

An Alternative to the *Sati* Model: Perceptions of a Social Reality in Folklore

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Sati, a widow who immolates herself at her husband's pyre,¹ was a model for the high-caste Hindus and was widely projected by the colonial government as a hallmark of a "primitive society" which held its women in utter contempt and degradation, and hence needed to be "civilized." The Brahmanical code advocating *sati* completely prohibited the widow to remarry. This extremely repressive system of high-caste Hindus for widows condemned them to a life of living hell, especially among the child widows. Virulent attacks on this Brahmanical code were made by the social reformers of the 19th century in Bengal, Maharashtra, Punjab, and the South, who advocated widow remarriage instead. The imperial government responded by first abolishing *sati* in 1829 and then by passing the Widow Remarriage Act XV of 1856, which legitimized widow remarriage. All this camouflaged the fact that an alternative model not only existed but was vastly popular in various regions and among different castes and classes of India. The recent 1987 Roop Kanwar *sati* episode has revived the memories of what is being called an almost unchanged past,² so much so that the idea of a "*sati* model" for a Hindu widow in India has become so firmly anchored in our minds that the historical reality of the existence of another model has been almost obliterated. The fact that remarriage for Hindu widows existed did not go unacknowledged even by the colonial administrators. But, interestingly, in direct contradiction to their stand in respect to high-caste Hindus who were severely condemned for not allowing their widows to remarry, they denigrated the practice of widow remarriage as a "low-caste *sudrā* practice."³ The practice and acceptance of widow remarriage, ac-

According to them, was common among "inferior castes" only. These "inferior castes," however, in reality included not only the untouchable castes but a vast number of peasant castes as well. Together, they comprised an overwhelming majority of the population, especially of northern India. For example, dominant peasant castes followed the practice of widow remarriage in a region like Punjab. This fact was conveniently ignored by the imperial rulers. The projection of an alternative model by a foreign government through a legal enactment, therefore, hardly made any difference to those regions and those castes and classes of people who had already been preaching widow remarriage. However, it did give the much-needed legal sanction of the foreign *sarkār* (government) and the assurance of acceptance by the "reformed" among the Hindus, especially the high castes. The importance of the moral support of the reformers, for example, the Arya Samajists in the Punjab, who provided this practice with justification drawn from the most ancient Hindu texts and offered protection to those who accepted it, cannot be denied.

This paper seeks to highlight the existence of this social reality which accepted and encouraged widow remarriage. It seeks to analyze how this alternative model was perceived at the popular consciousness level. For an explanation of this perception I examined the reservoir of existing folklore, proverbs, local sayings, popular beliefs and festivals, etc., of a north Indian region, viz., Haryana, which I came across during my fieldwork in 1986–1988. In fact, the oral tradition in rural India continues to be vibrantly alive and widely used in day-to-day life by its people, both male and female. Much of this oral tradition had been documented by British administrators in the late nineteenth century. More recent attempts of the Hindi literati of this region have resulted in a vast collection of a variety of still prevalent folktales and sayings with minor and insignificant linguistic variations here and there. Together they reflect socio-cultural life and show a continuity in many of its aspects, especially in the practice of widow remarriage. Haryana, which was until November 1966 a part of undivided Punjab, has led, and continues to lead, in the following of this practice. Indeed, its similarities with other regions of the north, with only minor variations among certain classes and castes of people, are startling. This exploration brings out the popular acceptance of the practice of widow remarriage, the hidden tensions behind its acceptance, the particular form that it assumed, and the reactions to this practice of the people concerned.

POPULAR SANCTION OF WIDOW REMARRIAGE

The custom of widow remarriage was widely prevalent not only among the "low castes,"⁴ but also among the so-called agriculturist castes, so designated by the British under the Punjab Alienation Act, 1900 (*GAZETTEER OF INDIA*, 1899). These were: Jat, Rajput, Pathan, Sayyed, Gujar, Ahir, Biloch, Ror, Moghal, and Mali. By subsequent notifications, Taga, Saini, Chauhan, Arain, Gaud Brahmin, and Qureshi were also notified. All except the Rajputs followed the custom of widow remarriage. Among the Brahmins, also, reports indicate that it was being followed. The Brahmins of this province were not a priestly class but were mostly landowners who followed the dominant social custom of this region in preference to the Sanskritic model of the other Brahmins who brooked no remarriage at all (*CENSUS OF INDIA* 1911, 219; CHOWDHRY 1983). Among other Hindu castes, the "low-grade Khatris" also followed this practice, but others like the Banias and the Kayasthas did not (*CENSUS OF INDIA* 1911, 219).

The popular acceptance of widow remarriage was signified in a local proverb which dates to the 19th century, but which I found to be uniformly used all over Haryana even to this day. Its popular usage shows not only the continuity of this tradition but also its strengthening. The well-quoted proverb maintains:

ājā beṭi lele phere,
yoh margyā to aur bhotere

Come daughter, get married,
if this husband dies there are many more.

(PURSER and FANSHAWE 1880, 53)

The peasant ethos which maintains "*ek kanyā sahāṅsar var*" (there are several bridegrooms available for one bride) (VERMA 1972, 43), even celebrates this idea as they had done a century ago:

tītar pāṅkhi bādli
bidhwā kājal rekh
wuh barse yoe ghar kare
ya maiṅ nahiṅ bisekh⁵

A partridge-feather-shaped cloud is bound to burst;
a widow using collyrium is bound to remarry.

The increasing acceptance of widow remarriage in this region has not only given these local sayings added relevance but also wider currency. Another indication of a widow's soon-to-be-changed status is seen when:

khole kes ughare sir, ek vidhwā nazar me āyee

A widow sighted, with unbound and uncovered hair.

A “merry widow,” heading for a change in her status, can also be seen in:

aalas neeñd kisān ne khowe,
chor ne khowe khāñsi,
ṭkkā vyāj mool ne khowe,
rāñd ne khowe hāñsi?

Laziness makes a cultivator, a loser,
a cough exposes a thief,
a high interest rate forfeits the capital,
laughter betrays a widow.

The old folk-sayings also show popular sanction behind the public enjoyment of the festival of Holi by widows. They in fact can be seen celebrating it fully. This festival, considered to be the most important rural festival in northern India, ranks above other festivals like Diwali and Dusserā (SAXENA 1977, 170). Holi is marked by earthiness, pretense, and laughter. The open mixing of both sexes erases divisions of sex, age, and status. It witnesses mock fights between men and women characterized by rude horseplay and ribald singing and throwing of colored powder, water, and even cow dung. In a reversal of roles the women beat up men with *koṛe* (a lash or a whip used for flogging made up of cloth laden with stone) and hurl abuses and obscenities at them. The men are given to inciting them with snatches of ribald rhymes or by using double entendre.⁸ In a sort of temporary freedom from social restraints the widows are accepted as full participants in the public celebration of fun and revelry at Holi. The folk observation records:

kāchchi imlī gadrāri sāman me
rāñd lugāi mustāi phāgun me⁹

A young innocent girl matures in *sawan* [rainy season],
a widow frolics in *phāgun* [early spring].

Clearly, the folk tradition has symbolically accepted and continues to accept the sexuality of the widows.¹⁰

The social ease which accommodates a widow emanates from the fact that she is seldom considered the mystical source of her husband's demise. Here, it may be remembered that, unlike the areas with strong Brahmanical influence in which widows are believed to be persons who

sinned in their past life and were being punished for their sins by widowhood (LUSCHINSKY 1963), the rural areas of Haryana and Punjab, where there is a clear lack of Brahmanical influence (CHOWDHRY 1983), culturally and ideologically attribute it loosely to *kismet* (fate), “*aise karam the*” (such was the fate), of the man rather than the woman.¹¹ The woman gets married again and the so-called stigma of her widowhood does not persist. Significantly, one of the more popular religious festivals and fasts, viz., *karvā-chauth*, kept by the wife to pray for the long life of her husband, a practice widespread in the whole of present-day Punjab and most of Uttar Pradesh, has no tradition in the rural areas of Haryana. Her prayers, therefore, do not include her death before her husband, as in the *karvā-chauth* observing areas. Instead, the women observe *komāi-kā-varat*,¹² a fast kept for the long life of the son. This tradition undoubtedly arose out of the practice of widow remarriage and, as one would expect, gives primacy to the son instead of the husband.

KAREWĀ: LEVIRATE MARRIAGE

The custom of widow remarriage has had special features of its own. Known as *karewā*, *karāwo*, or *chaddar andāzi*, it is a throwback to the old Rig Vedic custom of *niyog* (levirate marriage), which was prevalent in the geographical region of Haryana and Punjab associated with the early Vedic Aryan settlements.¹³ *Karewā*, a white sheet colored at the corners, was thrown by the man over the widow's head, signifying his acceptance of her as his wife. This custom still continues. There were and could be certain variations (TUPPER 1881, 93, 123). For example, it could take the form of placing *churries* (glass bangles) on the widow's wrist in full assembly and sometimes even a gold *nāth* (nose ring) in her nose and a red sheet over her head with a rupee tied in one of its corners. This could be followed by the distribution of *gur* (molasses) or sweets. Significantly, this form of remarriage is not accompanied by any kind of religious ceremony, as no woman can be customarily married twice, i.e., go through the ceremony of *biāh* (religious wedding). The widow after *karewā* merely resumes wearing the jewels and colored clothes which she had ceased to wear on her husband's death. In the colonial days even mere cohabitation was considered sufficient to confer all the rights of a valid marriage. However, for cohabitation to be accepted as a remarriage it had to be cohabitation in the man's house. Mere visits to the woman were considered “adulterous” (JOSEPH 1911, 46).

Karewā, as a rule, has been and continues to be primarily a levirate marriage in which the widow is accepted as wife by one of the younger

brothers of the deceased husband; failing him the husband's elder brother; failing him his agnatic first cousin, etc. In fact, the widow's right as to whom she could remarry was not only severely restricted, it could be settled only by her late husband's family. And although the widow could not be compelled to remarry, she was not free to marry without their consent. So complete was their control over the woman and the question of her remarriage that it was freely admitted that the widow was often practically forced to yield to their wishes (JOSEPH 1911, 45). This situation has not changed. The levirate practice with the *dewar*, the younger brother-in-law, is amply reflected in the folklore, freely and jocularly cited among women of all ages and their younger brothers-in-law.

dewar bhābhi kā pyār ho sai
is me kai takrār ho sai

The love between *dewar* and *bhābhi* is unquestioned,
there are no two ways about it.

A more telling but somewhat restrained voice is:

rāṅḍ ke ghar me dewar maulā¹⁴

The *dewar* is ecstatic in a widow's house.

A popular folktale has the custom of levirate marriage as its central theme:

A king had two sons. Both used to go to the forest. One day the younger brother, in order to wed his *bhābhi*, killed his elder brother and left him in the forest. He returned back alone. This aroused the suspicion of his *bhābhi*, who inquired about her husband. The *dewar* replied that his brother was still hunting. The *bhābhi* went to look for her husband in the forest, where she saw vultures hovering around a dead body. The *dewar* dismissed it as a dead animal and advised her not to go near it. The *bhābhi* nevertheless went, and found her husband's dead body. After having given instructions for the performance of her husband's last rites, she cursed her *dewar* by saying:

dewar taṅṅe keṛe paṛe chāhiyeñ,
taṅṅe apne bhāi kā ujār ker apnā bsāyā hai¹⁵

May you rot for ever, brother-in-law;
you have brought devastation to your brother's life in order to set up your own.

The oral tradition of this region is rich in such *dewar-bhābhi* songs

and stories. Their popularity is obviously reinforced by the continuing levirate form of widow remarriage.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND REMARRIAGE

For brothers, whether *dewar* or *jeth* (elder brother-in-law), taking over a dead brother's widow was often the formalization of an already existing relationship. The folk tradition shows the sharing of women among brothers to be a common phenomenon in colonial Haryana. British administrators, observing the practice in early 20th century onwards, recorded that even where there was only one married brother, the other brothers had free access to his wife.¹⁶ M. L. DARLING, writing in 1925, defined it as polyandry (1977, 51).

An oft-repeated story of those days,¹⁷ jocularly related even now to show what a marital association entailed in the past, concerns a new bride who had four or five *jeth* or *dewar*. All of them had free sexual access to her. After fifteen or twenty days of her marriage, the bride requested her mother-in-law to identify her husband from among them. Upon this the mother-in-law came out in the *gali* (street) and started to howl loudly; when asked about it she replied: "It is difficult for me to live in this house any more. I have been married for forty years, yet even now I have never asked anyone to determine the identity of my husband. This fifteen-day-old bride is already asking about her's."

The story gives a peep into the popular perception of sexual exploitation as it existed in those days, its common knowledge, as also its acceptance, albeit in a highly exaggerated manner.

Women's awareness of this exploitation is highlighted even more directly and in a very perceptive manner in a *lok geet* (folk song), not commonly heard these days, sung by a young bride. While cataloguing the enormous work load she is made to tackle in her in-law's house every day, the bride revealingly discloses:

maar kooṭ ke main̄ pāpan geri
dewar kar liyā ghar kā
main̄ to māṛi ho gai he Rām
dhandhā ker ke is ghar kā¹⁸

Beaten and forced to live
with my brother-in-law in sin,
unending house work
has emaciated me, oh God!

In another *rāgini* (song), used for enacting a *swāṅg* (local folk theatre), or *sāṅg*, as it is locally known, the theme revolves around the un-

welcome advances of the *jeth* who forces himself on his sister-in-law and refuses to take no for an answer. It goes as follows:

Jeth aur Bahu

Jeth: chañdmā si shān dekh pari tere mahal me āgyā
 Bahu: bāpā bargā jeth jale kayuñ karan ughāi lāgyā
 Jeth: bhāi merā perdes gayā dīn kaṭe kis ke sahāre
 Bahu: pāñch saat dīn me ājyā jale matnā boli mārē
 Jeth: tu mewā ki pāki dāli main khālun ban subāre
 Bahu: matnā choñch lagāiye pāpi bhar rākhayā zahar chhuhāre
 Jeth: āshik bañdā māsukoñ ke phal toṛ toṛ ke khāgyā
 Bahu: jis ne cheḍi beer birāni, turañt natijā pāgyā

.....

Jeth: mere kamre me chāle ne gori tu batuwā si
 Bahu: sou māruñgi joot oot ke ker rahā badmāsi
 Jeth: joot maar chāhe paag taar le chāhe tuḍwāde phāñsi
 Bahu: kāli nāgan beer parāie matnā samjhe hāñsi¹⁹

Jeth and Bahu

J: Enticed I am to your abode by your beauty.
 B: Your overtures don't befit a father figure.
 J: Your life is barren with my brother away.
 B: Proposition me not, you rascal, he'll soon be back.
 J: You are like ripened fruits, taste I must.
 B: Poisonous are these ripened fruits, touch not.
 J: A lover must possess his beloved.
 B: Punished are those who covet someone else's woman.
 J: Come to me, my sweet one, be mine.
 B: I shall beat you soundly, you scoundrel.
 J: Beat me or humiliate me or hang me, possess you I must.
 B: Don't mock, someone else's woman can be a venomous viper.

There is also an oft-repeated saying, very commonly heard not only in this region but all over northern India with minor linguistic variations, which maintains:

kamzor ki lugāi sabh ki bhābhi

A weak man's wife is everyone's *bhābhi*.

The proverb originates from the earlier practice, given above, which shows the brother-in-law to have sexual access to the sister-in-law.

Even the father-in-law, given a chance, was not above the sexual exploitation of his daughter-in-law. That this was customarily practiced was recorded by British officials in the late 19th century:

Certain villages which need not be named, have the evil reputa-

tion of deliberately getting girls older than their boy husbands in order that the father of the latter may have illicit enjoyment of them (JOSEPH 1911, 19).

In fact, colonial Punjab and Haryana witnessed instances of the father-in-law claiming *karewā* marriage with the widowed daughter-in-law in the mid-1930s (RATTINGAN 1966, 82). From the sexual point of view these attempts may very well have been to legitimize an already existing relationship which had possibly left the widowed *bahu* (daughter-in-law) pregnant. An old folktale highlights these aspects:

A widowed daughter-in-law conceived from her *sasurā* (father-in-law). She was deeply embarrassed about what the people were going to say. The father-in-law reacted to this by asking her to stitch him a quilt full of patches. This quilt he wrapped around himself and sat down in the front courtyard of the house. All the men and women who saw him laughed at the old man and commented on his heavily patched-up quilt. After a few days they stopped, having got used to him and his quilt. It was then that the old man said: "Look here, you woman, now it's all over. People take just a few days to get used to a thing."²⁰

The wide-scale social acceptance in the past of this level of sexual exploitation does not exist now. In fact, there is a universal condemnation of this practice. Even in the past, there were always women who protested against such sexual demands, as seen also in the above-cited *rāgini*. But such women were known to get "packed-off" to the parents—an act which was considered to be a matter of "ultimate shame" for the natal families of the women in question.²¹

FEMALE CONSCIOUSNESS: LEVIRATE AS A REPRESSIVE SYSTEM

The social force behind *karewā* had in the past led to many unmatched alliances in which the *dewar* was sometimes a lot younger. This factor highlights one of the most exploitative and repressive aspects of widow remarriage. The folk tradition attempted to make a virtue out of this:

baḍi bahu baḍe bhāg
chhoṭā bandrā ghaṇṇe suhāg²²

An elder or taller wife brings luck,
so also a younger or shorter bridegroom.

This practice was also made fun of and laughed at, as, for example, in the nonsense rhyme vastly popular among children, which nevertheless

underlines this as a common occurrence:

gor gaḍi bhai gor gaḍi
baṅṅa chhoṭṭa bahu baḍi

Oh what fun!
The bridegroom is younger than the bride!

The perception of women concerned, showing the pathetic irony of the situation and the torment that a physically mature wife underwent with a child for a husband, is shown in the following *lok geet*:

dhundhā dhundhā ri baigeniā se chhoṭā
paani ko jāyun mere sāth sāth jāve
rove rove ri yeh to neju pakar kai
rovo mut bāle saiṅyāñ, jhiko mut bāle saiṅyāñ
duṅgi duṅgi ji tumhe phuliyā mangāi kai
sone ko jāun, mere sāth sāth jāve
rove rove ri ammā ammā ker kai
rovo mut bāle saiṅyāñ, jhiko mut bāle saiṅyāñ
duṅgi duṅgi ji tumhe guḍiyā mangāye kai²³

I am married to a mere child,
he follows me when I go to fetch water,
crying and clinging he follows,
cry not my little beloved, don't be vexed my little beloved.
I'll get you sweets to eat;
he follows me when I go to sleep,
Mother, Mother, he cries,
don't cry my little beloved, don't be vexed my little beloved,
I'll get you a doll to play with.

Such *karewā* marriage where the *dewar* was a mere child, are remembered by many in the rural areas to have taken place in their own families.²⁴ Many cases could be cited by people from memory. Although there may not be much of a difference in the ages now, it is still considered to be not uncommon for the *karewā* wife to be older by anything between two to ten years.²⁵ This fact has kept the given folk tradition, somewhat exaggerated though it may be, alive and relevant.

The widow had not always given in easily to the levirate marriage. She resisted the custom of remarriage which was designed to retain her within the family of her deceased husband. The district officials under the colonial administration saw many petitions from young widows seeking sanction to marry men of their own choice.²⁶ Many widows denied that *karewā* had taken place (*CENSUS OF INDIA* 1921,

244). In the former case, for reasons of their own which I have tackled elsewhere (CHOWDHRY 1989), the petitions were not entertained by the colonial administrators. In the latter, it was very difficult for widows to prove their claim for, as pointed out earlier, even cohabitation could be and was recognized as *karewā*.

A woman's real revolt and release from this system, which at once showed that it was conceived of as being repressive, was, and is, to have a runaway marriage. At the folk-consciousness level, this phenomenon has been reflected in the popular association of running away with a *rāṇḍ*.²⁷ The term *Rāṇḍ bhāj gai* (the widow has run away) is popularly used now not only for widows but also for any runaway female.

This running away associated with widows, though not necessarily exclusive to them, has also found reflection in the local proverbs, for example:

ughlatiyāñ nai kise kasār²⁸

A runaway woman gets no traditional farewell.

Yet another one chides those who lament a runaway woman:

ghar tiriya sai lekho māñge
bhoo sukṛāi sowe
keh ghāghā ji teen chutiya
ughal gai nai rowe²⁹

Fools are they
who ask the wife for an account,
who sleep on the floor,
who mourn a runaway woman.

The increasing instances of runaway widows succeeded in enlarging the scope of widow remarriage. Consequently, it has no longer remained confined to its levirate form but has expanded to be known as *punar-vivāh*, i.e., literally, remarriage. *Punar-vivāh* also means that remarriage is no longer the sole concern of the widow's late husband's family. It has necessarily brought back into the picture her natal family, as they alone can find a second match for her in case she refused to accept *karewā*. In fact, in recent years the breaches in levirate are not entirely uncommon, as the young issueless widows in many cases go back to their parents and get married again. Here it may be noted that remarriage means an alliance which can "never be as worthy" as the *biāh* (religious wedding), and the bridegrooms in *punar-vivāh* are invariably "deficient" in some way or other.³⁰ This *punar-vivāh*,

generally arranged by the brother, has also found its reflection in the folktales and local proverbs. A short folktale titled *Rāṅd kaun*³¹ ("Who's a widow?") delineates the role of a brother in a widow's remarriage. It portrays a woman whose husband, son, and brother are held responsible for having committed a major crime. The king inflicts the death sentence on two of them and asks the woman to choose the one she wants to save. The woman opts for her brother and observes: "If my brother dies, I shall never get him back again, as the source from which he sprang has already dried up. If he lives I can always get married again and also beget a son."

A popular proverb underlines the same:

rāṅd te vā jis ke marjāñ bhāi
khasam te aur bhi ker le³²

Death of the husband doesn't turn a woman into a widow [as she can always marry again]. A woman remains a widow if her brother is dead.

Significantly, in their basic simplicity, the two forms of remarriage (*karewā* and *punar-vivāh*) closely resemble each other. The important ceremony in the latter involves the exchange of *jaimālās* (garlands) by the bride and the groom and not the *pherā* (a core ritual) ceremony of *biāh* (religious wedding).³³ Also, the male control of her marriage partner, both in *karewā* and in *punar-vivāh*, remains intact. Her own choice is not countenanced; if made, it has to be in a runaway match.

CONCLUSION

Interestingly, for a variety of reasons which are outside the scope of this paper, the widow remarriage custom in both its forms of *karewā* and *punar-vivāh*, with primacy being given to the former, is being increasingly accepted among the traditional downgraders of this practice, such as the Rajputs, Baniyas, and others. Referring to these castes, a recent district gazetteer of Haryana points out: "When none of the brothers has accepted their widowed sister-in-law as wife, *punar-vivāh* is performed anywhere in their caste" (*BHIWANI DISTRICT GAZETTEER, 1980 1982, 67*).

The widow remarriages in this region have become so common that one estimate suggests that only one widow in a thousand is left out.³⁴ This wider acceptance is not only an officially recorded fact but can also be perceived at the popular level when a proverb like "*ājā beṭi lele phere, yoh margayā to aur bhotere*" (Come daughter, get married; if this husband dies there are many more) is no longer used in a

derogatory sense, as it had once been used long ago (PURSER and FANSHAWE 1880, 53), but merely to illustrate and highlight a well-known fact.

This paper has sought to highlight the existence of widow remarriage as a social reality, its popular acceptance and even celebration, although primarily in its levirate form. Yet, the perceptions of the rural populace of this region towards widow remarriage, despite it being a clear alternative to the Brahmanical code and model of *sati*, reveal this custom to be a repressive one in the female consciousness. The oral tradition also reveals the resultant attempts of widows to back out of this practice, and the breaches in its levirate form.

NOTES

1. The *sati* issue has seen a spate of academic research recently. For a comprehensive account see DATTA 1988 and SHARMA 1988.

2. Roop Kanwar's case is the most recent one in India to take the socially conscious and intellectual world by storm. She burnt herself on the funeral pyre of her husband on the 4th of September 1987 at Deorala, a village in the Sikar district of Rajasthan. For details see DATTA 1988, preface.

3. This was repeatedly mentioned in a large number of civil judgments. See for example the case of Joginder *vs* Kartara in *INDIA CASES* 1937, 719-723.

4. There was a long list of "low castes" or "inferior castes," also known as the untouchables or the *Kamins* (menials). Chief among them in terms of their numerical strength were: Chamar, Dhanak, Chuhra, Kumhar, Tarkhan, Nai, Teli, Jhimar, Jogi, Chimba, Dhobi, Mirasi, Julaha, Maniar, Bharbhunja, Gadaria, Kunjra, Od, Bhatiara, Aheri (Heri), Darzi, etc. See *CENSUS OF INDIA* 1931, 281-302.

5. A commonly heard proverb, quoted by village males as well as females. It was first recorded in the 1890s: see MACONACHIE 1890, 46. Here I wish to point out that in translating the local dialect, emphasis is on conveying the mood and the message rather than its mere literal meaning. I also wish to record my thanks to Dr Omi Manchanda for helping me to translate these passages.

6. Cited by women in the village of Dighal and the village of Dujjana of the Rohtak district. Also cited in YADAV 1960, 469.

7. This was found to be very popular among men. Also see YADAV 1960, 427.

8. This behavior is a common sight all over Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh during the Holi festival. My own observation relates to the celebration of this festival in the village of Chhara of the Rohtak district. For details of Holi celebrations see MALIK 1981, 44-59.

9. A very common proverb used by both men and women. Also recorded in MALIK 1981, 57.

10. In the late 19th century, W. Crooke, writing about the Holi festival in northern India, observed: "Finally comes the indecency which is a distinct element in the observance (of Holi). There seems to be reason to believe that . . . promiscuous intercourse was regarded as a necessary part of the rite." For a full account see CROOKE 1894, 387-392.

11. This was the general consensus of opinion among the rural women of Haryana,

in the villages that I visited in the course of my fieldwork, 1986–1988.

12. Interview with Vidya Vati, Delhi, 24 December 1987. Born 1918, married to Hardwari Lal, member of Lok Sabha from Rohtak (1984–1989), she has kept in very close touch with rural life despite having lived in different urban centers from the age of sixteen.

13. *Niyog* was a practice of levirate marriage. Later, during the *Mahābhārata* times, *niyog* came to signify cohabitation by the wife with men other than her husband under certain specific conditions such as the impotence of the husband and the “moral” and “religious duty” to beget sons to continue the family line. The example of Kunti is a case in point.

14. Heard in the village of Asodha Todran of Rohtak district, but mainly among the men. Also recorded by YADAV 1960, 263.

15. Narrated by Dheer Singh of the village of Asodha Todran, Rohtak district, 21–27 December 1988; fifty years old. The same story may be found in HARIYANAVI 1962, 129–131.

16. P. J. Fagan, writing in 1904, observed: “It is not uncommon among Jats and lower castes for a woman to be shared in common by several brothers, though she’s recognized as the wife of only the eldest of them.” See FAGAN 1908, 65; for a similar observation also see DARLING 1977, 51.

17. Narrated by Chottu Devi, in the village of Dujjana, Rohtak district, 6 June 1986; born 1921, her late husband was a big landowner in Dujjana.

18. This folk song was remembered almost exclusively by the older generation of women in the village of Bandh in Karnal district. Also see HARIYANAVI 1962, 17–18.

19. Narrated by Khem Chand of the village of Govad, Sonapat district, a 65-year-old *Sāṅgi* (singer of local folk songs). Also see CHAND, n.d., 17–18.

20. Narrated by Vidya Vati, Delhi, 24 December 1987.

21. Interview with R.M. Hooda, Rohtak, 1 June 1986; born 1938, the village of Makrauli-Kalan, Rohtak district, B.A.L.L.B., Jat College Rohtak; practicing law since 1962 at the district level, has ancestral lands in the village.

22. This is a very commonly used local proverb. Also see VERMA 1972, 43.

23. Here, it may be noted, as given above, that even the *biāh* (religious wedding) could be and was performed between an older girl and a very young boy. The above-cited folk song was almost exclusive to women. Narrated by women of the village of Bandh, district of Karnal. Also see YADAV 1960, 331.

24. Ram Chander recalls that his grandmother was married to his grandfather, who was merely three years old when he got married to his 18-year-old widowed sister-in-law. She literally brought him up and then raised her own family. Interview with Ram Chander, 50 years old, the village of Bandh, Karnal district, 20–21 August 1988.

25. Gathered from the field interviews in Haryana, 1986–1988.

26. The instructions sent to the district officials read: “Often a young widow will present a petition to the Deputy Commissioner for sanction to marry a man of her choice, but with such applications he is wise to have nothing to do.” ROHTAK DISTRICT GAZETTEER, 1910 1911, 90.

27. Interview with Ram Singh, an Arya Samaj Upadeshik, the village of Bharpoda, Rohtak district, 12 August 1988.

28. Confined mostly to men; narrated by R.M. Hooda, Rohtak, 1 June 1986. Also see VERMA 1972, 96.

29. Narrated by Khem Chand Rathi, New Delhi, 24 May 1986; born 1912, the village of Rajlugarhi, Sonapat district, he now practices law in the Supreme Court. He and his wife have kept in close contact with their village and with their other family

members living in different villages of Haryana. Also see YADAV 1960, 446.

30. Interview with Ram Chander, village of Bandh in Karnal, 20–21 August 1988. Ram Chander opined that some compromise regarding the boy's looks, economic status, or marital and social standing, has invariably to be made in such cases.

31. Narrated by Chhoth Devi, village of Dujjana, Rohtak district. Also given in MALIK 1981, 131.

32. Commonly known among both men and women. See also MALIK 1981, 131.

33. The Baniyas alone are known to marry off a young issue-less widow "who has not lived with her husband" with the usual ceremonies. The *pherā* ceremony, unless the widow is a "virgin," is prohibited. See *BHIWANI DISTRICT GAZETTEER, 1980* 1982, 67.

34. Interview with Raghbir Singh, the village of Singhpura, Rohtak district, 6–7 August 1988; 65 years old. An *ex-sarpanch* of his village, he is currently the President of the Singhpura Gurukul and an active Arya Samajist.

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