.[70] The updeshika of the Sat Sangat Sabha or The Society of the Truthful, Bebe Budhwanti, the woman of intelligence, gave simple lessons to the poor Garib Kaur in enriching her home and raising her high caste husband from the humiliating status of a vendor of chickpeas. The author in the process revealed both the low status accorded to women's work, so that a woman who performed all the household chores could still be called worthless, as well as the popular feeling that women were the consumers of the hard earned money of men, scaling down their entitlement to food and other resources of the household. What also emerged was the

[68] *Sansar Par Hi Narak Surag,* p. 12.
[6<3] *Ghar Vich Surag,* p. 20. [m] *Garib Kaur.*

new puritanical frowning upon what came to be seen as women's frills and indulgences, which included a household's relations with its low caste senators as well as with others tied to the jajmani system. Not only was a woman asked to take over the performance of labour earlier rendered by others, but the prosperity of the household was made contingent upon women's acceptance of the same. Thus the Bebe calculated that out of the yearly income of Rs. 125 of her husband, Garib Kaur spent Rs. 40 on foreign cloth for herself, and Rs. 5 on its tailoring. She spent Rs. 10 on the Bahmani's *handa* (cooked food given to a Brahman woman responsible for informing women of various household rites and festive days), Rs. 52 on other laagis, so about Rs. 70 on maintaining jajmani relations. The major expense of even a precariously positioned household was shown to be the extravagance of the woman on herself, and on maintaining certain jajmani relations! She was further shown to spend Rs. 5 a month on food, 'rightly' feeding her husband and son first, but was left with a paltry 3 paise to feed herself, so no wonder that she went hungry often. However awry his calculations, the message of the author was dearly that - she could save by cutting out her expenses as well as severing relations with other castes. The Bebe also encouraged Garib Kaur to take up useful work in her 'spare' time, like making a *dupatta* for a neighbour which she could then exchange for some butter. If women so economized, the author spoke through the voice of the Bebe, then the household, *biradari*, community and the nation would all prosper.

A capable wife was also one who managed household budgets as she was taught to do in the ever increasing *kanya* or girls' schools. In the pamphlet *Istri Bharta*, the ideal wife's education is praised by her husband, for she was able to keep accounts of all the household expenditures in detail because she had been taught to do so.[71] What is more, a woman was to perform all this labour with a sense of duty, happily and without a frown, and not expect a word of appreciation in return (the wife in *Istri Bharta* says it is sin for a woman to hear her own praise).

The reformist literature was matter-of-fact about the increasing burden of women and sanguine about its ability to extract it. Speaking about the abundance of chores a woman has to perform after her marriage, and that too in a relatively unsympathetic environment, Mohan Singh Vaid advised parents to start training girls in these matters from a young age.[72] Girlhood was hardly meant for fun and games, and Agya Kaur, the heroine

[71]*Istri Bharta*, p. 23.

[72]Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, *Grahi Sikhya* (Amritsar, 1910), p. 38.

of *Agyakar*, *The Obedient One*, is conscious of it when she teaches her daughter all household tasks from a young age.[73] Again, in *Grihastha Nirbah*, meant as a guide to household duties, Vaid emphasizes how hard *(bhari*, literally heavy) the tasks of running a house were, and the need to train girls properly in them.[74]

Unlike the white memsahib in India, whose house management duty lay in primarily supervising the servants,[75] the reformers exhorted women to learn to do all household chores 'with their own hands' *[apni hathi)*. Women were told in particular to cook and serve on their own and not leave this work in the hands of servants. Vaid considered feeding the family as one of the most important duties of a woman, which every woman, whether rich or poor, educated or illiterate, ought to perform with pleasure.[76] The insistence was for women 'to work with their own hands'[77] and not think of labouring at home or the performance of household drudgery below their dignity. The importune demand for labouring with one's own hands tied together notions of housewifely work, prosperity and achievement of a middle class status. It kept women in the house, away from interaction with other castes, and though it did bind women to menial tasks it elevated the caste status of the family by allowing a separation from low castes.

The idea of cleanliness as a feature of middle class life further marked the class apart from the 'dirty', insanitary and unhygienic homes of the low castes. In the pamphlet *Ghar Suar* or *Reforming the Home*, the reforming male underlines to the women the importance of keeping the home, kitchen, clothes, children and their own selves clean, by telling them of the spread of disease through germs which flourished in dirt.[78] The requirement was for women to be more diligent in accomplishing the increasing load of their household tasks. They were thus told never to be lazy. In fact, some of the beliefs of women were now condemned as amounting to lethargy, or worse self-indulgence, and women were told to give up such practices. In *Ghar Suar*, the to-be-reformed Jai Kaur's objections to sweeping the house in the morning for fear of snakes being around, or bathing later in the day with the sun being a witness to the

[n]*Agyakar* (Amritsar, 1911), p. 16.

[74]*Grihastha Nirbah*, p. 6.

[75]F.A. Steel & G. Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (London, 1898, 3rd ed.). The subtitle of the book began—'Giving the Duties of Mistress and Servants ...'

[76]*Grihastha Nirbah*, pp. 72-4. [77]ibid. [7R]*Ghar Suar* (Amritsar, n.d.).

bath, are swept aside by the reforming Amar Singh as mere excuses invented by women for their comfort.[79]

Women were to be initiated into proper time management, so that they would be able to complete all of the considerable work in the house efficiently. In addition, a regulation of their hours, leaving little free time, meant a most effective way of disciplining them. Navinchandra Rai went to the extent of drawing out a time-table for women and girls, which ought to be generally followed. Of the twenty-four hours, he told girls, four should be spent in study, four in handicrafts such as sewing and embroidering, six hours were meant for sleeping, two for bathing and eating, and eight to be spent with friends and playing, the latter being very important to develop their bodies. The chart that he drew out for married women included two hours for bathing and praying, four for cooking and doing other kitchen work, three hours to be spent on the general cleanliness of the house in addition to making preservatives, pickles etc., two hours on discussion on knowledgeable things, two for handicrafts, four hours were kept to visit friends and relatives, and those with sons were meant to use these hours teaching them, and eight were meant for sleeping and resting.[80]

While few went to the lengths of Rai to account for every hour of women's time, most reformers wrote enough to ensure a steady pace of work for women at home. Agya Kaur of the tract *Agyakar*, for example, has little time to spend with neighbours, for she remained busy with household chores, as her husband wished her to be, despite having to care only for the two of them.[81] The time spent in the company of friends and neighbours was to be increasingly regulated. Sukhwant Kaur, the good daughter-in-law of *Sansar Par Hi Narak Surag*, spends limited time with neighbours and that too to give them lessons in the essential learning for women,[82] while the protagonists in other stories use afternoons to discuss religious matters.[83] Almost all reformers spoke against Ia2y women who spent many hours sleeping. Women were told that the woman who deserved the epithet of a lakshmi was one who 'gives up laziness and wakes before the sun rises and thinks of cleaning the house after purifying her body.'[84] The ideal was:

[79]ibid., p. 32, & p. 49.
[80]*Lakshmi Saraswati Satnvad*, pp. 16-17.
[81]*Agyakar*, pp. 4-5.
[82]*Sansar Par Hi Narak* p. 15.
[83]For example in *Char Vich Surag* or *lstri Bharta.*
[84]'Lacchmi Kaun Hai', *Bhujangan Patr*, December, (1917), p. 6.

I
Wake up before sun rise and sleep late Never get into the habit of sleeping in the afternoon Do not let your body be diseased with laziness Make home a heaven, daughter.[85]

Though using servants was not completely ruled out, dependence on servants was viewed as incompatible with the objective of economically running the household. Therefore, reformers also wrote about the manner in which servants had to be treated, discouraging both a familiarity with them, as well as too much dependence on them. In an article on how to treat servants in *Panchal Pandita* the writer warns women to make sure they know their place in the family. Jokes should not be shared with them, while they ought to be regularly scolded to discourage familiarity with the family.[86] In *Ghar Suar,* the woman of the house is asked to keep the sweeper outside the house while doing most of the cleaning inside the house on her own.[87] Vaid advised his daughter Satwant Kaur to treat the servants with kindness yet never to let them forget their place in the house.

As is evident now, there were diverse compulsions at work on the person of the pativrata daughter-in-law, making her the lynch-pin through which a high caste family hoped to succeed in its quest for social and economic advancement. Such a situation encouraged looking at the marriage of a son as a means to acquire economic wherewithal. I have already discussed examples of increasing demands from a girl's natal family. Though big dowries could provide a measure of security to the woman, the reformers were at the same time careful to enunciate that these did not mean a gain in the power of the new wife/nunh in relation to her marital family. The unpalatable possibility of such an occurrence was envisaged in the pamphlet *Daaj* or *Dourry.*[&8] The well-educated Khatri boy from an established family of Gujranwala was interested in marrying an educated girl from an 'ordinary' family. However, his parents were determined to marry him into a rich family where the girl would bring a large dowry. The parents, however, end up regretting their choice. For being a rich man's daughter, the bride, Vilas Devi, was given to a hedonistic lifestyle, as her name suggested. She was the opposite of a pativrata woman. She wanted to control her husband and have a mother-in-law who followed

[85] *Choti Nunh,* p. 85.
[86] 'Sevakon Se Bartav', *PP,* 5:7, May, (1902), pp. 8-9.
[87] *CharSuar,* p. 32.
[S8] *Daaj* (Amritsar, 1930).

her dictates. She was a spendthrift who did no work at home and did not respect elders. She did not hesitate to go against the wishes of her husband, and concomitantly made home a living hell for him. The moral of the story, in other words, was that one should not many a rich man's daughter if one wanted a girl to be respectful of and committed to the principle of pativrata. This it seems was only possible if the bride felt emotionally, materially and financially insecure, despite the provision of a 'legitimate' dowry, as this tract in fact had argued for.[89]

A corollary to the development of the notion of the pativrata was the underlining of the temporary nature of a girl's bonding with her natal family, which especially made sense if large dowries were not to translate into the growth of the influence of a girl's family in her marital household. As discussed in the pamphlet *Daaj,* a girl proud of her natal family, or one who was very close to them, was likely to prove to be a bad wife. Any interference of a girl's parents in the welfare of their daughter was seen in a negative light, as diluting the idea of a pativrata. In the story *Kalhini Deurani,* the quarrelsome younger daughter-in-law is shown to learn her vicious ways under the influence of her natal relatives.[90] Similarly in *Nunh Sas Da Sambad,* the old lady's grandson is shown to have picked up all his bad habits because he spent his formative years with his mother's family.[91] Parents who taught their daughter from the beginning the limits of their own availability to her were the ones who taught well.

The ideal daughter-in-law Sukhwant Kaur of the pamphlet *Sansar Par Hi Narak Surag* learnt the lesson of treating her marital home as her own, rather than her natal home, from her father.[92] When she had newly arrived at her in-laws' place, she told her neighbours, whom she was teaching a lesson in right womanly conduct, that she had felt very homesick and therefore had written a number of letters to her parents. It was then that her father told her to stop writing so often, and to understand that she had to regard her in-laws as her parents, and their home as her own. Vaid, while sending off his daughter Satwant Kaur to her marital home made explicit her transitory relations with her parents. Here, there seems to be an actual withdrawal of parental support for the girl. He told his daughter that she ought not to visit them for more than four days at a stretch, nor fight with anyone in her new family and think of taking refuge with her parents:

[85]See the discussion of this tract in Ch. 2.
[90]*Kalhini Deurani.*
[91]*Nunh Sas Da Sambad.*
^*Sansar Par Hi Narak,* pp. 14-15.

Sauhre lair na peke aain
Pita bharaat tere rakhan naahin.

Do not fight with your in-laws and come to your parents
Your father or brothers will not keep you.[93]

One Nihal Singh Kairon was equally tough with his **daughter Milap** Kaur at the same juncture in her life:

If you are especially praised by your in-laws, Do not wait run and tell us
If contrary to this you earn a bad name, Go far away and do not come near us.[94]

Along with the uncertain support of the natal family, which underlined the precarious existence of a pativrata in her marital family, her vulnerability was further enhanced by attacking a woman's control over the jewellery, questioning the desirability to acquire it in the first place. One of the most aggressive and systematic campaigns of the reformers was directed against women wearing and buying jewels. Wearing of jewellery was projected as unhealthy as it obstructed the efficient functioning of the body. These were the 'scientific' objections raised by Lala Devraj of KMV and echoed by Harnam Kaur of SKM, the latter also trying to show that wearing jewellery was against the dictates of Sikh religion and that propaganda against it should be on the agenda of Sikh reformers and not those of 'other' religions.[95] While nose rings and studs made it difficult to breathe normally, argued the Lala, heavy earrings turned the ears. Heavy jewellery elsewhere on the person of a woman made free movement difficult, making it impossible for women to exercise. Other reformers spoke against it, proffering women's intrinsic stupidity as the reason which allowed others to fool them easily and dupe them of their jewels, leading to financial ruin.[96]

Indeed, the perceived drain on the man's resources was one of the most important reasons given against buying jewels. This was portrayed in a story in *Panchal Pandita.* Wanting to emulate her neighbours, a woman insists that her husband buy her a necklace. All his reasoning has no chance of success against her determination to acquire it. The husband

[93]*Sauhre Turdi Dhi,* p. 30.

[94]Nihal Singh Kairon, 'Uttam Daaj', *Bhujangan Pair,* Sept., (1919), p. 32.

[95]'Striyon Ka Aabhushan', p. 10; Harnam Kaur quoted Lala Devraj to show how the Samajis were propagating the essential principles of Sikh religion. Harnam Kaur, 'Ik Singhniji Da Patr', *Khalsa Samachar,* 6 May (1901), pp. 7-8.

[96]This reason was offered by Pandit Shraddha Ram of Phillour, a Sanatanist reformer. See his *Bhagyavati,* (Banares, 1890), p. 1.

gets into debt to appease his wife, and from that day onwards his health is shown to deteriorate as he contemplates his financial ruin. The wife's (inevitable) losing of the precious ornament worsens his condition.[97] The moral of the story was quite clear. A woman who instead of economizing was responsible for material and physical destruction of a man was an immoral woman. Meanwhile the reformers organized themselves against the wearing of jewellery. Some Sikh reformers organized a *Gahne Nashak Sabha* in Kairon[98] to carry systematic propaganda against women's wearing of ornaments, while the *Khalsa Diwan* of Shahpur passed a *gurmata* or a religious dictat forbidding Sikh parents from allowing the piercing of their daughter's ears and noses for wearing of jewellery.[99]

The Making of the Pativrata: Education a Double-Edged Weapon

How were women to be trained to submit to the exigent and contradictory demands of being a pativrata? A few formal years of disciplined schooling for girls, as the propaganda for education spread, increasingly seemed to the reformers the best possible way to create the perfect pativrata women. Yet education remained a highly contentious issue within the upper caste society, its enabling potential feared, however closely schooling was supervised and syllabi circumscribed by making women adhere to their iconic roles.

The juxtaposition of various fears of the high caste orthodox in relation to education are visible in the cheaply produced titillating novel of Bhai Sundar Singh called *Navin Samajik Istri Sikhya* [10°] or the *New Social Education of Women.* Sundar Singh took the readers with him on a journey of sexual escapades of the heroine Sukhdai. Sukhdai, as the name of the novel suggests, represented the educated woman of the modern times. This was a period marked by overturning of caste hierarchies and a loss of control over women. Thus Pandit Andhadhund (literally, one who acts blindly and rashly), father of Sukhdai, could pose to be a Brahman, though belonging to the lowly *Jhinvar* or water-carriers' caste. This was possible in the city of Lahore, the typical modern city, which effaced the distinctive traits of social classes, and coloured them alike in the overwhelming whirlpool of its life driven by new economic impulses. Having given up his inherited caste, a feat achieved according to Singh

[97]'Aabhushanon Se Haniyan', *PP,* 14:11, Sept., (1911), pp. 17-23.
">[8]Bhujangan Patr, Feb., (1919).
"'Istriyan Nun Uchi Vidya', *PB,* Nov., (1917), pp. 17-18. [100]Bhai Sundar Singh, *Navin Samajik Istri Sikhya* (Amritsar, 1912).

by adopting the dubious 'reforms' of the Arya Samaj, Pt. Andhadhund ended up losing control over his daughter (apparently the right lesson for the Pandit's wrong conduct), by once again toeing the 'liberal' line adopted by the Arya Samaj in relation to women, which included at least theoretically, encouraging educated girls to choose their own mates, and exchanging diaries and photographs of the prospective groom and bride among their guardians.[101]

Worse still for the caste society, education was dangerous, as it promoted the extension of women's sphere outside the home, even though girls schools were to imitate the home-like surveillance, leading to a possible entry of women in the public/colonial world proper.[102] That this could make women as subjected to colonial humiliation as men, in other words take away from men their own arena of domination, led to a paranoid rejection of girls education by many. 'Were women to perform service *(naukri)V* was the persistent question that was asked, a signifier of not only women's potential economic independence from men, but also of the making of the colonized victim that the idiom of service connoted to middle class men, as also the jeopardizing the multiple investments made in the home.[103] No wonder an educated woman was often described as westernized, sexually aggressive, and rejecting domestic drudgery, all symbolic of either the thwarting of patriarchal hegemony, or outside its sphere of control. At the same time 'schooling' presented itself as the only way to suppress women's unruly culture and create the ideal women of the family.

Girls schools were first established in Punjab by the colonial government, but they were unable to attract high caste girls. Though an Educational Durbar held in Lahore in 1863 did produce some result in this direction—for example Sarin Khatris organized a school for forty of their girls, Baba Khem Chand Bedi opened girls schools in Jullundur and Rawalpindi—these measures represented nothing more than mere tokenism.[104] A fear that schools were used as excuses to convert easily persuaded girls to Christianity acted against high castes sending their

[101]Saraswati, *Light of Thith,* p. 105.

[102]For a contrary view see Chatterjee, The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', where he has argued that once women imbibed the symbology of nationalism on their person, they could unproblematically enter the public domain. The reformist opinion in Punjab, at least, suggests the contrary.

[103]This rhetorical question appeared repeatedly in reformist writings justifying education of girls, as a persistent fear that had to be alleviated. An instance of it is in Pandit Dharam Dev, *Istri Sudhar-Part 1,* (Ferozepur, 1906).

[m]*Report on Popular Education in the Punjab and its Dependencies-1863-4* (Lahore, 1864), pp. 24, 57-9.

daughters to them. Rumours were afloat in the 1860s that women converts were required to supply girls for marriage to native converts, or that the Europeans required women to art as *ayahs* for their children, making aversion to these schools even greater.[105] Another factor was that the government itself gave low priority to schools for girls, expending little on them, and keeping the educational needs of girls secondary to those of the boys. According to Article 455 of the Punjab Education Code, no primary school for girls could be established unless a flourishing one existed for boys, a clause that was done away with only around 1906.[106] As a result it was mostly low caste/dass girls who attended government schools, attracted by little monetary gifts made to them, a further reason for upper classes to reject these schools.[107] The government therefore commended the efforts of the missionaries to educate girls.[108]

Towards the last decades of the nineteenth century, however, the Punjabi elite wrested the initiative from the government and took upon itself to encourage the education of upper caste girls. The 1890s saw the establishment of the Kanya Mahavidyalaya of the Arya Samaj in Jullundur, with the close personal involvement of Lala Devraj; the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya at Ferozepur under the guidance of Bhai Takht Singh and his wife Harnam Kaur (after her death his second wife Agya Kaur remained equally involved in its affairs), who initially owed allegiance to the Singh Sabha but soon broke free of its control; and the Dev Samaj Girls High School also at Ferozepur, under the leadership of Gurmukh Singh,[109] among numerous other primary schools that were established all over the province. The massive involvement of the local notables in various districts in the education of girls becomes apparent from this passage:

... Sardar Kalyan Singh of Dinga opened a Girls School in his native town, and a mixed indigenous school in one of his villages. ... A scholarship for Girls Schools in the Mianwali District was founded by Lala Sukh Dayal, B.A., and

[105]ibid., p. 62.

[106]77ie *Quinquennium Report on Public Instruction in Punjab and its Dependencies 1906-7* (Lahore, 1907), p. 44.

[107]See 'Daughters of Aryavarta'. The Report on Public Instruction in the year 1894-95 noted that now some girls from Tjetter classes' had begun to attend schools.

[108]The importance that the government put to Zenana teaching comes through in the file—*Question of Female Education*—Home/Education-44-B, Sept. 1902. (NAI) Though not considered as aided schools, the government made it dear that it would consider favourably any demand of grant for the purpose if recommended by a Municipality or a District Board.

[109]Dev Samaj was also a reformist organization started by the maverick Swami Satyanand Agnihotri. For a brief sketch of this Samaj see, Jones, *Arya Dharm*, p. 335.

one Bhagat Govind Ram is reported to have bequeathed his property for the construction of a building for the Putri Pathshala in Multan city. The Multan Branch of the National Association, London, has founded scholarships tenable in the local Municipal Board Girls School. ...[no]

There were many reasons for this change of attitude. One important reason that led the elite to open schools of its own was, as mentioned, the fear that government or missionary schools would convert their impressionable girls to Christianity. Of course, many sensational conversions among upper caste boys did not deter their parents from sending them to such schools, though it did lead to the opening of schools for boys run by bodies like the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha. In a period when ambiguity over a religious or caste identity was seen to be dangerous, it was viewed as essential to train women in their religion.

The anxiety related to women's identity, for instance, is visible in an article in a noteworthy Sikh newspaper edited by Bhai Vir Singh, *Khaba Samachar*. Here, a good 'Sikh' girl married off to a Hindu man of high caste protests against this match to her mother. She in particular protests against her husband's statement that women have no religious identity of their own, and acquire that of their husband's. The author through this article was seeking to underline the importance of carving out a sharp religious identity for women.[111] The story related to the opening of KMV also shows the anxiety that educating girls in missionary schools evoked among parents. It was when the elder daughter of Munshi Ram, Vedakumari, came home singing 'Christ is the Prophet. No price is required to mention his name. Christ is my anchor...' that her father, an Arya Samaji, felt the urgent need to establish girls schools of their own. This was later accomplished with the help of his brother-in-law Lala Devraj.[112]

Education for girls was important, however, to instruct them in lessons which fitted them for the exacting task of being a pativrata wife. The ideal of Hindu womanhood as Mr Gurmukh Singh, Principal of the Dev Samaj Girls High School, described at the Hindu Conference held at Ferozepur in December 1914 was that such a woman in different stages of her life:

[no]*Report on Public Instruction in the Punjab and its Dependencies 1905-6* (Lahore, 1906), p. 5.

[111]"Anath Dhian Upar Zulm', *Khalsa Samachar*, 4 March, (1903), pp. 3-4.

[112]Jambunathan, *Swami Shraddhanand*, pp. 100-01. The anxiety of Munshi Ram extended to his wife as well. He also mentioned how a lady who came to teach his wife Hindi was bought over by the missionaries, who began 'inducing' girls to attend the Christian school.

... has to keep the house neat and clean, to be a dutiful daughter and sister, to please her husband when he is tired and worried, treat him with a song and instrumental music at times, nurse and cheer him up when ill, comfort, console and counsel him in his difficulties and struggle of life, to cook his meals and practise household economy, to attend to his relatives and friends, to give birth to and bring up children, to act the ministering angel in his misfortunes and to heighten his joys and lessen his sorrows.[113]

Such a statement shows that the ideal of a Hindu woman as described by Gurmukh Singh, that was being taught to Punjabi girls in government schools through texts like the *Sughar Bibi* was fairly close to that of the Victorian woman as the ministering angel of the house plus an efficient housekeeper.[114] However, despite covering much common ground in the kind of education given in government or reformist schools, the need for the latter schools was felt because of the perceived inadequacies of the former.[n 5] For example, Vaid while drawing attention to the importance of educating girls warned—%Ve do not want women to be suited-booted memsahibs.'[116] Becoming a westernized memsahib meant women becoming hopeless at routine chores of the household that Vaid had at one instance described as 'bhari'. In the KTS' tract *Sushila,* the newly married girl, having studied in a missionary school, regrets not being taught to cook, and the author mocks her fancy education by proposing that may be she should serve knitted socks for dinner, emphasizing that such schools provided a wholly wasteful education. He ridicules the missionary education given by white women as useless, for women who apparently wilted in the sun were hardly the best candidates for teaching how to cook before a hot fire.[n 7] Thus our heroine in *Agyakar* is especially careful with her daughter's education:

[lu]*The Punjab Journal,* 1: 1, April (1915), p. 4.

[U4]*Sughar Bibi Da Pahila Bhag* or *Good Housemother 1* (Lahore, 1906). The writer of this text book was probably F.A. Steel, the author of a number of novels set in India, and an avid collector of folktales of Punjab along with Capt, R.C. TempJe. Her husband was a bureaucrat in the Punjab Government, and she inspected schools for a time. Mrs Steel as the author of Sughar Bibi or Biwi is mentioned in *Report on Public Instruction in Punjab and its Dependencies 1894-5* (Lahore, 1895), p. 66.

[115]That the colonial state approved of the kind of education imparted in various reformist schools comes out in the commendation given to schools like KMV and SKM in government reports on education and its education-related journals like *The Punjab Journal.* Through its *Text Book Committee* and *Patronage of Literature Fund* too, tacit sympathy was displayed to the enormous efforts to inculcate the pativrata religion to Punjabi women. Among the recipients of the reward set up by the last-mentioned fund were Khalsa Tract Society, Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid and Bhai Amar Singh, *The Punjab Journal,* 8:1, April, (1913), p. 23.

[116]Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, *Viah Da Marsh* (Tarn Taran, 1920).

[m]*Sushila,* p. 8.

Agya Kaur feared that being educated in schools, and after having learnt English sewing and embroidery, her daughter may give up the necessary talents of running the house, she should not begin to think that cooking, sewing clothes for the household, serving the husband with one's hands were below her dignity.... She wanted her daughter to be talented, yet patient, faithful, who read the gurbani and who must be a patibrata.[118]

Pandit Dharam Dev, an updeshak of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha explained the significance of good education for women.[119] A girl educated till the age of sixteen was not meant to do naukri, education was only meant to impart her intelligence to become a good mother and wife. Pandit Shraddha Ram of the Sanatan Dharm Sabha active in Phillour, emphasized the same aspects. According to him education not only helped girls pick up simple skills like reading and writing letters, managing household expenses, not being swindled by mercenaries etc.,[120] but also taught correct norms of behaviour which would fit them for their future role in society. That education helped women to avoid getting cheated was considered significant, and Dharam Dev showed this by giving the example of an educated woman who saved two annas from a trickster vendor of cloth, emphasizing her good financial management. Education was also meant to inculcate in women the discipline for undertaking future familial roles, including the making of a disciplined wife and a subservient daughter-in-law. Speaking through the voice of a daughter appealing for education, a poet pointed to the association between education and a good pativrata:

Hamne duje gharjana hai, jahan sakal kutumb begana hai
Sabne hamko ajmana hai, vahan begunron ka moan nahin
Vidya sampan hai jo nari, vohi kant ki hai agyakari Lagti hai
sab ho bahu pyari, virudh devar, jeth, ninaan nahin.

We have to go to another home, where the entire family is of strangers They will all test us, and they have no use for the untalented The woman who is educated, only she is obedient to her husband She is the daughter-in-law that all like, for she is not against her brothers and sisters-in-law.[121]

In mid 1911 *Punjabi Bhain* carried an extensive article on the kind of education girls ought to be given, disagreeing with many prevailing

[ns] *Agyakar*, p. 16.
[''9] *IstriSudhar.*
[U0] *Bhagvavati.*
[i21] *Putri Di Appeal* **(Amritsar, 1916), p. 5.**

government practices regarding the school curriculum.[122] It argued that though till the primary level girls did have an easier syllabi than the boys, this difference vanished as they reached the middle level, and girls had to tackle disciplines such as algebra and geometry, which had no relevance in women's life. It rested its case on two basic arguments. First, that women were physically weak and therefore required a less burdensome course; and second, that they had to be made fit for taking on the future responsibilities of being a wife and a mother. While this line of reasoning sounds similar to that which some of its contemporaries in the West were using to debar women from higher education, and may well have been picked up from current western debates, the special needs of Punjabi women were spelled out. Thus religious and social education had to be imparted. Important subjects of study for women were of course to be stressed, e.g., cooking, managing the house and bringing up children. But women had to be told especially about the pativrata religion and the duties it entailed because, as the author put it, 'pativrat religion in our country is considered the most important and pure jewel of a woman.'[123] Hard work and learning to work with one's hands was another significant aspect of a woman's duties as spelt out earlier, and that it came habitually to women had to be ensured (the contradiction between physical weakness and hard labour having escaped the author):

... a number of essential things have to be accomplished with one's own hands, without doing these tasks with one's hands one can not learn, and unless one is not put into the habit of doing them, one does not feel like tackling them when one grows older.[124]

It was all the more important to give attention to these things as women in India, the author pointed out, studied for a comparatively shorter period, for parents sent them to schools later than boys, and they married younger as well. While boys mostly continued their studies after marriage, it was not possible for girls, because of the disapproval of in-laws, and duties in the house. The author was not critical of such a state of things, but merely stated them as a matter of fact. Thus these few years had to be spent judiciously:

... education of such a kind should not be imparted that it would tear women away from household work, turning them dandies and useless. Nor should it

[122]'Path Vidhi Istri **Vidya** Lai', *PB,* April-May-June (1911).
[123]ibid., p. 9. [124]ibid., p. 7.

make them lazy, with a dislike for chores of the house, or instil in them a sense of arrogance. Rather, it should make them take initiative, be energetic, and help become wives and mothers full of love. ...[125]

And the SKM seemed to be doing this task rather well. They were endorsed for a job well done from none other than their rivals in the field of reform and education, the Arya Samajis. Some time in early 1910, a few stalwarts of the Arya Samaj visited the SKM in Ferozepur. They were full of praise for what they saw there, and published their appreciation of it in their newspaper *Prakash.* They were impressed with the cleanliness of the institution and the fact that the girls cooked for them and served them. They reported:

... we were surprised to find that girls were not being taught to become memsahibs there but efforts were being made to make them good housewives ... humility and a desire to serve was ground fine and put into them, and arrogance does not come close to them.[126]

Education was thus only to be instrumental in reiterating traditional roles of women, while helping them cope with the new demands within these roles. Pandit Dharam Dev emphasized this by exhorting parents to educate their daughters 'like' sons till the age of sixteen, and thereafter marry them in a respectable way:

Kaniya parrau put vat, sikhiya karo sambhal
Deo var vidvan nun, sahit dhan ar maal.

Educate your daughters like sons, teach them with care Marry them to the learned, along with riches and wealth.[127]

Dharam Dev paradoxically ended up showing how unlike that of the sons the daughters education was expected to be. Not only was girls' schooling to be halted peremptorily when they turned sixteen, but they were to be instantly married of, while boys pursued higher education and professions. The girls were also to be married off with a handsome dowry, a drain on parental wealth which men were expected to recompense through their own marriages. By juxtaposing education and dowry, Dev pointed to how unattractive educating girls actually was for parents as

[125]ibid., p. 9.
[126]'Panth Pyara Ashram Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya Ferozepur Te Arya Samaj Da Manya-Danya Akhbar Prakash', *PB,* June & July, (1910), pp. 4-5. [127]*htri Sudhar,* p. 9.

it increased their expenditure on her, a prejudice that reformers had to fight against. Mohan Singh Vaid scolded parents for treating sons as the 'wealth of homes' and daughters as 'rubbish of other homes' and encouraged them to educate girls.[128] Yet, as the ideal of an educated and disciplined pativrata gained acceptance, education itself became an essential quality that enhanced a daughter's marriageability. As J.A. Richey, the Director of Public Instruction in Punjab in the year 1916-17 reported, 'Professional men now wish to marry their sons to educated girls who can in a real sense be companions and helpmates; therefore education is beginning to be valued by parents as improving the marriage prospects of their daughters.'[129]

As the demand for churning out perfect pativratas grew, so some measure of high caste girls' education became established. However, by the second decade of the twentieth century, the new controversy on education focused on whether or not higher education was required for women, and for what purposes were women to be fitted if they were to be its beneficiaries. It may be argued that for the well established schools like the KMV or the SKM, the logic of running these institutions required them to respond with enthusiasm to new opportunities for higher education (as also including English in the syllabi for girls) that were being discussed. KMV, for example, approved of the idea of an independent women's university mooted by some intellectuals of Punjab. It proposed Jullundur as the right place for such a university, and not Lahore, as Jullundur was the best known centre for girls education in Punjab.[130] Though few of the supporters of higher education for women expected or wanted women to step out of their ideal roles of a wife and a mother, the logic of their arguments was impregnated with what the more orthodox would see as the approaching danger. The new debate, on the one hand, took up the issue of women's rights—a novelty when being a pativrata meant training only in one's duties. On the other, it widened the area of women's roles, even though the new ones came attached with, and packaged in, traditional garbs. Significantly, the new debate, though it still had a few women participants in Punjab, gave space to a burgeoning voice of dissent from among women themselves.

In April 1917 one Tek Singh of SKM wrote an article endorsing the idea of higher education for women.[131] He ridiculed the arguments put forward by its opponents. He said that on the one hand self appointed

[128] *Sade Gharan Di Dasha*, p. 12.

[129] *Report on the Progress of Education in the Punjab During the Quinquennium Ending 1916-7*, p. 42.

[130] Lajjawati, 'Punjab Aur Striyon Ka Bhavi Vishvavidyalaya', *Bharti*, Dec, (1920).

[131] Tek Singh, 'Istriyan Nun Kis Prakar Di Vidya Di Lorr Hai', *PB*, April, (1917).

leaders of society often stated that the state of a nation's civilization could be measured by looking at the progress its women had made. On the other, the same people produced scientific data to prove higher education of women was not feasible because they were meant to have smaller brains. Injecting humour in his argument, Singh stated that charity ought to be given to the have-nots, and that the smaller brains of women should be compensated with more education for them. Singh, of course, made it clear that he did not envisage women to be given the same education as men. Rather, he categorically pointed to the need of a different course for women till their masters level. His case for higher education for women rested on impressing upon his readers the need for longer years of formal education for women to become adept in all the disciplines they were meant to, i.e., domestic economy, cooking, handicrafts and the like. He also pointed to the importance of learning English for acquiring proper reading material in these disciplines, and sought to demolish the image of an English-speaking woman as fashionable and materialistic. He did not try to break the parameters of the ideal roles of women inside the house; yet, despite the logic of his own arguments, a significant opening was made. He spoke of the 'medical' and the 'educational' fields being open to women, for treatment of women required female doctors, while women, because they were mothers who taught their own children, , would make better teachers. Here were the seeds of change for women which could overturn the well worked out constraints imposed on their lives.

Shamsher Singh Khanjar also wrote in favour of higher education for girls to fit them better for the roles earmarked for them. Like Singh, he too disputed the view that education made women less willing to bend to patriarchal norms. Education, in fact, was meant to equip women better in the tasks set out for them. At the same time Khanjar hit out against those men who did not wish to have educated wives. According to him they were selfish, and were scared of women who could demand their rights as wives or *ardhangis* (literally half the body of their husbands). They would rather have women who could not question them, and who were too busy doing menial household chores.[132] Thus the question of the rights of women was brought to the fore, even if its scope was circumscribed by the limitations imposed by their set roles.

Rights of women and their denial by the patriarchal society was brought into sharp focus by a small article that accompanied Khanjar's piece. While analysing the reasons behind women's mental and physical weakness, Santokh Singh Kavi put his finger on the manner in which

[132]**Shamsher** Singh Khanjar, 'Istrian Nun Uchi Vidya', *PB,* Oct., (1917).

daughters and sons were brought up in Punjabi society. He felt girls from the very beginning were told by their parents that their rights were much fewer than those of boys, thereby putting strain on them and inhibiting their development. At the same time boys too grew up thinking their rights to be more than those of their sisters. Kavi appealed to parents to give both girls and boys equal opportunities in life, and then they would realize that girls could do as well as boys in every respect.[133]

Early in 1920 *Punjabi Bhain* carried the important speech made by the Arya Samaj leader Lala Lajpat Rai in the annual function of KMV in Jullundur.[134] His speech was a revelation on how far this Arya leader had come from his position of opposing education of girls altogether. Here he recommended the immense significance of higher education for women so that they grew into responsible citizens of the country. Though he made liberal use of the established image of the Indian woman whose capacity for suffering, sacrifice and warmth he maintained were legendary, he nevertheless broke free of a number of stereotypes as well. For him the Indian woman now had to recuperate her lost qualities and also learn from her western counterpart. He especially cited the war years as ones which compelled women in Europe to come out of their homes and see to the business of the world, while men were away fighting.[135] The nationalist movement in India, according to Lajpat Rai, created a similar situation. While men ought to fulfil their duty to the nation and fill up the jails, women must acquire confidence and independence to fill their shoes. This was a significant statement, even though Rai maintained that women and men were neither superior or inferior to each other, rather that they were different, expected to take on different duties in life.

The revolutionary potential apparent in Rai's speech was, in fact, picked up and disapproved of by the editor of *Punjabi Bhain.* While the case made for higher education of women was commended by the editor, the thought of women's 'independence' was unpalatable. This was seen as a reason for the breaking of families, and overturning of gender

[133]Santokh Singh Kavi, 'Sikh Istri Sikhya', *PB,* Oct., (1917).

[134]LaIa Lajpat Rai, 'lstriyan Di Sutantarta Bina Des Di Sutantarta Asambhav Hai', *PB,* Feb., (1920). For a discussion on the changing roles for women and their education as envisaged by Lajpat Rai see Anshu Malhotra, 'Every Woman is a Mother in the Embryo-Lala Lajpat Rai and the Womanhood of India', *Social Scientist,* 22: 1 & 2. Jan.-Feb., (1994), pp. 40-63. Also Kumari Lajjawati Ka Interview-24.11.81. (NMML) for important references from this speech. Lajjawati was a product of KMV and remained its principal for a number of years.

[135]What the war did for women of Europe was an inspiration to a number of supporters of women's rights in Punjab. Both *Panchal Pandita* and later *Bharti* of the KMV carried snippets of achievements of women in these years regularly.

hierarchies. The editor reiterated that at least a Sikh woman must remain a pativrata looking up to her husband as her god or *'sir da sain'*. The husband, in his turn, will regard her as his limb.

The potential for unseating an ideology was emerging from the dynamics of trying to maintain it. As men fretted over women's latent capabilities as well as likely excesses, some women began to seize the initiative from men. Women's hesitant, often fractured voices, point to both the travails of becoming a pativrata as well as the simmering fury against those who sought to make them so. The dinning into them of the incessant obligations their supposedly elevated roles in society required them to accept made many take up the issue of their suppressed rights.

Fragmentary, but Powerful Voices

The idea in this final section, where I discuss some tentative, hesitant efforts of women to demystify the mythologization of the idea of pativrata as it came to be constituted by the end of the nineteenth century, is not to ridicule or render 'unreal' the experiences of women who lived within and according to the precepts of a pativrata. Rather the notion of ideology has been taken such that it is seen to insert itself in the routine of everyday life However, if ideology also functions to retain, sustain, mystify, aggrandize and systematize power, the beginning of its demystification is also the genesis of the process of redistribution of power.

It is in this context the apparent paradox of the title of this section should be read. Though cautious, often timid, and mostly diffident, women who began to question the idea of the pativrata, or the various constituents of the idea, also had powerful voices that not only disrupted the given organization of power, but also gave support to those who envisaged gender relations afresh. Yet their speech was also fragmentary for a number of reasons. The two articles that I discuss in some detail below formed a part of the plethora of writing that was meant actively to propagate the chosen ideology in its most sophisticated form to generations of girls and women. In that sense these articles, fragments of 'the difference of view',[136] merely struck chords of dissonance in a tide of homogenous literature unflinchingly devoted to the cause of the pativrata, so much so that their import seemed dangerously close to losing its meaning swamped as it was by the inanity of the established discourse. Women's voices also sounded fragmented. Mired as women's

[135]I take the phrase 'the difference of view' from the insightful article of Mary Jacobus of the same title in M. Jacobus (ed.), *Women Writing and Writing About Women* (London, 1979).

lives were in the terms of discourse and social intercourse set by men, their efforts at writing and speech often ended up only mimicking the voice of the dominant. This was, of course, to an extent a problem of language and established discourse, but women could, and did, use both to altered and different signification.[137] Thus doubled speech (when women seemed to be simultaneously saying and conveying separate meanings including the one in consonance with the establishment), double speak and 'duplicitousness'[138] (to be able to say something at all) were aspects of women's writing. Yet these should not deflect us from the significance of women's voices, as also from the 'reading against the grain' which these articles initiated and their feminist recuperation attempted here duplicates.

Before taking a closer look at some women's inchoate discontent with the expected attributes of a pativrata, one may mention that eulogistic accounts of exemplary pativratas constructed by men do exist, though they are not of a central concern here. Thus we know of the quietly sacrificing Shiva Devi, wife of the prominent Arya Samaji leader Munshi Ram and sister of Lala Devraj of KMV, and her willingness to transform herself in accordance to the demands of her reforming husband while carefully undertaking all the traditional duties of a wife.[139] We also have a fuller account, though limited by its agenda to create the perfect pativrata, of the life of Jewni turned Harnam Kaur, perhaps the most celebrated pativrata among the Sikh reformers.[140] Wife of BhaiTakht Singh who was honoured in his lifetime as the *ziruia shahid,* the 'living martyr',[141] she and her husband devoted their lives to the establishment and the running of SKM. Harnam Kaur was married to Takht Singh in order to make a Sikh girls school possible and to provide it with a female pedagogue. A teacher at the age often years, Harnam Kaur died at the age of twenty-four in 1907, her short life, punctuated with child-birth, devoted completely to the running

[137]On the poignant relationship of women to reading and writing, and on the reading of women's autobiographies in nineteenth century India see Tanika Sarkar. 'A Book of her Own. A Life of her Own-Autobiography of a Nineteenth Century Women Vol. XXI, Occasional Paper, NMML.

[13S]I pick up the word 'duplicitous' as partially used by S. Gubar & S. Gilbert in their discussion of the nineteenth century women writers in their book *The Madwoman in the Attic* as discussed by Toril Moi, *Sexual Textual Politics* (London, 1995, first published 1988).

[u9]*Swami Shraddhanand.*

[140]Karam Singh, *Sritnati Bibi Hamam Kaur* (n.p., 1907).

[141]Sardul Singh Caveeshar, The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala Ferozepore', in Ganda Singh (ed.), *The Singh Sabha and Other Socio-Religious Movements in the Punjab 1850-1925* (Patiala, 1984).

of the school and being a model wife to her husband. Her biographer informs us that Harnam Kaur treated her husband like her god, always obeyed him, ate after him, and dressed simply, especially after Takht Singh adopted khaddar. One aspect of her pativrata character that her biographer emphasized was her limited relation with her natal home after her marriage. He informs us that unlike other women who spent a lot of time in their parent's house, Harnam Kaur hardly ever visited them. She never went there without the permission of her husband on the rare occasion she did go to visit her mother. She met older women for sessions on Wednesdays where she repeated to them the lessons taught to girls in school on the discipline of being a pativrata. Her correspondence with some women also reveals her giving them ardent lessons in fulfilling their marital duties. No wonder Harnam Kaur came to deserve a biography; the Sikh reformers appreciating having a model of wifely virtues amongst them and praising her as such.

Yet despite the display and dissemination of pativrata qualities, at least in the account of her biographer, we nevertheless have a glimpse of how onerous Harnam Kaur may herself have found her duties. Harnam Kaur's extant correspondence with Bhai Vir Singh shows that he gave her lessons in correct behaviour with her husband and his relations, including how he and his mother should be served, asking forgiveness of the husband when in the wrong and the like, the three bhabhas earlier referred to, enshrined in an ornamental letter.[142] Harnam Kaur herself reflected deeply on these matters. On scraps of papers she wrote of the manner in which a daughter-in-law ought to serve her husband's mother, respecting her and doing her chores with a smiling face, as well as how a mother-in-law should not abuse her daughter-in-law. Harnam Kaur thus, involved as she was in the construction and implementation of the new patriarchal ideology for women, worked hard to make herself an example that others could emulate. Such conduct brought her out of anonymity and earned her the respect of the society she lived in.

However, respect and adulation for being pativratas was hardly the fate of most women, and certainly not for those who questioned the formulation of its tenets by men. Anonymity was therefore an essential condition for the author of a tract called simply A *Letter From a Sister,* to be heard at all, published as it was from the treadmill of propagandist writing of the Sikh reformers, the Khalsa Tract Society.[143] Though anonymity meant for her a relief from being indicted for making a critique

[142] *Bibi Harnam Kaur,* p. 125.
[143] /fe *Bhainji Di Chitthi* (Amritsar, n.d).

of reformers' ideal for women, it also blunted the edge of what she had to say for she remained unnamed, without active agency, hence harmless, introducing herself merely as an avid reader of KTS' tracts. Yet she hoodwinked her way to publication by at times reproducing the ideological stand of the reformers, often because she deeply imbibed the myriad aspects of the developing Sikh identity. Thus her faith in the unique privilege the Sikh religion bestowed on women remained unshaken, as did her acknowledgement of the necessity of preserving the ideal of pativrata for women. Also her high caste, middle class stance in relation to the wider social world is apparent in her hurtful accusation of men in treating their women as low as the shudras. Reverberate as her essay did with the commonplace of reformist discourse, she nevertheless was able to convey her discomfort, in fact a subdued anger, at the way men actually treated women, their unreal expectations of them, the way in which the reformist propaganda actually harmed women more than did them good, and the lack of opportunities for women to educate themselves. Thus this sister effectively used the 'language of inventive complaint and embattled anger'[144] to both 'traverse and expose'[145] the path of womanhood inscribed for women by reformers. Using reformers' language she used the 'subversive power of writing to destabilise the ground'[146] on which they stood.

Though she started her essay by reiterating the cliche of women's fall from their golden age, in which they were the recipients of learning and respect because of the rapacious darkness introduced by Turkish rule, she however quickly slipped to blaming men for making the situation of women worse by imprisoning them within homes, doubly shading their darkness. Thus men deprived women of learning, making them as low as the shudras, indeed worse than the servants—*naukar ton nakarian*—and then blamed them for being foolish and having intelligence in their feet—*khuri pichhe akal*\[147] In a similar vein she spoke of the Sikh religion of Nanak and Gobind Singh, who raised the status of women opening its portals to women as equal participants—a carefully constructed myth of the Singh Sabha reformers—but blamed men for persisting to treat women like the menial shudras and in other degraded ways in the manner

[144]Anne Stevenson writing of Sylvia Plath in "Writing as a Woman', in M. Jacobus (ed.). *Women Writing,* p. 160.

[14ri]Mary Jacobus writing of Virginia Woolf in The Difference of View', in *Women Writing,* p. 19.

[146]ibid., pp. 18-19.

[147]/fe *Bhainji Di Chitthi,* pp. 3-5.

of their Hindu and Muslim counterparts. Of course according to her, Sikh women made their situation worse by mixing with non-Sikh women, as the reformers clamorously claimed, but what was left of women's self-respect was wounded/killed by their own men *(mardan di ghaul ne mariya).*[ua]

She was critical of the reformers for making the bad situation of women worse by encouraging unreal expectations of them, and by putting the blame for all social evils, including the present condition of women, on them. She told the reformers that theirs was a masculinist point of view, by giving an analogy in the parable of a man and a tiger who come across a picture of a man killing a tiger. The tiger tells the man that had the picture been drawn by a tiger, it would have depicted a different tale. Our sister was obviously making the point that it was because men were educated and powerful that they could absolve themselves, and put all the blame of their deplorable condition on women, and that women had a different and contrary point of view to that of men. Her anger was directed at garrulous reformers who made long speeches running women down but did little to improve their situation. According to her the reformist literature of the KTS had added to the miseries of women's lives. While girls were married young and illiterate, men after having read the copious reform literature expected them to be the model pativratas spoken of in these writings. When women, because of lack of opportunities for education, could not act as they desired, they cursed their 'inadequate' wives. Women thus became targets of unkind treatment from their husbands, besides that from the various members of the affinal family. She thereby overturned the favoured myth of quarrelling daughters-in-laws and wives by apportioning blame for unhappy homes to the patriarchal families' treatment of them. She went on to claim that women bore with such a cavalier attitude because of their physical weakness, implying a general feeling of helplessness. Throughout her essay she addressed women as the oppressed—using terms like *garibnian* (poor), *anathan* (orphans), *nimaniyan* (child-like)—to locate the reasons for their apparently 'natural' humbleness and slavishness—*nimrata ate adhinta vale kudrati subhau*—in their social condition of powerlessness. Furthermore, she underlined that women too had expectations of men, inserting the unheard-of notion of women's will and self-realization, even if within the limits of a marital state. She thanked the KTS for publishing tracts like *Patibrat Dharm,* which taught women about being pativrata, but felt there was also a need for writing

[148]ibid., p. 14.

one on *Stribrat Dharm,* for men too needed to be told about their ideal behaviour. It is worth quoting her in detail on how she thought it was difficult for women to be the pativratas they were meant to be:

> Men do not think of how girls married at the ages often or eleven years, still lost in the streets playing marbles, are married off by their parents, without having been taught any sense or skill. Now having taken the four circles of marriage *(lavan)* how are these stupid girls expected to know of being patibrata or get transformed into brides with all the requisite qualities, sitting in the palanquin for a few hours they do not pass a B.A. or an M.A. that these girls who were still playing with dolls till yesterday will become a Sita or a Leelavati. Neither the parents taught them anything nor do the in-laws. Further, instead of teaching them you had such expectations of them that even King Nal would not have had of Damyanti.... Foolish they were, but you made them more so, and a little will be added by your mother and sister. ... One unwise young girl, and four-five people wanting her to do different things, who all can she please and from who all's pointing finger can she protect herself? I say it with force that if a grown-up and highly educated man were to be made a daughter-in-law by nature, he will become crazy with fear. Poor foolish women bear with all this because of their natural humble and slavish nature, had they your strength, then God knows what would have happened.[149]

Her appeal was for women to be respected as reporducers and modiers. At the same time she realized diat women had to wrest this respect from men. For her education was a panacea for women, even though women were to use it to become the good mothers and wives that men wanted them to be, and she also realized that it depended on the powerful men to grant this boon to women. To achieve this aim she used duplicitous double-speak to maximum effect. On the one hand, she tried to arouse the kindness of men by appealing to their 'superior' selves to educate the child-like women. On the other, she kindled the fear of the ruin of upper caste society by reminding them of the activities of the missionaries among women, especially widows, and the need for the indigenous patriarchy to take charge. At the same time she tried to play down the fears of men about the over-educated woman, one who will be a competitor of men rather than their subordinate. She insisted women did not need the kind of education received by men, but that it was enough for the Sikh girls to get a religious education. By championing education, the most enabling aspect of the reformist agenda for women, however limited its scope, she effectively argued for self-realization as a goal for women.

The second article that I wish to discuss here was much less ambiguous

[149]ibid., pp. 17-18.

in its attack on patriarchal structures and much more forthright in arguing a 'feminist' case for 'equal' rights of women in property.[150] The author of this editorial piece from a 1909 issue *of Punjabi Bhain,* set about explaining why women continued to wear and possess jewels despite the reformist propaganda against women's ownership of ornaments—*htri Nun Gehniyan Naal Kyon Pyar Hai* she asked rhetorically, *Why do Women Love Ornaments?*[151] Though like the sister above, the author of this piece too continued to speak in two voices simultaneously, in her case it was nothing more than a very thin veil for the radical stance she was taking. Thus she began by ostensibly taking the reformist stand against women's wearing of jewels, and she too defended the Sikh religion for granting a superior status to women in religious and social matters. Yet the thrust of her article uncovered and demolished the patriarchal agenda of keeping women subordinate. She attacked men for denying women basic rights that guaranteed them economic independence by refusing them a share in property and an independent legal status.

Though she began her article by comparing women's desire to buy jewels with men's bad habit of gambling, she quickly moved on to indict men for stealing women's jewels after ruining the home to feed their bad habit, besides employing physical violence against women to do so. This was a significant statement because in the context of her argument in this article, jewels emerge as women's only right, her only form of property as well as recourse to security in bad times. If men took this away from women as well, then women were truly left without any succour. Thus implicit in her whole argument was a friction between the sexes, inherent in the social structure whose parameters had been set by men for their own benefit. (At one stage she refers to men as belonging to a separate/ other caste—*beganijati).* What also develops concomitantly is a nascent notion of sisterhood (if only of middle class women) for at one stage she accuses men—both Hindu (here inclusive of Sikh) and Muslim—for treating women as shudras, and for confining them behind parda. Throughout her essay she employs gentle irony to refer to men as her brothers *(vir),* but brothers who wilfully used their cunning to deprive women of their rights. She implores her brothers to read through the article, not be angry, and to think and reflect on (and rectify) the unequal situation between the sexes.

Women took to wearing (investing) in ornaments, according to her,

[150]It may be mentioned in passing that Indian feminists today continue to fight this battle, for despite certain enabling provisions in the 'secular' law, women's rights have remained circumscribed within unequal and patriarchal 'personal' laws.

[151]*htri Nun Cehniyan Naal Kyon Pyar Hai, PB,* Sept.-Oct, (1909).

because men stole away from women all their rights. It was not just the present-day men who were indicted in this thievery; in fact, men today were only seeking to cloak the crime committed by their forefathers much before even the time of 'Manu Mahatama' (she thereby overturned the notion of Aryan golden age). Men achieved this objective, she postulated, by flattering the beauty of women and encouraging them to spend their time in looking good. To quote her on when and how women lost their rights:

Since the time the world became conscious to the idea that everybody should spend their life living within their rights *(adhikaran andar),* since then our brothers have blinded us with flattery *(khushamad)* and have snatched, if not all, then nearly all of our rights. ... All rights our brothers have kept, while the empty basket of praise and flattery has been our lot.[152]

The language of'natural rights' of'man' that was being employed by men to wrest 'freedom' and independence from colonial rule, and also to make a case for 'citizenship' in the emerging nation, was redeployed by our author to make a similar case for women. Only the oppressors of women here were their own men, and she tried to expose the discomforting relationship of power within the home, a refuge from worldly humiliation for men, but the very site of oppression for women. She went on to claim that though men took the opinion of women on social/familial matters *(bhaicharak mamle),* if only in name *(naam matar),* women had no right to speak on political issues. This was apparently so, and men argued as such, because only those who owned property had the right to express political opinion. And why, she went on to ask had women no property? If women were meant to be *ardhangis* of men (as the reformers reminded women endlessly), should they not also be owners of half *(adh)* of their property? But here, she pointed out, men conveniently brought in the question of legal rights, which women did not possess, and so women got no justice even in the courts of law:

When you praise us you make us even higher than god, but at the time of division (of property) our share does not figure!!! Then who, if not you are responsible for the deficiency *(uundtai)* of the law? You have not even allowed us to think when these laws were made? The husband may receive all the land, but the wife despite fighting a case may not get more than a maintenance for three months, is that not amazing![153]

•"ibid., p. 15.
[153]7stri Nun *Gehniyan,* p. 16.

Thus she hit at the core reasons for women's subjugation, mixing their lack of property rights with their inability to acquire an economic and legal status, which in turn denied them a say in social and political matters. Thus despite the hype of the praiseworthy qualities of women that men indulged in, women found it impossible to achieve individu-ation or self-realization.

Significantly, she went on to state that women were not completely stupid, and they took advantage of the system (of making a life of looking good) that men pushed them into. While men through their cunning took away women's property rights, women on the pretext of making themselves up had more and more jewels made, even if it hurt their bodies. In this gender conflict men lost their liquidity, women their legal rights! She thus defended women's more traditional right to wear and invest in jewels, even while making a case for them having legal and political rights.[154] She thereby not only problematized men's puritan reformism, but also mocked their self-serving intention which did not allow justice to women. For as she put it, when it came to the crunch, women looked to ornaments as the only resource available to them to survive, even if the husband had an income of thousands and spent recklessly. So when the reformer 'brothers' went campaigning among women against the wearing of jewels, women confronted them with the simple question—*sade hath pale hor hi hail* What else do we have in our hands? No wonder women ridiculed the Singh Sabha as *sangh safiya,* a term, one might indicate, loaded with subversive meanings including clearing the throat (of jewels?), cutting the throat, or a general practitioner of sleight of hand.

Thus the very project of disciplining women created fractures in the otherwise highly accomplished pativrata ideology, giving new spaces to women to expose some of its tyrannies. The paeans that were sung to the pativrata wife hid under their effulgence a history of suppression, conflict and manipulation. The struggle over the suppression of women's culture was one such conflict to which we now turn our attention.

[154]Another reader of *Panchal Pandita,* who introduced herself as the wife of Dwarika Prasad, also exposed the hollow arguments of the reformers against wearing jewellery by women. She used their own method of giving examples from ancient texts, and in her case from Dayanand Saraswati's *Satyarth Prakash* and *Sanskar Vidhi* for good measure to prove there was no traditional basis for reformers arguments. 'Striyon Ka Abhushan Pahinna', *PP,* 14: 12, Oct., (1911).

CHAPTER FIVE

Powerful Women-Fearful Men: Reforming Women's Popular Culture

f T^huri pichhe akal' and *'kuni vich mat'* were two of the most common ry maxims used by reforming men to describe the women-to-be-*J*. V reformed. Both proverbs were meant to underline the lack of intelligence in women, perhaps an exasperated response to women's conspicuous lack of enthusiasm for the new reforms. However, the use of the two phrases also revealed deep anxieties about the nature of women, brought to the fore especially in times of fluid and unstable identities. The former castigated women for having intellect under the 'hoofs' of their feet, an inversion in women of the 'normal' (male) abode of intelligence in the head (associating women with shudras). The latter condemned women as animal-like beings, without an ability to reason, by placing their thinking capacity in their stomachs *{kuni* literally refers to a cooking pot). It thus hinted at the masculine perception of women as beings with enormous appetites—gastronomical and sexual, food here a metaphor for sexuality.[1] The use of these contemptuous, almost misogynous adages, tell us something of the complex ways in which issues of high caste, middle class women's sexuality, and caste allegiance were tied up in the minds of men with women's unstable belonging to caste and class categories. The mind that cast women as essentially kupatti—quarrelling against, and insubordinate in the face of men's

'The close association between gastronomical and sexual appetites has been commented on by a number of scholars in many cultures. For a recent exposition of this see Ann G. Gold, 'Sexuality, Fertility and Erotic Imagination in Rajasthan Women's Songs' in G.G. Raheja & A.G. Gold, *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India* (California, 1994), pp. 30-72.

prestige, defined in terms of their caste and religious identities—revealed the pathological character of that imagination.

If men used their culture, education, and power to fashion a perfect pativrata, they equally used these resources to create the figure of the distasteful woman of the 'popular culture'. However, it needs to be emphasized that while imagination, myth and legend were used to impress upon women their pativrata religion, it was the women men encountered everyday who were now seen to be the repositories of qualities that men both feared and sought to erase. If women were to become pativratas they had to cease to be what they were. And it was women and their daily existential and cultural practices that were now regarded by men to be acutely embarrassing and loaded with danger.

The story that I wish to follow here is that of the changing patriarchal structure and patriarchal imagination. I have attempted to show earlier how the ideology of the pativrata was sought to be used by men to control women, and assert a greater, and certainly more oppressive, patriarchal authority. Here I wish to focus upon certain aspects of the patriarchal structure that were sought to be changed, that were seen to have been successfully subverted by women, and that were feared to have led to the erosion of the 'legitimate' power of high caste men. This was the world which can be referred to as that of Punjabi 'popular culture'.

The concept of popular culture as developed by the historians of early modern Europe, has tended to concentrate upon the culture of the 'people', the 'subordinate' sections of society, as also the manner in which this culture came to be attacked and purged of its undesirable elements by the clerical elite of the post-reformation period. This was, then, in many ways a history of the process of 'acculturation'.[2] However, increasing engagement with sources and the growing sophistication of the concept has led to the understanding that many aspects of this popular culture were shared by various sections of society. Ginzburg, for example, despite empathizing with the subordinate, has spoken of the 'circularity' of flow of cultural influences, which emanated and disseminated both from the dominant to the subordinate and vice-versa,[3] and Chartier has referred to the ways in which cultural practices were 'appropriated' by different sections of society.[4]

[2]See, for example, Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978). Also David Hall, 'Introduction', in S.L. Kaplan (ed.), *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe From the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Berlin, 1984), pp. 5-18.

[3]Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller* (Baltimore, 1976).

[4]Roger Chartier, 'Culture as Appropriation: **Popular Cultural** Uses in Early **Modern** France', in *Understanding Popular Culture*, pp. 229-53.

Thus when a Punjabi popular culture is referred to here, it signifies a certain degree of sharing across castes, classes, and sexes, of the praxis and spatial conduct of some cultural practices, for example, the visiting of the tombs of *pirs*, the ubiquitous saints of Punjab, evoked to cure both bodily and social ills.[5] However, also significant for the discussion here are the notions of the 'dominant' and the 'subordinate', for the manner in which the new elite of high caste, middle class men, first separated themselves out of the praxis of this culture and then sought to wean away 'their' women as well. Though the discussion here does not extend to the lower classes, the purported sharing of certain cultural practices by upper caste women with men and women of low castes, classes and 'other' religions, was a matter of serious annoyance and considerable reflection for the new elite. More specifically, the reference here is to a 'women's culture' for two reasons: firstly, because I study those aspects of Punjabi culture which were seen to be more directly of concern to women and their bodies, and whose many rites and rituals were authored by them, often with a degree of cross-caste participation; secondly, because I wish to follow upper caste women into those spaces that may be open to other castes, classes and sexes.

However, if women were the subordinate in relation to the dominant men, then, the subalterns here belong to the same caste and class, unlike the discussions on popular culture in Europe. This was a reflection of the peculiar configuration of caste, and women's simultaneous belonging to, and separation from, what high caste men imagined caste to constitute. Women were in many ways central to the reproduction (literally) and perpetuation of caste. As proud mothers of sons they were meant to inculcate caste rituals and ethics in them. Sociologists and historians have repeatedly shown the importance of monitoring women's sexuality in order to achieve caste mobility or maintain a high caste status, underlining the instrumentality of women in this process. However, this factor also reveals how caste adheres to men, and the unreliable character of the quality of women's caste, for by manipulating women's sexuality, men make gains in caste hierarchy. The tenuous relation of women to caste was a function of women's 'impure' bodies, menstruation in women seen as a sign of their inferior selves, and therefore the ambiguous but persistent linking of women with shudras.[6] The desire

[5]For an interesting but gender-blind reading of popular religion of Punjab see *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, pp. 139-203.

[6]On the impurity of women's bodies as a function of their menstrual cycle see Leslie, 'Some Traditional Indian Views', op.cit. Also see Karin Kapadia, *Siva and her Sisters: Gender, Caste and Class in Rural South India* (Boulder, 1995), pp. 163-78.

for cultural separation from the low castes, and therefore a greater surveillance over women's sexuality, were a necessary corollary to the manner in which caste and class tended to come together in Punjab. By focusing on aspects of women's popular culture that revolved around the relatively autonomous management of their bodies and fertility, and the subsequent attack on this culture, I hope to show the co-relation between new patriarchal agendas and caste/class identities.

Significantly, popular religious practices also came to be condemned for they were seen to act against the crystallization of a 'Hindu' or a 'Sikh' identity, as propagated by the increasingly sectarian politics of the period. Just as women were seen to have an inherent ambivalence towards the upkeep of caste purity, so they were viewed as having little at stake in propagating the new communalized religious identities. Indeed women had something to lose by assimilating themselves to the new communal agendas, and therefore offered a stubborn resistance to giving up popular religious practices. Women's popular and eclectic religiosity began to be seen with horror, contempt, and increasingly as involving practices that could not be allowed. Mulk Raj Anand's rather condescending attitude towards his mother's religion is an example of male attitudes of the time:

> I remember how, when I was a child, my mother would place little brass idols of the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon side by side with a crucifix which she had picked up somewhere, a picture of the Aga Khan, and of Guru Nanak ... on a raised platform for worship on various festivals. That always seemed to me to be incongruous, and I do not think I learnt much about religion from her.
>
> As a matter of fart, I do not believe she knew very much about any religion, or even about the rules of the traditional Hindu ritualistic worship. She did, indeed, take lessons in reading the *Bhagvad-Gita,* the Hindu prayer-book, from my father, but I do not think she ever got beyond the stage of being an amusement to us. I recall many a time when I won a prize of a shiny silver coin, from my father... for the prodigious feat of mimicking my mother reading the *Gita.* And in retrospect it seems to me that she really affected the mumbo-jumbo, the incense-burning, the water-sprinkling of the priests in her worship, while all of us, my father, brothers and myself, laughed at her. ...[7]

It is noteworthy that men of the household found the mother's religiosity not only amusing, but also as non-serious religion. Training her in the reading of the Bhagvad Gita, the newly enshrined masculine Hindu 'prayer book',[8] was an effort to inculcate in her a 'meaningful' religion,

[7]Mulk Raj Anand, *Apology For Heroism: A Brief Autobiography of Ideas* (Delhi, 1975, first published 1946), pp. 29-30.

[8]On the transformation of the figure of Krishna by Bankim 'from a figure of abandon to one of heroic action... from a lovable popular figure of eroticism, excess, transgression,

which she could not imbibe, presumably because of her peculiarly feminine religious sensibility. Unsurprisingly, Anand's father was a member of the Arya Samaj, the male club where correct Vedic rituals could be propagated and practised, and a proper religious (and caste) identity flaunted, and where women could be admitted on men's terms of correct religious and public behaviour.

Women had to be both coaxed and coerced into identifying with new religious causes, and partially this was sought to be achieved by granting women more definitive caste and religious affiliations. The Arya Samaj, for example, not only encouraged women to form Sen *Samajes*, but also started giving the girl students in KMV the *yajnopavit* ceremony, conferring a twice-born status to shudra-like women. The Sikh reformers urged women to undertake the formal initiation into the Khalsa religion by taking *amrit*, encouraged such initiates to wear the five Ks on their bodies, and forcefully tried to herd women into formalized religious ceremonies performed in gurdwaras, a public space where a neat segregation between the sexes was maintained. In this context the new scholarly initiative which has attempted to examine the stakes of women in new communalized religious identities is significant,[9] and aspects of such (en)gendered sectarianism must be traced back to the very early twentieth century. However, a step before such sectarian initiation of women was that of luring/forcing them away from popular religion, at least in Punjab.

A further point needs to be made in relation to Sikh reformism for women. Earlier I have alluded to the difficulty of culling out a Sikh identity for women as separate and distinct from a Hindu identity. While the pirs could be unitedly castigated as Muslim, it was harder to pin-point a specifically Hindu practice as opposed to a Sikh one. Popular culture, unanimously condemned by reformers, was additionally censured by the Sikh reformers as 'Hindu', who also tried to inculcate specifically 'Sikh' daily rituals into the lives of women and men which included the reading of specific sections of the *Granth Sahib* at various times of the

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playfulness ... into a god of a dependent nation who had to help them cross, nullify, reject and transcend in practice the historic indignity of subjection' see Sudipta Kaviraj, The Myth of Praxis: Construction of the Figure of Krsna in Krsnacaritra', in his *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India* (Delhi, 1995), pp. 72-106, p. 91. The Gita was a favourite text to create the figure of a warrior-rationalist god.

[9]See for example, T. Sarkar & *U.* Butalia (eds.), *Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays* (Delhi, 1995); K. Jayawardena & M. De Alwis (eds.), *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia* (London, 1996); Urvashi Butalia, 'Community, State and Gender: On Women's Agency During Partition', *EPW*, 28:17, (1993).

day.[10] Yet confusion on this point remained for a long time, and often casteist predilections could lead to temporary abandoning of rhetoric on correct religious behaviour, though it was never given up altogether. Finally, in addition to the didactic reformist tracts, I have once again used the flourishing genre of jhagrras/kissas to uncover the depth of antipathy to popular cultural practices in Punjab. Elsewhere in this study I have called this literature a second level of reformism, connecting cities to the countryside, and building anew caste and class affiliations. Some additional facets of this literature are also noteworthy in the present context. As the genre thrived on social tensions, the repeated cursing of mulish women who refused to change their ways are constantly referred to in kissas, which hints at women's resistance to the onslaughts on their cultural practices. While the very form of the jhagrras created two opposed points of view, the obvious sympathy of the author with masculinist reform, and the specific formulation of women's resistance, tells us both about the masculine imaginations of women, and the ways in which women may have withheld support from patriarchal agendas. Any woman's resistance came to be condensed in the person of the essential kupatti whose intrinsic nature was untrustworthy. In a sense women became the subject and the object of many of the jhagrras, the quarrelling woman became a 'jhagrra' for men to tame, quieten, and unscramable. Also the ability of the kissa writers to be lewd and reforming at the same time, displayed in a much more vivid and vulgar manner the fears of women's sexuality hinted at more staidly and euphemistically by the reformers. In that sense they uncover and crudely expose the male fear and contempt concealed somewhat in the reformist tract due to its own 'civilizational' intent that eschewed the vulgar and tried to excise it from the new modernist prose. Another significant aspect of this literature that took on the task of spreading reform was its subtle ability to reinterpret the reformist message or take recourse to methods to drive home its point which were highly suspect in reformist eyes. This was one reason why the high-minded reformers themselves always condemned

[10]The difficulty of separating Sikh rituals from Hindu ones remained, partially because the Granth was a popular text among most Hindu families as well. An example of this is provided by Karuna Chanana's Punjabi emigrant women informers in Delhi who told her that in Punjab often the temple and the gurdwara were housed in the same building, with the Granth and the idols kept together, and the upkeep of this room mostly the duty of women. See her 'Educational Attainment, Status Production and Women's Autonomy: A Study of Two Generations of Punjabi Women in New Delhi', in R. Jeffery & A. Basu (eds.), *Girls' Schooling, Women's Autonomy and Fertility Change in South Asia* (Delhi, 1996), pp. 107-32, fn. 17, p. 118.

this literature. For example, a part of the jhagrra was often written to be sung in *'taraz siyapa',* the tune of the mourning dirges. This was a performative tool that the audience was familiar with and would have responded to, but which obviously evoked displeasure of the reformers who sought to banish the mourning ritual of *siyapa* itself. Also often, despite overtly carrying the reformist propagandist voice, the author of the jhagrra might display a more ambiguous stand on the issue, as one suspects would emerge from someone who stood half-way between the elitist reformers and the common folk. This ambivalence, once again, shows different 'appropriations' of the reformist message, and creates some space for the practice of resistance, though this space was increasingly circumscribed for the high caste women.

The focus of this chapter will be on a few cultural practices of women from among their vast repertoire of rites and rituals. The purpose is to tease out areas of conflict among older patriarchal structures and new patriarchal concerns, between women's relative autonomy over their bodies and culture and men's growing suspicion of a culture that was perceived to be outside the control of upper caste males. As issues of sexuality, caste and religious identity came centre-stage, so also were rewritten the codes that set the parameters of what constituted 'public', 'private', 'domestic', 'outside' and so forth. If'home' was the proper arena for the assertion of male authority, as some scholars have posited, and 'public' a world that men inhabited, a demarcation of these boundaries was undertaken at the same time as these spaces were being defined.

Reproduction, Barrenness, and Visiting Holy Men

Procreation of male progeny is one of the most important functions demanded of women by a patriarchal society, and this was the case in nineteenth century Punjab. Early marriage and a long reproductive age meant that women themselves placed a very high value on their fertility. Punjabi proverbs captured the premium the society placed on a fertile woman:

Dudh banki mainh changi, Kukh Banki goria,
Sukhan banka mard changa, Chal banki ghoria.

A good buffalo gives good milk, a woman is good if she has children, a man if he keeps his word, and a mare if she trots well.[11]

*"Punjab District Gazetteers—Vol. XXXA—Ferozepore District **1915*** **(Lahore, 1916), p. xiv.** The translation of the proverb is as it appears in the gazetteer.

Conversely, childlessness in a family was regarded as a sorrowful curse, and the following proverb brings out the poignancy of such a situation:

Savan minh na vassia, Bhadon pai kahar,
Jis ghar bal na khedia, Ainven gai bahar.

If it does not rain in Savan, in Bhadon distress increases. So in a house in which there is no child, the spring of life is gone.[12]

Barrenness in a woman was hence seen as an unmitigated curse. Calling a woman 'barren' was one of the worst kinds of abuse that could be heaped on her. In the kissa *Churrelan* or *Witches (churrel* is especially the ghost of a woman who dies in child-birth), the author freely abuses women who refuse to mend their ways as *'aut'* and *'nikhati',* both words pointing to the barren, and therefore, the worthless quality of such a woman.[13]

Anthropologists studying high caste Hindu society have emphasized the importance of a son in carrying forward the patrilineage, and in performing rituals that went into making high caste identity. Scholars have also written of the need for children, especially a son, to establish a woman's position in her affinal home.[14] Without restating these arguments, it is worth reiterating the obvious point that women were under immense pressure to reproduce, preferably sons, at the right time in their reproductive age. In the kissa *Sand Nar*, the author stigmatizes the woman as a 'Barren Buffalo'.[15] However, as was typical of the jhagrras,. the author arrives at this conclusion only after the husband and the wife 'fight out' among themselves the cause of their childlessness, with the husband accusing the wife of barrenness, and the wife in turn implying impotence in her husband. (The advertisement on the back cover of the jhagrra for a book which told men to find out about regaining 'strength' and not waste money on doctors and *hakims* is appropriate, pointing to a subliminal world of male fears even though the society would outwardly stigmatize a woman for barrenness).[16] Yet, the sympathy of the author

"Punjab District Gazetteers—Vol. XXV A—Gujrat District (Lahore, 1921), p. 64. The translation of the proverb is as it appears in the gazetteer.

[13]Bhai Sadhu Singh, *Churrelan* (Sheranwala, 1921), The society of early modern Europe sniggered at barren women, calling them mules, the cross-bred animal which cannot have offspring, an aspect of analogical thinking of pre-modem societies. Jacques Gelis, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy and Birth in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1991, first published 1984), p. 15.

[M]Veena Das, 'Masks and Faces: An Essay on Punjabi Kinship', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (ns), 10:1, (1976), pp. 3-30; Hershman, Virgin and Mother', op.cit.

[15]Varyarr> Singh Kavishar, *Asli Tin Kisse-Sand Nar* (Amritsar, 1917).

[X6]*Hakims* were physicians trained in *Unani* medicine. For a study of fear of impotence

lay with the reformist cause, even though his literary output was anathema to them. In spite of all her efforts to 'untie' or 'open' her barrenness *(banjh* literally meant 'tied up'), which include visits to the hakim, pandit, fakir and doing *tunas* (sorcery), she does not succeed, and the author laughs at her discomfort by pointing out that blankets do not change colour, nor crows grow horns, so a barren woman cannot have a child, underlining the need to wipe out women's superstitions. In the end he depicts her as a sixty year old, toothless, hard of hearing hag, who has no son to take care of her. Interestingly, the fate of her husband is not discussed. Barren women, in fact, did not have to wait till their old age to get into a social and existential predicament. Barrenness in a woman was a very acceptable reason to take on a new wife, *[7] as was a wife who gave birth only to girls.[x 8] While the pressure to procreate in order to conform to the expectations of a patriarchal society was always present, women at the same time celebrated the fecundity of their bodies—immanent, potential or exhausted. This positive evaluation of their bodies must be seen in the context mentioned above—successful procreativity enhanced women's position in society, thus women gave consensus to and participated in the maintenance of patriarchal structures. Yet, women's intimate knowledge of their bodies, and the celebration of its procedures, did give them an 'alternative', often a joyous, space. This was visible in the festive celebration of pregnancy, and the on-coming birth of a child in the ritual of *ritan.*[19] And it was this rejoicing in their bodies that was on public view when women of Amritsar observed the fertility rite of *Sada Talla* in Tek Chand Garden and the Guru Bagh. The reformist author spoke with disapproval of women's festivities on this occasion, when poor and rich women dressed in their best finery and gathered there, unembarrassed by their bodies or the fact that they were on public display, where men came to watch them:

... these women bare their bodies up to their breasts and then start rolling on the ground with great zest and enthusiasm, shouting with their mouths in loud voices: 'I have laid down on a wheat field, may my womb become fertile.' During this

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among high caste men see G.M. Carstairs, *The Twice-Bom: A Study of a Community of High-Caste Hindus* (London, 1957).

"Punjab District Gazetteers—Vol. VII A—Mulum District 1923-24 (Lahore, 1926), p. 83.

^*Gazetteer of the Ferozepore District,* p. 69.

"Amongst most Hindus in Punjab, a *choti ritan* was held in the fifth month of pregnancy and a *ban ritan* in the seventh month. These were normally occasions for celebration, with women singing songs through the night, and sweets being distributed amongst them. See 'Hindu Pregnancy Observances' in H.A. Rose, *Rites and Ceremonies of Hindus and Muslims* (New Delhi, 1983, reprint of the 1908 edition), pp. 1-10.

action of theirs almost the whole of their bodies become naked. The women believe that by this action of theirs, they become pregnant immediately thereafter.[20]

Though it is important to speak of these alternative spaces of women, whose cultural codes were written by them, one must be cautious about romanticizing this alterity. Women did live with, and had stakes of various degrees of power sharing in the patriarchal society. Besides it is difficult to speak of a collectivity of women motivated by the same interests, and it is a truism to state how women in a household could be divided on the basis of access to patriarchal power. The time of confinement in particular could be a trying period for the woman, despite all the rejoicing in the anticipated birth that may have preceded it. The birth of the first baby could strain the relations between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law, as the birth of a boy could alter the future relations of power within the household.[21] On the other hand, the repeated birth of girls could seriously undermine a daughter-in-law's position in a family.

Howsoever the birth of a child may alter relations in a household, the position of a barren woman must have been irredeemably hopeless. It was for this reason that women undertook all manner of measures to overcome such a situation, including recourse to 'witchcraft' and 'sorcery', the *tunas* and *totkas* women were becoming infamous for in the eyes of the reformers. A common *tuna* that women resorted to was to try to capture the spirit of a recently dead young man in their wombs by cooking *kheer* (rice pudding) on his *mason* (place of cremation) in the darkness of night. A half-burnt body, whose soul was said to be trying to escape, was seen to be most effective in the granting of the boon of sons.[22] M. Millet reported many similar practices common in Punjab to secure

[20]Pandit Bihari Lai, *Annual Report—Tajaviz Kameli Dharam Sabha* (Lahore, 1873), as cited in K.W. Jones, 'Socio-Religious Movements and Changing Gender Relationships Among Hindus of British India', in J.W. Bjorkman (ed.), *Fundamentalism, Revivalists and Violence in South Asia* (Delhi, 1988), pp. 40-56.

[21]Flaviana Zanolla, studying the biographies of women in the Lower Friulian plain of Italy in the early part of the twentieth century notes a similar situation. Women felt themselves to be very alone at the time of their confinement, and mothers-in-law, verbally or otherwise, acted cruelly towards their daughters-in-law. Flaviana Zanolla, 'Mothers-in-law, Daughters-in-law, and Sisters-in-law at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century in P. of Friuli', in E. Muir& G. Ruggiero (eds.), *Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective* (Baltimore, 1990), pp. 177-99.

"Personal conversation with Swam Malhotra, New Delhi, 14.8.93. Apparently, so common was this *tuna* that the relatives of such an unfortunate young man would often guard the *masan* at night to prevent women from performing this rite or desecrating the remains in any other way.

male issues. These included bathing in a tomb or a cemetery; cooking food on a funeral pile; bathing when standing or sitting on a dead male buffalo's head; bathing at night where four roads cross; bathing on a dead human body; and cutting out a male buffalo's tongue.[23]

These measures speak of the desperation experienced by women who were denied motherhood, the most acceptable way of acquiring honour in their society. These are the words that the author of another kissa, *Chelian Di Kartut (The Tricks of Holy Disciples)* puts in the mouth of a desperate Jat woman, Aso, determined to have a child. She pleads to the holy men:

Putan bajho jama khali, phal lavo suki dali, main sadaman putan vali, gharri aave rang di.

My body (jama literally refers to a garment) is empty without sons, make this dry branch bear fruit, so that I will be called one with sons, let that colourful moment arrive.[24]

The aim of this author was to show the bad influence of holy men, for they advise Aso to kill a young girl, draw out her blood, and bathe on her limbs. And Aso is shown to be rightfully punished by the 'law and order regime' of the colonial state for her pains. The gory act described in the kissa was meant to expose the dark side of women's culture in order to expunge it, and bring women under the jurisdiction of legitimate male authority, whether of the husband or of the colonial state. But the kissa is, in spite of its depiction of a gruesome act which must seldom have been performed,[25] nevertheless, an appropriate social statement of the desperation of sonless/childless women, as it is a comment on the cheapness of the life of a girl child, despite the efforts of the colonial state to raise her status, at least nominally.

A more harmless ceremony is described in another kissa. Once again the reformist author frowns upon the 'foolish' customs of women, here the women of Hoshiarpur. He describes in detail the manner in which a barren woman, childless after ten years of marriage, prays to and hugs the *Ak* tree (Calotropis Gigantea, a tree which was more than a phallic symbol as it was attributed with both medicinal and destructive powers), in the company of other women, who go with much fanfare to the site

[23]M. Millet in *PNQ,* 1:9, June, (1884), p. 100.

[24]Bhai Didar Singh *Chelian Di Kartut* (Amritsar, 1929), p. 3.

[25]The newspaper *Koh-i-Nur* of 23 September 1865 reported a similar incident where *a fakir* in Hoshiarpur was supposed to have killed a child, and placed it upon a barren woman's breast asking her to bathe, in order to make her fertile. *SNNRP* p. 489.

of the ceremonies.[26] The author indulges in vicarious participation and voyeuristic pleasure in the rites of women. But he also takes his stance as a reformed Sikh who hides and watches women's ceremonies, thereby culturally distancing himself from them, and then after the ceremonial has finished lectures them on their wrongful conduct.

The most common resort of women in such a situation of distress, like Aso, was to visit holy men, whether to partake of the meritorious aura that was felt to emanate from the tombs and shrines of renowned pirs, or to acquire practical advice from living holy men, often the pirs' descendants and disciples.[27] The syncretic culture of visiting pirs in Punjab has been documented.[28] Some pirs were renowned throughout the province, and others had a more local fame, but they collectively attracted adherents from all walks of life, until some reform-minded high caste/ class men became suspicious of their popularity. Sultan Sakhi Sarwar, for instance, who flourished some time in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, and whose main shrine was in Nigaha in the Dgra^GhazXKhap district of west Punjab, was one of the most popular saints of Punjab.[29] His followers included Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, while he was specially favoured by the Jats of central Punjab, as well as Jhinwars and Gujars. A number of fairs were held in his honour, which included the annual fair at Dhonkal in the Gujranwala district, the Jhanda mela at Peshawar, and the Kadamon ka Mela at Anarkali in Lahore. Almost every village in central Punjab had a shrine dedicated to his eminence.[30] A pir of such illustriousness must have attracted barren women in large numbers, to cure them of their curse. The Punjab census of 1891 reports how the pir was popular not only among the low castes, but also upper caste women such as Khatranis, Brahmanis and Rajputanis.[31]

There are a number of stories and legends which illustrate the closely knit relationship between women, their barrenness or fertility, and the pirs, and I will relate a few of them. Women's efforts to reproduce, whether seen in individual or collective rites, or visible in making allies of holy

[26]Bhai Dalel Singh, *Ak Nun Milni* (Amritsar, 1909).

[27]Eaton has described how *barakat,* 'that intangible capacity of a saint to wield spiritual power and to attract devotees,' was transmitted to the saint's descendants and his tomb. Richard M. Eaton, *Sufis ofBijapur 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (New Jersey, 1978), p. xxx.

[2S]*The Construction of Religious Boundaries.*

[M]ibid. Also see, Harjot S. Oberoi, The Worship of Pir Sakhi Sarwar: Illness, Healing and Popular Culture in the Punjab', *Studies in History,* 3: 1, (1987), pp. 29-55.

[i0]*COP-1891,* pp. 132-7.

[31]ibid.

men of various hue, gives us a glimpse of their unique and powerful agency in this sphere. This culture, though undoubtedly overdetermined by the patriarchal society women lived in, made them actors capable of taking matters that concerned their bodies into their own hands, and they tried to manipulate various cultural resources at their disposal to their benefit. It is also noteworthy that all these practices of women were carried out in what came to be referred to as the 'public' sphere, a domain from which women were subsequently sought to be barred.

Legends, stories, and their lived experience, affirmed for many women their special relation with pirs *to* set matters right for themselves. The famous legend of Dani Jatti, who not only managed the boon of a son, but also of another life for him, must have accounted for part of the popularity of Sakhi Sarwar among women in the nineteenth century. Dani Jatti's was a 'modern' legend (the recorder of the legend having conversed with the son of Dani's son, miraculously brought to life by the pir). It recounted the story of Dani invoking the pir Sakhi Sarwar for miraculous aid after remaining childless during twelve years of marriage. The legend then goes on to speak of the manner in which Dani arouses the anger of the pir, and loses her child. However, she refuses to accept the death of her son, and in Nigaha, managing to lock herself in the shrine of the pir, is able to convince Sultan Sarwar to bring him back to life. This legend is remarkable for a number of reasons. It is a portrayal of the special relation of Dani, as a woman, with the pir, whom she invokes in spite *of the* opposition, indeed anger, of her husband, a Sikh.[32] However, Dani's will prevails over that of her husband and his relatives. Again, she emerges triumphant when she is able to win back life for her son, by keeping her wits about her in the time of crisis, and by relying upon her ability to convince the pir. Even though it is the pir who has the store of miraculous powers with him, it is Dani who has the ability to manipulate that reserve to advantage. The legend also highlights the inordinate love a mother had for a son in Punjabi society, and Dani's ability to get the breath of life back in her son is reminiscent of the manner in which the mythical Savitri saved her husband Satyavan from the jaws of death by conversing with Yama. Whereas Savitri's fable, which stressed her pativrata dharma, became extremely popular among the reformers in Punjab, the legend of Dani, because it affirmed a close relation between a woman and a pir, came to be ridiculed, and became a target of attack by the reformers.

[32]This suggests perhaps an older friction between a strand of Sikhism and popular religion of Punjab. For correct Sikh conduct as prescribed by *rahitnamas* see *The Construction of Religious Boundaries.*

Sakhi Sarwar represented a wider, more mobile, popular culture of Punjab. However, Punjab was teeming with local pirs.. who were equal to the demands women made on them, mostly in the nature of supernatural help in helping them conceive. Every success story, whether legendary, or more parochial in character, validated this symbiotic relation between women and their spiritual aides. The story of Ram Rati Ghai, who did not have children for the first four years of her marriage, and thus came close to being stigmatized as *'autari',* again draws attention to how networks of women and pirs set delicately balanced personal and power relations right. Ram Rati's mother-in-law had the choice of taking her either to Pir Sheelnath in close-by Mayani, (after marriage she came to Malakwal, on the edge of Shahpur and Gujrat districts) or to the keepers of the tomb of Pir Qureshi in Dhamrai.[33] She chose the latter option. The subsequent ordeal included an arduous journey to Dhamrai, made by at least three women. At dawn, three women, with the barren one in the middle, walked single-file to a bathing well, three or four miles away from the tomb. Once the ablutions were completed, the women walked back in wet, cold clothes to the tomb. Upon entering the tomb, they said in loud voices:

'Pir Qureshi, mangian muradan desi ke na desiV

'Pir Qureshi, will you, or will you not, fulfil our deepest desires?'

And the tomb would faithfully echo *'desi',* meaning 'will give'. After partaking a little of the *parshad,* given by the fakirs who looked after the tomb, the first morsel of food for the women that day (but a morsel imbued with sexual connotations), they left, hopeful that their wishes were close to the point of materialization. The benevolent Pir Qureshi, apparently never did renege on his promises. At least, Ram Rati had four children to show the miracle of the Pir.[34]

"Personal communication with Swam Malhotra. The name Sheelnath obviously suggested the 'Hindu' origins of this particular pir. Also the place Pir Qureshi was associated with, Dhamrai, was said to be the sister of Dharamraj (Yamaraj, the messenger of death in Hindu mythology), once again pointing to the syncretic nature of popular religion in Punjab. Similarly, the messengers of Sakhi Sarwar were said to be Hanuman and Bhairon, two prominent deities of the Hindu pantheon who figured in many legends surrounding the pir, including that of Dani Jatti discussed above.

[34]A similar story was related to me by Ram Kaur Sethi in New Delhi on 31.7.96. Her mother, the second wife of her father, a resident of Rawalpindi, also remained childless for many years after marriage. She then evoked the help of the followers of a fakir, whose *samadhi* (referring to a cenotaph of a Hindu saint) was near Jammu. This fakir was not only famous for his holy deeds, but also for those of his daughter, who in sati-like fashion

If Pir Qureshi was consistently benevolent, there were others who asked for their pound of flesh, and women anxious to have living, healthy children were ready to make sacrifices. The famous shrine of Shah Daula, on the periphery of the city of Gujrat, a saint who flourished in the period of Shah Jahan, gave the boon of fertility to women, but, demanded the first born to be given to his *khangah*, the famous *chuhas* or rats of Shah Daula.[35] The story of these unfortunate 'rats' is described in the Gazetteer of Gujrat:

The popular belief is that the priest undertakes to cause children to be born in childless homes on condition of the parents consenting at the shrine to relinquish to him their first-born child, which is said to be born rat-headed. There are at present about a dozen rat-headed men, women and children attached to the khangah: they are wretched looking imbeciles, with little or no forehead, and sharp features, which in a manner justifies the appellation of 'rat-head'.[3s]

Other pirs may be happy to be just remembered and worshipped at the time of celebrations at the birth of a child. The high caste Hindu women of Chunian, in Lahore District who normally strictly maintained the taboos of purity and pollution, nevertheless lit lamps every Thursday evening on the *mazaar* or shrine of the patron pir of their village, quite oblivious of the pollution incurred by the act of devotion to a Muslim pir. When a son was born on Thursday to one of the two women who lived in the house whose basement housed die pir's grave, they forgot to light the lamp. The pir appeared in a dream to the child's aunt, angrily clanging his *ch.xm.Xa* (musical instrument shaped like tongs, associated with some fakirs) and accusing the woman—*putardi khushi vich mainu bhul gai venl*—In the happiness of having a son have you forgotten me? The woman promptly went and lit a lamp on the grave in the middle of the night.[37] I wish to emphasize, while examining the incidents described above, the validity of women's experience, both in the management of their religion, and that of their bodies. Psycho-analytical, or psycho-social explanations of popular religion may seem more 'rational', but they also

burnt herself on the funeral pyre of her father, as she did not wish to live alone and unprotected in a jungle after his death. Fakirs told Ram Kaur's mother that she will have a daughter and two sons, which occurred as predicted.

[35]'*Gazetteer of Cujrat District*, pp. 54-5.

[36]ibid. The author went on *to* explain the natural birth of congenital idiots, and of 'superstitious' parents compressing children's head at birth to make them into chuhas. The settlement officer of Rawalpindi even opened an enquiry into the scandal of artificial deformation which came to nothing.

[37]Personal conversation with Sat Pal Malhotra of Chunian, New Delhi, 20.6.92.

make for explanations that undermine and negate the cultural idiom through which women experienced life, and the world-view which made them look at their children as special gifts of saints.[38] At the same time one must be cautious about not romanticizing the familiarly reassuring world of women and their allies, and its despoliation by the new medicine of gynaecology and obstetrics firmly under male control.[39]1 find Kathleen Erndl's analysis of popular experience of religion, made in the context of her study of the cult of Goddess Sheranvali in northern India, much more useful. She writes,'... the reality of the Goddess is not a matter of belief or disbelief but rather an experience, a way of seeing, a way of knowing.'[40] The cultural milieu which made women turn to pirs for the rectification of their various social or bodily ills, validated their experience. The pirs were a powerful ally of women in their attempt to make their bodies fecund, helping them to occupy the rightful place of honour in society. It was the codes of this cultural idiom that the reformers were now attempting to change, making both women and pirs targets of their sharpest attack. While the Hindu and Sikh reformers hoped to vilify the pirs as 'Muslims', they were anxious to bring women, and their bodies, under greater patriarchal control.

Women's Sexuality, Holy Men, and the Reformist Intervention

Having separated themselves from the cultural milieu in which the popular religious practices flourished, upper caste, male reformers (and those with aspirations of being regarded as such) were determined to draw women out of this amorphous morass as well. It was the 'casteless' and 'religiousless' nature of popular culture involving visiting pirs, in the sense that in this world, caste and religious identities did not matter, that aroused the fear and unremitting hostility of the new male elite, that wished to make others adhere to its own narrow outlook. Equally a cause of concern was the crucial question of reproduction of high caste,

[38]See for example, I.M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion* (London, 1989, first published 1971). Oberoi tries to explain spirit-possession at the shrine of Sarwar by women as the manner in which the voiceless section of society voice their dissent. While such explanations may seem reasonable, they do nothing to understand the cultural milieu in which life and religion was experienced. *The Construction of Religious Boundaries,* p. 159.

[39]Gelis makes this point when he says its an oversimplification to trace such a trajectory in the advance of medicine. See the Introduction in his *History of Childbirth,* pp. xv-xvi.

[40]"Kathleen M. Erndl, *Victory to the Mother: The Hindu Goddess of Northwest India in Myth, Ritual and Symbol* (New York, 1993), p. 16.

healthy, male, religious communities (arya as against the anarya in the language of Dayanand), in a period when numbers became important signifiers of sectarian identities. Leaving reproduction to women, and their communion with low caste men and women, as well as holy men of doubtful pedigree, was simply not permissible as far as middle class men were concerned.

To elaborate upon the reformist attacks on popular culture, I have found some of the literary output of Ditt Singh especially pertinent to explain the processes in motion, though other sources have also been used. Ditt Singh was an exceptional spokesman of the reformist cause, be it the elite's casteist or communal politics, or the desire to impose coercive patriarchal controls over women. He was also a prolific writer and between 1880 and 1900 (he died in 1901) he is said to have written forty books in defence of Sikh religion.[41] Though a Singh Sabha ideologue, a movement he joined in 1888, he started his reformist career in the Arya Samaj, a point whose significance must not be undermined. Ditt Singh was himself a Rahtia, a Sikh Chamar,[42] who perhaps used the ambiguity of the early Arya Samaj position on caste to enhance his own caste/class status. Ditt Singh's writings combined aspirations for caste mobility with venomous insistence upon observation of caste rules by various castes. In this context he attacked the situation of flux with regard to caste in popular religious practices. Participation of women in such a culture was especially abhorrent to him, because their involvement rendered suspect any purity of caste or religious affiliations. Ditt Singh is also interesting because his aim was simultaneously to fix a Sikh identity. Yet his overriding concern with the question of caste could instil ambivalence about whom he was addressing, Sikh men and women or the high castes? Furthermore, he used a literary style not altogether prosaic and modern. He wrote fluid verses, whose reach was very wide indeed. The humbler kissa writers of the early twentieth century not only picked up themes popularized by Singh, but also reproduced poor imitations of his work, giving us an inkling of the reach of reformist ideas.

In his *Sultan Puarra* or *Wrangle over Sultan,* (the word *puarra* has the connotation of both a cause for trouble as well as a dispute/quarrel) Ditt Singh was keen to make men adhere to caste identities, and attempted to attack the popular realm of visiting pirs by ensuring a scrupulous observation of purity and pollution taboos that went into the making

[41]Jones, *Arya Dharm,* p. 329.

[^]*Confidential Report on the Vernacular Press of the Punjab for the Year 1888,* Home-Public-76/78-A, Jan. 1890. (NAI)

of caste status.[43] Though his larger task was to work out a Sikh identity, in this polemical and vituperative attack on the worship of Sakhi Sarwar, caste considerations seem to be his overriding concern. He frowns upon the collectivity of men of all castes (the *sang),* going together to the pilgrimage of Sarwar, led by a Muslim *bharai* (bards of Sarwar's shrine). Thus a Brahman is reminded of his high status in the caste hierarchy, and how he would incur pollution by associating with a lowly Muslim; a Jat is invited to take pride in his high status as a land-owner; a Chamar is reminded of his poverty, and advised to concentrate on earning a livelihood; a Khatri is told of the honour of being born as such, which is eroded by intermixing with low castes, and so forth. Towards the end of the text, Ditt Singh invites his audience to take amrit and become Sikh. Importantly, for Ditt Singh, to become Sikh was not to lose one's caste (that would dilute the *raison d'etre* of drawing people away from popular religion), but to take on the caste of the Guru, to become a 'Chhatri'.[44] In *Nakali Sikh Prabodh (Awakening of False Sikhs),* another text written by Ditt Singh in order to reform Sikhs, this point is further elaborated upon. On taking the amrit, he writes, all become Sodhis (the Khatri subcaste of the Sikh Gurus from the fourth Guru onwards), yet people are embarrassed when they are addressed as such, and shamefacedly say they are Nai (barbers), or aver that they are Bedi, Trehan or Bhalla (Khatri sub-castes of the first, second, and third Gurus respectively).[45] Thus in Ditt Singh we simultaneously have a discourse that ratified caste mobility, even while ensuring social distancing between castes, a typical position on caste found among reformers in Punjab.

In any case, Ditt Singh was highly suspicious of high caste women associating with low caste men and women, as well as the Muslim pirs and their disciples. In another attempt at reforming the culture of celebrating pirs, he takes on the followers of Gugga Pir, another popular saint of Punjab.[46] Gugga, a saint especially invoked to cure children and animals from various diseases, was also seen to protect from snake-bites, and was annually worshipped in the form of a snake.[47] His worship also involved a ritual inter-mixing with Chuhras, the scavengers, and Mirasis,

[43]Bhai Ditt Singh Giyani, *Sultan Puarra* (Lahore, n.d., 6th edition).

[44]ibid., p. 42.

[45]Bhai Ditt Singh, *Nakali Sikh Prabodh* (n.p., 1899, first published in 1893) p. 124.

[46]Bhai Ditt Singh, *Gugga Gapaura* (n.d.)

[47]See Ibbetson, *COP-1881,* pp., 115-16. The *chhari* or switch of the pir, consisting of a long bamboo surmounted by feathers, a coconut, some fans, and a blue flag was in the charge of Jogis and sweepers who took it round and asked for alms.

genealogists as well as musicians.[48] Ditt Singh's anger is directed at both men and women, who shamelessly worship Gugga Pir, but castigates women for cooking *sevian* (a sweet, milky pudding) for snakes and Chuhras, while feeding their own sons with the Chuhras' left-overs![49] Similarly, he attacks the *sangs* of Sarwar, where not only inter-mixing of castes among men took place, but also these collectivities had women in them, thus allowing their association with men of different castes and religions. These *sangs,* in which men and women, for the period of the pilgrimage, referred to each other as *pir bhai* and *pir bhain,* pir brothers and sisters, for Ditt Singh led to a dangerous situation, where the boundaries between caste, and at times, between the sexes, came dose to disappearing:

Aurat marad bane sabh bhai, Pir bhain jin aap banai; Pir
bhai nari mukh bole, Palat layejin apne chole.[50]

Women and men have become brothers, They have made pir sisters; Pir bother speaks as a woman, They have inter-changed their garments.

The ire against occasional transvestism is significant, for now both femininity and masculinity came to be defined sharply, and maintaining gender hierarchy was important in order to instil other hierarchies in society. Leaving reproduction of a high caste society to this arena of fuzzy castes, and easy association with members of other castes, religions, and sex, was an unacceptable situation for the reformers. Ditt Singh tried to dissuade women from going to pirs for boons of sons by ridiculing the miracle-making abilities of the pirs. In *Sultan Puarra,* the followers of Sarwar argue that if going to the pir gives them the boon of their sweetest desire, to have a son, then why should they not go to him? And they relate to him the story of Dani Jatti. The 'good' Sikh, in reply, tries to undermine the pir's sacred aura:

Aj kaljo Sarwariye han kitne autarjande;
Kyun na put una nu denda margaye rot pakande.[51]

These days how many barren Sarwarias go to Him;
Why does He not give them sons, they are tiring (literally dying) making *rot* for Him. (A sweetmeat made with flour and jaggery to take on the pilgrimage)

The Sikh makes fun of the Sarwarias' incredulity and asks them if sows, hens and bitches go to the pir as well? Or indeed, if the English do,

[48]D.C.J. Ibbetson, *Panjab Castes* (Delhi, 1974, reprint of the chapter on The Races, Castes and Tribes of the People in the Report on the Punjab Census of 1881). [49]*Cugga Gapaura,* p. 10. [50]*Sultan Puarra,* p. 4. [51] ibid., p. 18.

who apparently had ten children in their homes. Even the Muslims do not go to Sarwar who, according to him, had sons crawling like worms from a hole?[52] Nor did the righteous Singhs, with brave sons in the army, go to Sakhi Sarwar looking for boons of sons.[53] The Sikh, applying the new rationalist logic, tells the 'gullible' folk that the gift of a son or a daughter was dependent upon the will of the God—*Putar dhian da parivar, ae sab denda hai Kartar*—an appropriately masculine godhead. Later, in the text the author announces that the family of Dani Jatti had given up following the pir, and taken amrit, a fact that appeared in the pages *oiKhalsa Akhbar*.[54] Yet, the insidious suggestion that was present in the text, and which was part of the world-view which sent people to Sarwar to cure barrenness in the first place, was that conversion to 'true' Sikhism was more likely to give fuller families. This is shown by a comparison between two brothers—a Sarwaria, who was childless, and a Sikh, who had a large family with sons and daughters.[55] The competition was between the realm of popular religion and Sikhism, with the latter accomplishing greater control over women.

While Ditt Singh, in the text discussed above does not say so explicitly, the fear embedded in the minds of the upper caste society was that of the uncontrolled sexuality of women in association with 'other' men. This calamitous situation affected, on the one hand, the purity of the high castes, and on the other carried the danger for men of being cuckolded by their wives, signifying a loss of masculinity, and in men's imagination, women became the wielders of real, subversive power. It is noteworthy that the emasculation of high caste men effected here was not simply in relation to the colonial state, as most scholars who have written on the colonized male's self-perception tell us. Rather the emasculation experienced here is in relation to other men of the indigenous society, whether low castes or Muslims. The exposure of promiscuous goings-on in the establishments of the pirs, was one of the reasons for the Singh Sabha reformers to publish a tract called *Nishang Kaur*, about the *Shameless* woman.[56] This youthful twenty year old woman, gaudily attired and heavily bejewelled, that is after making herself sexually attractive, is shown to visit the local establishment of the Lalanwala Pir (another

[52]The myth of stronger and more fertile Muslims became widely prevalent in this period, with the Census data generated by the colonial state playing no mean role in it. See Anshu Malhotra, The Moral Woman and the Punjabi Society of the Late Nineteenth Century', *Social Scientist*, 20: 5-6, May-Iune, (1992), pp. 34-63.

"Sultan Puarra, pp. 20-1.

[54]ibid., p. 70. Ditt Singh was himself the editor *ofKhaha Akhbar* for a long time.

"ibid., p. 19.

[5&]*Nishang Kaur Kikur Laaj Kaur Ban Gai* (Amritsar, n.d).

name of Sarwar). She is shown to move, late in the evening, with a firm, unhesitating step towards the saint's establishment, a sign of her promiscuity, unaware of being observed by two 'reformist' men. Once there, the men observe a lot of 'shameful' happenings, and are horrified to see a number of Hindu and Sikh women mixing with Muslim pirs. The two men give their readers a glimpse of the sensuality of the occasion:

> When she (Nishang Kaur) began to leave, the Pir kept one hand on her head and the other he gently passed over her back. With his eyes, he stared into her face and said that the Pir will be merciful and grant you a son. But make sure you do not skip any Thursday. ... With reddened eyes and a face aflush with faith, Nishang Kaur said 'never'. She bowed her head and began to move. While she was moving, the Pir caught and pressed the small finger of her right hand. This too Nishang Kaur interpreted as the grace of the Pir. ...[57]

This portrayal hinted at the sexual exploitation of high caste women by unscrupulous pirs. However, women were seen to be equal partners in the committing of such 'crimes'. The author quickly brings the clandestine nature of the occasion to the attention of the readers. Nishang Kaur is shown to go back home in the company of other women, most of whom were visiting the pir without the 'permission', if not actual opposition of their husbands.[58]

Association of bad times with men losing control over the sexuality of women, thereby leading to the downfall of an entire people, was also depicted by one Lala Banke Dayal, keen on restoring the ideal life of Vedic times. In his pamphlet where he sought to vilify holy men, and dissociate women of respectable homes from them, he tackles the crucial question of women's unfettered sexuality in relation to holy men.[59] For Banke Dayal all holy men were suspect, and sadhus, along with pirs and fakirs are commonly shown in the literature of the period as parasites of the society, cheating people. The question for him was not why women went to holy men, or adopted personal gurus as spiritual aides. For him

"ibid., p. 16.

[58]The image of holy men as degenerate came to be firmly implanted in popular imagination. Rajinder Singh Bedi, a famous Urdu novelist and a script writer for the Bombay film industry, effectively employed this image in his renowned novel *Aik Chadar Maili Si.* Here, a holy man, whom all the women of the village visited, and who was renowned for wearing iron underpants, i.e., was a celibate *par excellence,* ends up being imprisoned on the charges of raping a young girl. This occurrence uncovered village women's own 'dubious' relations with him, for many visited him for the boon of children. *Aik Chadar Maili Si* (Lahore, 1965), pp.11 & 39.

[59]Lala Banke Dayal, *Auratan Nun Guru Dharan Da Bherra Updesh* (Gujranwala, 1917).

it was the immanent need of the times to bring women under the control of their husbands, and the conflict between husbands and the holy men on the rights over women's sexuality was obvious. He bitterly complains that the sadhus make women give up their pativrata dharma, teaching that husbands are the companions of hell. On the one hand, as with the above tract, women are depicted as victims of licentious sadhus. Yet, women's sexuality, portrayed as intrinsically voracious, was a problem in itself, requiring a stringent control over their movement. A woman, Dayal noted, was like fire. Men were like *ghee,* the normally cool butter that was bound to melt in contact with hot fire. So while Dayal decried sadhus for luring and often kidnapping women of respectable families in cities like Lahore and Peshawar, he distrusted women, and was not altogether sure of women's own role in being kidnapped—... *auratguru banandi-banandi guru naal udhaljandi hai*—while making gurus women *get* abducted by them.[60]

Thus men discerned women's agency in maintaining close relations with pirs, gurus, and other holy men. However, they were no longer comfortable with either women exercising any degree of control over their bodies or minds, nor with the cultural milieu that allowed women to wield this power. The 'sexualizing' of relations between high caste women and 'other' men, the obverse of which was the fearful image of the husband as a ridiculous cuckold, was a new way to deploy patriarchal control. Both Banke Dayal and the author of *Nishang Kaur* appealed to men to exercise greater control over women. Banke Dayal used the appropriately holy image of Goddess Lakshmi massaging oil on the soles of the feet of her husband Vishnu, to show the proper place of a pativrata woman at the feet of her husband.[61] The author of *Nishang Kaur* was more blatant. He portrays the cuckolded husband, Buddhu Singh, regaining his lost masculinity by beating up his wife so severely that it took her a couple of months to recover, a sanctioning of physical coercion against women that we encounter time and again. The author concedes the punishment to be excessive, but it did have the desired effect, for not only did it lead to the 'reform' of the shameless one, but also of other women of the neighbourhood.[62]

This perceived conflict between the sexes and spouses once again

[60]ibid., pp. 7-9.

[61] ibid., p. 3. For the image of Lakshmi as epitomizing the pativrata consort goddess see, David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (London, 1986), pp. 19-34.

[62]*Nishang Kaur,* p. 29.

emerges most pointedly in the work of Ditt Singh. The anxiety in relation to the 'women on top', bluffing and tricking husbands, conspiring with other men to make fools of them, bleeding men of power in the one arena where they were meant to enjoy it unrestrained, became paramount. In *Miran Manaut*, printed after his death in 1901, Ditt Singh does not even consider the basis of the relationship between women and pirs, as he did in his earlier work.[63] Women and pirs are seen to be in a conspiracy to cuckold men. However, Ditt Singh seems to be suggesting that pirs could be tackled effectively, in fact robbed of their power, if women were brought under domestic patriarchal power.

Miran Manaut relates the story of the stupid Majula Singh made a fool of by his wife, who tries to use the cult of the pir Miran to gain power over her husband and his household. It is Ditt Singh's tirade against the 'wiles' of women, apparently employed by them to overturn power at home. Right at the beginning of the text Sailani Singh, the Sikh responsible for restoring patriarchal power, warns Majula:

Jisnu murke main kiha sun jhudu mat hin,
Nar hoke tu ho gaya apni naar adhin.[64]

I turned (after listening to Majula Singh) and said listen you henpecked witless man
Despite being a man you have come under the control of your woman.

The cultic practices associated with Miran, described as the 'wiles' of women by Ditt Singh, and employed by Majula's wife, included being 'possessed' by the pir, calling *dumnis* (same as *mirasins*, women minstrels) to come and sing the praises of the pir, and organizing *chaunkis* (religious gatherings to sing devotional songs) of women to worship the pir. Here, then, from the point of view of middle class men, were collectivities of women of different castes, singing in abandonment, and disrupting patriarchal power and its moral codes, by experiencing joy and ecstasy in the possession of their bodies by the pir. According to Sailani Singh, Majula's wife deliberately gets 'possessed' by the pir, so that she could have her way. He warns Majula:

Miran-Chhiran kuch nahin bhai, ih naran di hai chaturai; Kai tarah de fandh chalavan, phir apna matlab kadhavan.[65]

There is no Miran-Chhiran, this is just women's cunning;
They lay down numerous traps, to extract their wishes.

[63]Bhai Ditt Singh, *Miran Manaut* (Lahore, 1902).
[64]ibid., p. 7. [65]ibid., p. 9.

Majula's wife, according to Sailani Singh, desired to have complete control over her household by displaying her extraordinary powers by being possessed.[66] This power earned her respect, as a mark of her closeness to a spiritual pir, and made her family members fear her, as she could use it to their detriment. Her husband and his family would thus come under her control and do her bidding, a reversal of the ideal situation of a daughter-in-law. Ditt Singh carried the analogy further. According to him, women wanted husbands to be like their *hamins* (this is shown in the demand of the pir speaking through the woman asking him to act as such), the low castes rendering various services to their high caste patrons.[67] Women, the author then asserted, were really like the shudras themselves, and were looking for *'laags'* by exercising power over their husbands, the traditional gifts and money offered to low caste providers of service on ceremonious occasions.[68] In this imagery replete with women and low castes gaining power over high caste men, was a warning to men to confirm women and low castes as shudras, and to deny them their laags, by closing any opportunity of even ritual role-reversal. And women ultimately were to be raised from 'shudrahood' only by acknowledging their subservience to their husbands.

In addition to the fear of reversal of normative roles in society and women acting in imitation of, and in association with, low castes, there was the danger of'uncontrolled' and uninhibited behaviour of women. This was expressed, as mentioned earlier, in terms of women's enormous appetites:

Tabar vich na milde chokhe, mardi pai bhukh de dokhe;
Kali hoke khub udau, churi kut malida khau.[69]

In a family she does not get plentiful, she complains she is dying of hunger;
Alone she can be gluttonous, she will crush *churi* and eat *malida.* (Sweetmeats prepared with pounded bread, jaggery and ghee).

[65]Possession has been seen by anthropologists as a sort of'weapon of the weak', or as Lewis has put it, 'the special endowment of mystical power given to the weak,' See *Ecstatic Religion,* p. 104. Men were now keen to deprive women of all sources of alternative power, howsoever ritualized and contained in an effort to establish their supremacy in the newly defined home.

[67]ibid., p. 13.

[68]ibid., Natalie Davis had noted how in the eighteenth century charivaris in Europe it was the henpecked husband who was ridiculed for allowing the overturning of the norm. Ditt Singh seems to be doing the same in order to re-establish the norm. Natalie Z. Davis, 'Women on Top', in her *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (London, 1975), pp. 124-51.

[69]*Miran Manaut,* p. 9.

Gluttony, again, appears as a metaphor for sexuality, and in either case, stresses the physicality of women's enjoyment. Also, the traditional space meant to be occupied by women, *chaunka* or the cooking area, which gave them a certain degree of'control' over the distribution of food in the household, played on the insecure men's mind. In fact, in spite of being associated with the preparation of food, access to its consumption was ordered in a hierarchical manner, so that a wife was meant to eat last of all, and that too the men's left-overs. However, in the imagination of high caste men, over-indulgence in food and sex (outside the familial space), in carnivalesque fashion, were the hallmarks of undisciplined, disorderly women. So Nishang Kaur is shown to take sweetmeats to be blessed by the pir, and Banke Dayal disapproves of women who invited holy men for feasts. The description of the sensuous 'play' of the pir on the body of the woman in possession[70], spelled out the fear of women's insatiable sexuality, as well as giving women the power for verbal abuse of authority:

Usdi vahuti uthi mach, bolan lagi kacho-kach;
Jiyun-jiyun dholak vaje changi, tiyun-tiyun nache hokar nangi.[71]

His bride got up with exuberance, and started speaking gibberish;
As the beating drum reached a crescendo, so she danced becoming naked.

Women, then, were insidiously subverting power at home. Their accomplices in this game of subversion were the low castes and holy men. So ingenious were women shown to be that they were said to manage this relocation of power with the consent of their husbands. The task of the reformers was, therefore, to make men aware of their eroded power, and to uncategorically reassert their authority. So Sailani Singh relates to Majula two stories of how he managed to bring women possessed by Miran to the straight path. In one incidence he himself had beaten the woman into submission, and to admit her tricks. The other anecdote he relates of his friend, a Brahman, who is taught by Sailani Singh to break a *chaunki,* similar to the one organized by Majula's wife, by beating the *dumni,* breaking the drum and beating his wife.[72] Majula

[70] "Possession is experienced as *khedna* or playing in Punjabi, and is described as such by Ditt Singh. See *Victory to the Mother* for a description of the Goddess playing in the bodies of women in possession.

[71] *Miran Manaut,* p. 18.

[72] Kavi Waryam Singh's kissa *Nari Da Pakhand* (Amritsar, 1917) was an imitation of *Miran Manaut* in which Petha Ram's wife Tori pretends possession and is beaten by Tinda Singh to reveal her fraud. Note the names of the protagonists are those of vegetables of daily consumption and were used to inject humour in what must have become a formulaic plot.

is made to follow the latter path, and his wife too admits to faking her possession.[73] Once his wife is rid of her pir and her power, Sailani Singh advises Majula to treat her well, educate her in her religion, and to keep her busy with household work; in other words, to initiate her into her pativrata, and Sikh religion.

Ditt Singh's call to men to aggressively assert their authority and to induct women into a more formal Sikh religion was taken up with enthusiasm by the kissa writers of the time. On the one hand, using crude language, they built up the image of'bad' women who displayed 'uncontrolled' behaviour, and on the other, they made fun of the culture on which she apparently thrived, and juxtaposed it with reformed religion. Bhai Kartar Singh Kapoor painted the image of a kupatti woman, one who did not hesitate to pull her husband's beard, disliked her in-laws and separated from them, and was useless at household chores.[74] For Pandit Sitaram, such women were without proper method or tact, *(kuchaji)* and were licentious and degenerate *(badkar).* They were unskilled at housework, and of course, ruled over their husbands, mixed with the low castes in disregard of purity/pollution taboos, but their primary goal was to satiate their incredible craving for food:

Atta chuhri thon bhiaundi, gun hation mangaudi, ghiu khushi naal paondi, nit churman banaundi. ,..[75]

She makes the scavenger woman grind her grain, she gets jaggery from the shop, pours ghee with glee, and makes *churma* daily. (Same as *churi,* a sweatmeat).

These were also women who indulged in cultural practices that gave them space to enjoy life and have fun. Indeed, most writers spoke of such women's reluctance to give up these cultural practices, for here they could, in men's language, 'indulge' themselves:

[73]In his autobiographical writings, Lajpat Rai mentions the case of his *dadi,* grandmother, who used to periodically be possessed by the spirit of her dead sister-in-law, and in that state answer various queries of her family. This is evidence of both respect, and to a certain extent the power women had to sort out family matters in such a state. However, what is interesting is the length to which Rai goes to show the 'honest' and 'simple' nature of his dadi. He underlines that she could not be 'pretending, frauding, tricking or being deceitful' in such a state. Obviously Rai, as a reformer, felt the need to defend the character of his grandmother, for he knew what he was writing was against the grain of reformist world-view, which, in a sense, took away women's power by refusing to recognize it. He also admitted his helplessness at understanding what it was perhaps because it could not be 'rationally' explained, *Atmakatha,* p. 19.

[74]Bhai Kartar Singh Kapoor, *Kissa Kupatti Nar Da* (Lahore, 1903).

[75]Kavi Pandit Sitaram, *Kissa Ran Kuchaji Da* (Amritsar, 1903), p. 7.

Chan he manji sis hilanve, har dam geet Miran de gaven, nale raj gongle khanve. ...
Rinne khir pakanve purre, ni tu sad liyaven chuhre. ...[75]

Sitting on bed you shake your head, all the time you sing Miran's praises, and eat sweetmeats to your fill....
You simmer the rice pudding and cook *punas* (another sweatmeat), you go and call the chuhras....

Women, slaves to a 'superstitious' culture, also had sexual licence:

Jamme balak misar sadandi, chavle nai khasam banandi. ,..[77]

She calls priests on the birth of a child, and makes husbands of low nais (barbers)...
However, through this vulgar portrayal of the woman of popular culture, one does get the sense of women not only reluctant to give up a familiar culture, but also perhaps actively resisting the induction into a new colourless religion being advocated by Singh Sabha:

Doven hath patan te mare, aandi ho gaye karam nakare, ve nahin jana gurdware, mari bharman di;
Je main gurdware jana, tusan sabo varat chhunanan, changa pher nahin milna khana, mari bharman di.[75]

She beats her hands on her thighs, says her destiny has gone bad, and that she does not want to go to gurdwara, the one beaten by superstitions; If I go to the gurdwara, you will break my fast, and then I will not get good food to eat, the one beaten by superstitions.

Reformers' new propagandists, the kissa writers, depicted women's 'resistance' as their refusal to give up self-indulgence, and as a mulishness that was to be expected of superstitious women. But for women, their could have been myriad reasons to defend their cultural practices, not least of which must have been a desire to prevent an encroachment into their space and power by men. In fact, women may have been actively hostile towards the activities of the Singh Sabha. Scholars have commented on how the 'rural folk' hit back at the Singh Sabha by lampooning them. Thus Padam refers to the popular perception of the Singh Sabha—*Mukge gharre de dane ban gaye Singh Sabhiye*[79]—When the pot was emptied of grain (i.e., when all other sources of livelihood disappeared), they became

[76]Kavi Harnam Singh and Kavi Gurdit Singh, *Manmukh Bharman Mari* (Amritsar, 1918), pp. 4-5.
[11] *Churreian,* p. 2.
[78]Kavi Bhai Ganda Singh, *Manmattan Di Kartut* (Lahore, 1917), pp. 4-5.
[71>]Padam, *Punjabi Jhagrre,* p. 27.

Singh Sabhiyas! One can only speculate on the contribution of women to stripping the Singh Sabha reformers of their self-worth. The reformers themselves provide evidence of women's dislike of them. In Nishang Kaur, one of the women visiting the pir confesses that she was coming without the approval of her husband, who was a Singh 'Safiya'.[80] Similarly, in the kissa *Churrelan,* a mother-in-law complains about her puritan daughter-in-law having been spoilt by the Singh Sabha.[81]

Despite the consistent undermining of women's culture and roles in society by the reformers and their allies, women's festering resistance may not only have remained, but may have at times countered men's propaganda. In *Navan Kissa Mela Dekhan Vali Nand Kaur Nar*[82] *(The New Story of the Woman Nand Kaur Fond of Visiting Fairs)* the Singh Sabha dictum against the fairs held in honour of pirs is embodied in the voice of the husband, who refused permission to his wife to visit the fair of Haidar Shah in Malerkotla, for such behaviour was not expected of respectable women. The author, again in Singh Sabha style, looks at fairs as occasions for women to have fun, and meet separated lovers. He expresses disgust at the various excuses employed by Nand Kaur to have her way. She finally succeeds by falling ill, and the family is forced to ask forgiveness of the pir and beg for his grace. Nand Kaur not only goes to the fair herself, but makes her husband go as well! The author is perhaps able to resolve his own reformist sympathies in the denouement of the text by reviling women's wiles—which were evidently put to good use by Nand Kaur in order to persuade her husband. Yet, the author also speaks of the victory of the pir, who may have miraculously assisted the woman in her 'wiles' by making her fall ill, thereby ensuring that his traditional worshippers fell in line, at least, for the present. The ambiguous stand of the author, at least partially hints at the strength of women's determination to hold their own, and their ability to influence their men.

Women's Culture and Power: Attempts at Women's Confinement

A parallel development to the one which saw the sexuality of the woman outside the home as suspect, was that of viewing women's cultural prac-

[80]*Nishang Kaur,* p. 18.

[81]*Churrelan,* op.cit., p. 3.

[82]Daulat Ram Kavishar, *Navan Kissa Mela Dekhan Vali Nand Kaur Nar,* Lala Devi **Das Janaki** Das, Amritsar, 1922.

tices performed outside the confines of home as obscene and vulgar. Central to this attitude was the manifestation of deep discomfort with women occupying a 'public' space without conforming to the bodily comportment and sartorial prescriptions of the reformist elite. The 'persistence' of some women to carry on with these practices was seen as 'defiance' on their part, whereby they eroded men's authority. Thus women, by not adhering to the new male spatial definitions of'public' and 'private', or mores of 'decent' and 'obscene', were seen to be challenging men's power *over* women:

> Europeans say that native women have no liberty. But in fact native women possess more freedom than European women. The existence of these evil customs is due to the great power exercised by women among us. All our attempts at reform end in nothing owing to their opposition.[83]

It may be pointed out that these attacks on women's culture were accompanied by vitriolic condemnation of those rituals and festivals where the high and the low of society came together to celebrate, or worse where there was ritual parodying of figures of authority. The festival of Holi, with its carnivalesque traits of licence from the constraints of quotidian life, was one such object of reformist consternation. Khalsa Tract Society published two pamphlets which attacked the festival for allowing the dishonouring of men of prestige, for general unruly behaviour which allowed the 'scum' of society *free* play, and for the satires *(saangs)* staged by 'ruffians' which made fun of everyone.[84] The elite's prestige had become too fragile to allow such sacrilegious behaviour. Additionally, the festival now came to be attacked also for its sexual licence, and middle class men saw their women as targets of the sexual drive of low caste men, though they could not be sure of women's own behaviour. *Koh-i-Nur,* a well respected Urdu weekly published from Lahore, reported in March 1873 how a girl, on the road from Ludhiana to Phillour, despite being chaperoned by an old woman was stopped by a party of grasscutters, who pulled off her clothes and sang *kubeer* at her.[85] A similar report in the *Suhaile Punjab* noted how five syces on Holi in Lahore, went about teasing women and singing obscene songs.[86]

Ditt Singh, again, was able to capture very well the fears of high caste men in relation to women in public and therefore open to the sexual

[83] *Mitra Was, 5* March 1883, *SNNRP-1883,* p. 203.
[84] *Ho\i Hai 1 & 2* (Amritsar, n.d.). [85] *SNNRP-1873,* p. 185. [86] *SNNRP-1867,* pp. 191-2.

advances of low caste men. Women outside the home were seen to enter a liminal arena, where other men were bound to take advantage of them, make them the butt of their bawdy jokes and sexual innuendoes. The situation was especially dangerous when women were out because women, according to the reformist men, were inclined to indulge in their own gazing and mirth-making. In *Gugga Gapaura {Fibs ofGugga),* however, Ditt Singh depicts women as becoming innocent targets of lewd men, in the hope that women will restrain themselves. So he scolds the elderly Prem Kaur for taking the women of the household for a visit to Gugga's fair:

Dhian Nunhan laike kali, ghar ton kadh turi tun jhali...
Jithe firsan log hazar, nange buthe te badkar. Ten nunhan vale takan, bur bolde mul na thakan. Phir dhian hai age laian, jiun kar hovan vasat paraiyan. Dekhan luche gunde log, gaun geetjo hon ajog. Relu di paon parheli, Ranjha Mirza gaon Leli. Pae nagoze uh bajaon, sharam na karan ludian pavan. AT parheli pake gandi, karde dishat tusan val mandi.[87]

With daughters and daughters-in-law alone, are you insane to have taken **them** out of the house ...
Where thousands of people will be roaming, bare faced and licentious.
They will stare at your daughters-in-law, and will not tire of speaking rubbish.
And then you have put your daughters in front, who belong to others.
Rogues and rascals will look, and sing improper songs.
They will perform Relu's satire, and sing of Ranjha Mirza and Leli.
They will beat the drums, and will not feel shameful in dancing the Ludi.
Cracking dirty jokes, they will give you the bad looks.

While women were here seen as targets of others' obscenity, the low caste men's who sang kubeers and danced ludis for them, or recounted the sexual prowess of the discredited heroes of the middle class, Ranjha and Mirza, some of women's own cultural practices were also condemned. There were many concerned outpourings against women who sang obscene songs in *mohallas* or neighbourhoods, and other public spaces, as well as many writings against women bathing naked in the open near wells and rivers.[88] Similarly the ritualized quarrel of women of different mohallas during the period *oikanagats* came to be denounced, when wearing their best clothes and finery, and standing according to

[87] *Gugga Gapaura,* p. 41.
[88] *SNNRP* 1867, 1874, 1881.

status, they hurled abuses at each other, their taunts aimed at husbands, parents, and other figures of authority.[89]

These various concerns came together in a bitter attack against the performance of women's mourning ritual called *siyapa.* Reformers were keen to wipe out this custom, because siyapa had all the ingredients in it that reformist men had set themselves against: the public display of women's bodies, large groups of women engaging in the ritual unmindful of men looking on, and inter-mixing with low castes. However, in reformist efforts to expurgate mourning rituals, and expunge siyapa altogether, was also visible the need to define male respectability and power as against that of women, and ultimately to recast society with their own vision of gender hierarchy and caste propriety.

Siyapa, with its theatrical high drama, and its cathartic release of emotion, within prescribed performative codes, came to be attacked for all these reasons. On a death in a *biradari* (patrilineage, but the term was flexible enough sometimes to include a mohalla, or even a village) women gathered in the house in which the death took place. Making a circle or a row, often in front of the house, women took off their clothes, and wrapped themselves in a blue or a black sheet. Then led by a *dumni,* who sang *alahniyan,* the dirges and laments that remembered the dead, women would sing while beating in unison their bare breasts, thighs and cheeks. Women then often went as far as the cremation ground performing the siyapa. The ritual was repeated for a number of days after the death, the period of official mourning *(furri paona,* literally spreading out the reed mat, on which women were expected to sit and cry), varying from thirteen to seventeen days, or longer.[90] While these rites were performed immediately following death, mourning for close relations could stretch for a year or more.

The new reformist literature against siyapa plucked the ritual out of its cultural context and condemned it on various 'rationalist' grounds. Yet the new arguments against siyapa nevertheless betrayed concerns about women's sexuality. The effort to privatize grief was also importantly a method to push women into the private.

The rational arguments against siyapa evinced concern about women's own health, as also that of their children. Some even tried to rationalize why siyapas were held, offering the reason that women needed an excuse

[89]Pandit Shraddha Ram Phillouri of Amritsar Dharm Sabha (later a founding member of Sanatan Dharm Sabha) wrote against kanagats in 1872. *Annual Report—Tajaviz Kameli Dharm Sabha,* op.cit.

[90]Pieced together from various pamphlets, but especially Sita Devi, *Sukh Di Khani* (where she quotes Lala Saligram Bajaj's pamphlet against the practice) (Lahore, 1921).

to go out and exercise, since women could now do that freely, they need not have siyapas![91] Women who took part in siyapas, it was held, did not eat the whole day, spoiling their health. Excessive crying was said to be bad for their eyes, and beating their chests bad for their lungs. Siyapas, one author maintained, were like abattoirs for women where they slowly met their death, for both cold and heat affected them in their naked state.[92] While the issue of women's health was important, what was more salient a problem was the manner in which siyapas affected children's health. Women who went to siyapas were said to neglect their children, leaving them behind, without adequate care. And when they took children with them, the ritual itself affected children adversely. Siyapas were in particular harmful for pregnant women, for not eating well or crying affected the health of the unborn child. Lactating women, reformers complained, ended up not feeding the baby the whole day, and when they did feed them in the evening, babies threw up, having remained hungry the whole day, or because they were being fed 'heated' milk. (The milk having become hot, and unfit for consumption, by women beating their breasts). By attending siyapas, Saligram warned, women faced the danger of becoming barren.[93] The fear of having a weak race also played upon men, who blamed women's customs as the root cause for this. A one year old child of a Lahoran, one reformer pointed out, was equal to a six month old of an English woman, all because Punjabi women attended siyapas![94]

Observing the custom of siyapa meant, paradoxically, both intensely sexualizing the body as well as robbing it of its sexual appeal to the husband. The high caste woman's body became excessively sexual when exposed to the gaze of other men. Thus one reformer decried women of respectable houses wearing only skirts on such occasions with no trousers or shirt, and the shirt too came off at the time of siyapa. He further noted how women carried on their performance in the streets and market places, unmindful of men watching. And after cremating the body and having had the purifying bath, they came back shamelessly in wet wraps. Women, the author went on, did all this without bothering about the honour of their own men.[95] Obviously, the high caste men experienced a loss of honour when women's naked bodies were observed by other men. Another writer made this diminishing of male prestige explicit:

"Sumna, 'Siyape Ka Swad Bigarr Diya', *PP*, 6:9, July, (1903).
[n]*Siyape Da Siyapa* (Amritsar, n.d.), pp. 30-1. "Lala Saligram, *Sukh Di Khani*, p. 19. [94]*Siyape Da Siyapa*, p. 16. [95]ibid., pp. 11-12.

While people of other communities watch them, having made chains and with half of their bodies naked, they laugh at them and dislike them, we Hindus see these women in that condition standing naked and feel very shameful. ...[96]

However, women in mourning were seen to be unattractive to their men, for they dressed in dirty clothes, did not wear the auspicious marks of a married woman, or otherwise look appealing to their husbands. Lala Saligram of Arorvansh Mahasabha described how despicable women in *busa* were (literally meaning stale or stinking, referring to the custom of extended mourning which entailed among other things wearing unwashed clothes and not eating well).[97] He especially regretted that women of fifteen or sixteen years of age, who really ought to make themselves attractive for their spouses, also observed extended mourning. It was no wonder, he concluded, that their husbands turned to prostitutes.[98] Women immersing themselves in the remembering of a dead relative were seen to be neglectful of their duties towards their husbands. Besides the anxiety over neglecting the husband was a reflection of the resurfacing of the fear of the sexuality of a woman in public. Saligram also noted that when a woman said she was going for a siyapa, one really did not know where she went.[99]

However, more than just controlling women's sexuality seemed to be at issue in the attempt to halt the practice of siyapa. The proverbs of the period reflect women's insistence on attending siyapas, and from men's point of view, a peculiarly feminine 'pleasure' derived from the attendance of what ought to be solemn occasions:

Ran gai siyape, ghar ave tan jape[100]

The woman has gone for a siyapa, we'll know she's back when she comes home (indicating that the woman was in no hurry to get back).

Another proverb spoke of the four great 'loves' of a woman, which were:

Dudh, putar, tija kurr, chautha siyapa, bhavein nerre, bhavein dur[m]

Milk (food!), son, third lying, fourth siyapa, whether nearby or far away.

[96]LaIa Durgadas of Lahore quoted in 'Siyapa', *PB,* May, (1913).

[97]*Sukh Di Khani,* p. 15.

[98]Lala Saligram as quoted in *Srimati Durga Devi Da Updesh* (Lahore, 1902), p. 12.

"Sukh Di Khani, p. 19.

[100]Bhai Bishan Das Puri, commissioned to make a dictionary in English of Punjabi words gave this proverb while explaining siyapa, with an obvious reformist tone of disapproval (Panjab, 1922).

[101] Personal communication with Swarn Malhotra, New Delhi, 28.2.96.

The pleasures of women, referred to here, were those of women moving out of homes and daily routines of work, of meeting up with other women and 'gossiping'. But siyapas were also imbricated in a cultural context where women derived authority from maintaining and perpetuating kin relations and caste ties.[102] These were areas that men were now keen to bring under their own control as they redefined their own relationship to caste, class and communal identities.

There are numerous examples from the reformist literature itself which tell us how women used the occasion of siyapa to fix marriages, exchange news about relations, and to build good or bad reputations of each other, and of various families in the biradari. In one reformist pamphlet, for example, the prospective groom's mother looks for brides for her son (her son gets married twice as the first bride dies due to ill treatment by the mother-in-law) in *'sang siyapa* or the gathering of a siyapa. It is again at such a gathering that the bride's mother tries to give a bad name to the woman who ill treats her daughter. Therefore, for the second marriage of her son, the author comments, the boy's mother will have to accept a bride from a much inferior family, in terms of caste or financial status, or indeed buy a bride.[103] Thus the attendance on siyapas could reflect the prestige of the women who organized them. In another pamphlet, the 'unreformed' woman who organizes a siyapa on the death of her brother (here the siyapa is referred to as *janoni,* a term which emphasized the female character of the ritual), is shown by the reformist author to foolishly measure her prestige by the number of women who attended it, for that was a statement on her stature in the biradari.[104]

The tensions between women's role in the biradari and their new role demanded at home, between women's autonomous prestige in the biradari versus their recognition only as wives of their husbands, comes out very sharply in the pamphlet *Siyape Da Siyapa (Performing the Death Ritual of Siyapa).* Here the unreformed woman Parbati, while going for a siyapa, is accosted by her 'reformed' friend, Rukman, who reads the 'conflict' going on in Parbati's mind. The conflict was between going to the siyapa and earning the wrath of her husband, or staying at home and experiencing a contraction of her prestige in the biradari (cutting of her nose), besides a chance of her children remaining unmarried. Rukman is, of course, able to reform Parbati, and she does

[102]For a study of women's significance in maintaining kinship ties in Punjab, especially as seen in the institution of *vartan bhanji,* or a complex exchange of gifts and services see Zekiye Eglar, *A Punjabi Village in Pakistan* (New York, 1960).

[ws]*Sudeshi Nunh 1 & 2* (Amritsar, n.d.).

[m4]*Sansar Par Hi Narak Surag,* op.cit. p. 57.

this by emphasizing that women derived their honour from that of their husbands, besides reminding her of their economic dependence on them, and telling her that if her husband respected her, the biradari would too, and if he abandoned her, the biradari would not bother about her either.[105] The author also derided women who made matches while attending siyapas, sitting on the edges of the drains in mohallas (apparently uncaring about the inauspiciousness of the occasion, or the filth of their surroundings). He berated women for spoiling relations by gossiping on such occasions, or running down their husbands. It was here too, the author maintained, that good women came under the influence of bad ones, and learnt superstitious practices, or other ways to trick their families. However, what really infuriated him was the manner in which women organized matches for marriages. According to him, women did not bother to look at their children's ages, the state of their health, their character, or whether the boy was rich or poor—obviously issues of significance for men in this period. He further fumed that women did not even care if the boy was a Sikh or a *mona* (a man with trimmed hair, used in opposition to a Sikh who kept uncut hair), indicating both the relative unimportance of this issue in making marriages earlier, and the reformers' inclination to define more strictly new 'community' identities now.[106] In another pamphlet women's older culture built around kinship ties, came to be pitted against their pativrata religion. Women's culture was derisively dismissed as vulgar knowledge of *chaunka, siyapa, alahniyan,* and *sithnian* (songs sung on marriages parodying the kin of the family with which marriage had been fixed).[107] The author, appropriately the wife of one Lala Ramchand Manchanda, a lawyer in the Punjab High Court, and the Vice-President of the Arorvansh Mukh Sabha, a reformist organization of the Aroras, deprecated these skills, and asked women to be pativratas instead.

Women's collectivities of all kinds, in fact, came to be looked upon with suspicion, as places where the authority of men was sure to be ridiculed, and imperceptibly overturned. Even women's time in the neighbourhood was sought to be regulated to only a few hours, and that too to discuss religious matters. For it was with neighbours women were thought to air familial disputes, thereby robbing the privacy of the private sphere. By quarrelling loudly, even with each other, women involved neighbours in domestic affairs, and by gossiping, they used their

[105] *Siyape Da Siyapa,* pp. 7 & 42-3.
[106] ibid., pp. 22-6. [107] *Sukh Di Khani,* p. 3.

speech to deadly effect. Thus women's life in the mohallas was sought to be reorganized, and healthy suspicion of neighbouring women encouraged.

In the jhagrra, *Vehrre Vich Athan AuratanDa Jhagrra* (A *Quarrel in the Courtyard Between Eight Women),* the author shows how women of the mohalla gather together in a big courtyard in the centre of town. In this 'public' space, where the author noted women itched to go to laugh, talk, and spend long hours, four 'bad' women try to teach four 'good' ones various ways of establishing control over their husbands, and other means of enjoying life.[108] So one 'shameless' woman, Ati, tells the 'pativrata' Ram Kaur, to stop working too hard, and put an end to being abused by her husband, and as she had herself managed, to straighten him out. It seemed necessary to the reformers to replace the Atis of the world with Ram Kaurs, the pativrata wife had to take over the woman of the popular culture in order to build power and prestige of men.

One such transformed woman was the mother of Lala Devraj. He idolized her as the perfect pativrata. From a woman who was very strict about observing all the traditional practices of women, which included *chaunka* (of keeping this space unpolluted), fasting, and attending mourning not only in the biradari, but also in Muslim and Mehtar families, to becoming a woman who gave up singing of obscene songs, keeping fasts, or observing the day of Gugga. The author specifically informed the readers that she refused to organize siyapas, not only on the death of her husband, but also on that of her eldest son, who died at the peak of his youth, a real cause for mourning.[109]

[108]Arjan Singh Hakli, *Vehrre Vich Athan Auratan Da lhagrra* **(Amritsar, 1918).**
[109]Vidyalankar, *Lala Devraj* (Jalandhar, 1937), pp. 39-42.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to probe the gender relations among a middle class composed of high caste Hindus and Sikhs in the colonial context of the period 1870s to 1920s in Punjab. The work has endeavoured to show how a specific understanding of caste grew in colonial Punjab, and the manner in which a people labelled as 'high caste', 'casteist', and 'unmanly by the colonial state, interacted dynamically with the institution in order to 'preserve' the 'inherited' social advantages that flowed from it, even as they took on the challenges of'modernity[1]. It has been argued here that the way in which caste became a significant ingredient of class formation had very serious implications for defining women's social roles, as 'right' conduct on their part, and control over j their sexuality increasingly became the indices for flaunting a high caste and middle class identity. This work has further postulated that as issues of caste, class, and religious identities came to be centrally debated, the male high caste elite problematized women's relationship to the categories of caste and religion. The overwhelming need to 'reform' women, and make them adhere to appropriate behaviour as defined by men followed an ideological position that perceived women as inhabiting the liminal edges of caste and religious identities.

This study has attempted to show that the colonial gaze of the British Raj towards its Punjabi populace reified the understanding of caste in certain ways, as the state came to study and classify the people under its rule, binding them to their peculiarities. A corollary of this attitude was 1 that the state demanded and expected appropriate caste behaviour from *j*

the 'high castes', identifying as it did the Punjabi people through their rituals and customs. The Punjabis' treatment of their girls and women was picked up as indicative of caste status. Thus it was the high castes and classes who committed female infanticide, who insisted upon widows' chastity and did not remarry them, who followed particular 'high' and expensive rituals and customs relating to marriage, who gave generous dowries to their daughters at that time, and who kept their women cloistered in zenanas. What was significant about such a colonial attitude was not only that it gave an opportunity to some to upgrade their class status and to others to hang on to the prestige that being designated high caste bestowed, but also that the specific techniques of governance employed by the state allowed a fluid ritual status to become immutable. The recording of the customary law of the Punjabi people was an example of such a change, which revealed the patriarchal predilections of the colonial state itself, just as it promoted collusion with Punjabi patriarchies.

The main concern of the thesis has been to show how the 'high castes' themselves regrouped as a caste and a class, and how such social processes translated themselves into women's lives. The breakdown of narrower biradaris, and the emergence of a broader high caste, for example, put pressure on all those included in this identity to follow certain rituals and customs that were seen as honourable and suitable to their caste status. Thus marrying daughters in *pun*, and giving them large dowries came to be eulogized, creating new reasons for deploying vigilance over a daughter's sexuality and devaluing her person. Forms of secondary marriages, including informal sexual relationships of some high caste widows, exchange marriages, and marriages with some form of brideprice came to be frowned upon. Similarly, celibate widowhood was renewed in this period as a social symbol distinctive of the high-born. This was the reason that created a discomfort among large sections of the high castes with the efforts of some reformers to promote widow marriages. At the same time, it may be noted, the 'high caste' pool from which to find suitable matches itself grew as education, employment opportunities for men, the earning capacity of a household, and the material resources that women could bring into their marital homes, all constituted the new structures on which to build a middle class identity.

The need to rediscover and redesign a 'tradition', foundational to the emerging elites of the period, encouraged a hierarchical view of the society, albeit one that also took cognizance of the demands of a modern 'community' formation and nationalism. The *Satyarth Prakash* of Swami Dayanand, for example, extremely popular among the middle classes of Punjab, provided a formula to some for the growth of modern nationalism,

while ensuring the perpetuation of an essentially segmented society. Women in particular bore the burden of the ensuing conflict between tradition and modernity that followed. A rediscovered tradition helped to convert women into ideal pativratas, happy in a regime that underlined their servitude, and emphasized the *difference* of the colonized from their new rulers. Women as submissive pativratas also allowed the controlling of their sexuality, reproductivity, cultural contacts, and movements. Thus putting women into the 'private' did more than make men masters at home. It helped to secure a perpetuation of caste and class interests, even as some reformist men took a 'radical' stance on the question of caste, denouncing the divisive role it played in firming up 'communal' or nationalist identities. On the other hand, a pativrata could also be shown to have accumulated certain traits associated with 'modernity'. Her education, 'emergence' from parda, and her new housekeeping skills were all apparently marks of her modern status.

A study of the dichotomous construct of the kupatti in relation to the pativrata gives a glimpse into the ways in which the elite of high caste men felt women did not fundamentally belong to caste and religion-based affiliations. A kupatti was seen as a sexually assertive and culturally autonomous person, and the need to tame and train her into a pativrata was spelled out. A pativrata, in other words, could only emerge if women gave up their autonomy, a culture that allowed them a modicum of prestige and honour, and control over economic and material resources, in the name of devotion to the husband and his family. A pativrata brought material resources from her natal family to that of her husband, along with her services, labour, and auspiciousness. In return a pativrata was eulogized. The dependent, but auspicious pativrata, however, made other women who needed to be independent, for instance a widow, look as if they were a drain on fragile resources, and their very existence was to the detriment of the patrilineage and the patrimony. The construct of the pativrata, then, was a weapon with which to subjugate all women.

However repressive the model of the pativrata may have been, the contradictory pulls of the ideology that fed that idea created its own spaces for women to fight that oppression, or make possible a new sort of individuation. This is not to say that all women rejected the ideal of the pativrata. On the contrary, the venerable origins of the concept and its long associations with ideal behaviour encouraged most women to emulate it. And for many there were rich rewards if they lived up to the lessons they learnt. Yet some women also took the new opportunities in education and some careers that opened up for them to discredit the ideology that put them on the pedestal, but denuded them of all

independent rights. Thus the emergence of a middle class, and a gender analysis of the course of its making, must record the conflicts involved at various levels, along with consensus and consent. The contentious nature of reforms was visible when women's cultural practices were attacked, many women hitting back by ridiculing the reformers. Some women also realized and commented on the hollow glory that their ideal bestowed on them, writing of the loss of stature and some financial resources, as well as the emotional mayhem the insistence upon their emulation of the duties of a wife and a daughter-in-law entailed.

An aspect of the formation of the high caste and middle class identity in the period under discussion that appears throughout this study was the social and cultural distancing from the low' castes. While the 'agricultural' castes like the Jats were ridiculed, envied, and sometimes seen as too powerful for comfort, there was a consistent disgust espoused towards all 'menial' castes. The need for such a sharp cultural separation requires a further and fuller investigation than has been undertaken here, especially from the point of view of the 'low'. From the perspective of the high castes at least two overriding reasons for defining distinction may be pointed out. It is noteworthy that the state sought to collaborate with, and perpetuate the interests of the agricultural classes, especially in its enactment of the bill that barred both the high castes and the menial castes from buying land from the agricultural classes in the future. This clubbing together of the 'high' and the 'low' only fuelled a desire for a marked separation from the low, specially as the Land Alienation Act led many high castes to feel economically insecure. However, the significant reason for working out the divisions from those designated low was the renewed interest in establishing caste hierarchies. Because women's belonging to caste and class was viewed as ambiguous, they were seen to transcend easily from one level to the other. Placing women within homes and a cultural distancing from the low were projects undertaken simultaneously. Not that low caste labour was rejected, though some of it certainly was to be replaced by women, but that boundaries of separation were sharply defined.

The contrariness involved in such a programme of social, separation when 'communal' politics was gaining ground needs to be highlighted. One of the confessed goals of leaders of various 'communities' was to increase their numbers. The constituencies for such an effort were the low castes, who were also pushed by the colonial state to adhere to the ranks of the established religions. The promise of turning high caste that was offered to them, or the postulation of a basic equality, perhaps pushed the need for preserving distinction at a more private level. It is this context that explains the desire to seal off high caste homes from low caste contact.

While this study has sought to emphasize the manner in which being high caste became an important component in the emergence of middle class identities among Hindus and Sikhs, it is also obvious that sectarian divisions between Hindus and Sikhs on the one hand, and between Hindu/ Sikhs and Muslims on the other, were also forming. The development of such a process requires a separate analysis, one, in fact, that has engaged scholars for some time. More pertinent to the concerns of this work is the new scholarly interest in understanding women's stakes in communal identities. It has been suggested here that men both questioned women's firm belonging to caste and religious affiliations, and tried to incorporate them in the world-view that encouraged a singular sectarian public posture The attack on the syncretic culture of Punjab, and removing women from public spaces where castes and religions mixed, was an important step in the direction of laying down sharp religious differences. Many women, as they struggled to find new opportunities of self-enhancement and individuation could do so only by imbibing and espousing new communal politics. Thus conflict and a degree of compliance were aspects of gendered sectarian identities, and the history of such a process needs to be traced. Also the way in which women came to be respected as mothers, the 'communal' reasons for which their reproductivity came to be valued, and the new ways in which control over their sexuality came to define communities' honour needs to be assessed.

The importance of such an analysis for the changing face of Punjab hardly needs to be stressed. The fractured state of Indian Punjab today has a Sikh majority of almost 63 per cent.[1] What are the effects of the change of status from a minority to a majority for the Sikhs? How did women imbibe the programme of accepting a 'Sikh' identity, keeping in mind the antagonisms such a project sprouted that have been noted in this work, and what were its costs? On the other hand, the 'minority' Punjabi Hindu diaspora, whether to India or abroad, has fuelled its own politics. While the Punjabi Hindus in India today may assert a militant Hindu identity, some of those resident abroad may find themselves rootless, when the old Punjab does not exist, and Indian Punjab, Punjabi language, and 'Punjabiness' have come to be identified with the Sikh.[2] Is there a women's perspective to the all-embracing identities of being 'Hindu' or 'Sikh', or to the more ambiguous one of being a 'Hindu-Punjabi' in Britain?

^*Census of India, 1991* -Series 20-Punjab-Part IV-B (ii)-Religion, p. 4. [2]Dhooleka S. Raj, 'Partition and Diaspora: Memories and Identities of Punjabi Hin-diis in London', *International lournal of Punjab Studies,* 4: 1, (1997), pp. 101-27.

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