

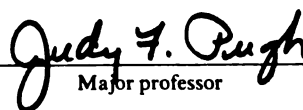


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HEALING THROUGH THE SPIRITS: EMBODIMENT, EXPERIENCE AND
NARRATIVES OF SPIRIT POSSESSION AMONG THE JAUNSARIS
OF UTTRAKHAND, INDIA

By

Krishnakali Majumdar

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ABSTRACT

HEALING THROUGH THE SPIRIT: EMBODIMENT, EXPERIENCE AND NARRATIVES OF SPIRIT POSSESSION AMONG THE JAUNSARIS OF UTTRAKHAND, INDIA

By

Krishnakali Majumdar

My research focuses on how Jaunsari people make meaning in their daily life, how they seek to predict and control events and how they deal with existential issues of the human condition. By calling attention to the specific experiences of spirit possession, I am calling attention to a social phenomenon which helps shape, define and change the lifeworld of the people concerned. My main argument is that spirit possession has healing powers since it provides an articulation of suffering as well as an interpretation of contradictions and tensions in the social order. The healing process involves a continuous and persistent attempt to make this experience meaningful. By providing a new meaning for the experience of possession, Jaunsaris are able to transform their sense of self and recontextualize their experience.

In my analysis of Jaunsari understanding of spirit possession, I have focused on "narratives" of spirit

possession; the way they are organized and have a particular syntax and meaning order. Narrative is approached here from a "critical phenomenological perspective" as espoused by Good (1994), who attends to the imaginative linking of experiences and events into a meaningful story or a plot.

In choosing to explore spirit possession, its production of meaning and its structuring of experiences in narrative form, I situate my work in the line developed by Boddy (1988), Good (1994), Kapferer (1991) and Scheper-Hughes (1994) stemming from the traditions of existentialism, phenomenology and social interactionism. For guiding my analysis, I will begin by considering the embodiment of spirit possession from the perspective of practice theory; I will identify the process of symbolization accomplished first by diagnosis of spirit possession and later, by the whole process of initiation and healing. Turning then to the discursive level, I will sort out the various themes that structure the experience, the subjunctivising elements that give creative potency to the story, and the pragmatic of spirit possession that reveals the structure of social relations and power.

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Chapter 1

Methodology and its Limitations

One of the major epistemological debates in postmodernist sociocultural anthropology concerns what Marcus and Fischer (1987) have called "crisis of representation." The postmodernist trend in anthropology has been towards resolving the spurious binary opposition¹ between self and other, subject and object, and researcher and researched, to name a few, and "deconstructing" theoretical and methodological tools used in the portrayal of the "other." Some postmodernists have called for Anthropologists to "decolonize" our minds (hooks 1995, Harrison 1995), which can involve the simultaneous processes of familiarization and defamiliarization (Marcus and Fischer 1987; Rosaldo 1989). Others like Jones (1970/1988) bid for a "native anthropology" as a part of the "essential decolonization of anthropological knowledge."

-
1. The artificial separation of Psychological and Medical Anthropology reflects the fallacious binary contradiction between mind and body that afflicts much of anthropological discourse.

Native anthropology reminds me of the cautionary words of my professors at the University of Delhi (who are natives practicing anthropology). They alerted me to the fact that I was being recruited to conduct fieldwork in my native country to collect otherwise inaccessible data. In a sense, then, I would become a glorified informant of a culture at a distance. However, I must add here that my national, ethnic, and gender identities have definitely sharpened my sensitivity and made me aware of certain aspects of the culture that I had set out to investigate and of the literature and theory that has accumulated on South Asia. Jones (1970:472) has pointed to the double standard of anthropological training:

the rule that the student should not work in his culture seems to be reversed when it comes to the foreign students, the "native" who is studying for a Ph.D in U.S. . . . The Philosophy concerning the field training of the foreign students, therefore, is opposite to that which pertains to training American students.

Interestingly enough, the "natives" who were studying for a Ph.D in the U.S. often times did not study their own culture but the "exotic other" (the "tribal" or the "peasant" or the "minority") in their country. Is this then truly a native anthropology? At what level would an ethnographer become a true native--belonging to the same culture area or to the same community or to the same village? At what level would the power differential between the researcher and the researched become most equitable?

Jones (1970/1988) also observes that even though the "native" has been trained in western anthropological theory and methods, the "native" as an "insider" involved in field research in his or her native culture formulated little theory. That is, there have been native anthropologists but little native anthropology. He urges that if native anthropologists want to decolonize anthropology, the "natives" must begin to formulate theory.

While I agree that the recent rise in subaltern studies has further challenged the discipline's colonial legacy, Jones overlooked the fact that the "natives" were involved in theory building in the past. However, their voices have been muted and their knowledge "buried" (Harrison 1992, 1995). In fact, the inattention to feminist works and "Third World" anthropologists (Talal Asad being the exception) by postmodernist scholars like Clifford, Marcus and Fischer is a case in point.

Feminist scholars have been highly critical of the mainstream theory-building but their critiques have never been taken seriously and have been charged with not being "critical enough." What is interesting is that when the same feminist critiques were appropriated by postmodernists and translated into postmodern terminology, they became fashionable and were taken very seriously (Mascia-Lees, Sharpe & Cohen 1989; Wolf 1992). For example, the study of the "other/native" as a subject was made trendy by

postmodernists, but it was as early as 1952 when Simone de Beauvoir initiated the study of woman as the "other," as a subject and an engaged being. Anthropologists who critique objective, detached, scholarly studies have long been suspicious of feminist works that have "written against the grain" while at the same time they have appropriated the critiques those feminist scholars have leveled against mainstream theory and translated those theories into the postmodern genre.

Coming back to the point made by Jones about native anthropology, a number of scholars have pointed to the vantage point of "natives" in theory building, an idea that has come to be known as standpoint theory (Harding 1987, Harstock 1983, Harraway 1985, Rosaldo 1989). Feminist standpoint theorists claim that objectivity in field research is impossible and that the position of the researcher in relation to the researched shapes the social reality that an ethnographer documents and interprets.

The crucial point made here is that those who have a subordinate position have a less distorted and more complete knowledge of the society in which they live. Rosaldo claims "the dominated usually understand the dominant better than the reverse. In coping with their lives, they simply must" (1989:189). According to standpoint theory, in order to acquire a more complete picture of the social reality the researcher wishes to study, she needs to identify the margin

and its members and, in their struggle against the center, she will find a less distorted picture of the reality.

The postmodern turn in anthropology has been more concerned with "representations," and hence anthropologists have particularly focused on only one part of the ethnography research process--ethnography as a written product of fieldwork--rather than on the fieldwork itself. The "reflexivity" they talk about is less with "doing fieldwork." The audience of our ethnography is not our informants (unable to read a foreign language) but other anthropologists. Ethnographies have little impact on the people who were our "informants;" we do however change their lives in many profound ways. As anthropologists, we do not remain detached scholars (although some may claim otherwise) but sometimes unwittingly become intimately involved with household, intervillage, and regional politics. Nonetheless, this postmodern reflexivity of how to describe, write about and relate to the "other" has made us aware of "anthropology for what and for whom" (Blakey 1995).

While the postmodernists have been sensitive to the form and style of "writing culture" and "authority," feminists have been attentive to the power differential between the researcher and researched. Feminists' consideration of and sensitivity to power as an integral part of research has intensified from their understanding of and having been hurt by gender injustice and the masculinist

social science redefinitions proposed by postmodernists
(Wolf 1992:135).

Harrison (1993:407) is wary that:

the concern with the dispersing authority and
engaging in dialogue is often reduced to the
polyphonic style whereby a form of narrative
ventriloquism is performed, creating a magical
illusion of the other's coming to voice.

She elects for "empowering informants by creating new forms
of ethnographic relationships. . .coauthorship and
coeditorship. . .imparting research and writing skills"
(1993:407) and a space for "talking back." In this way we
become ethnographically responsible to our audience as well
as to our informants. This sort of engaged research
involves nonexploitative methodology and takes into account
the ethnographer as a field worker and as an author as well.

These issues of power, privilege and representation
have plagued me since the time I started preparing for my
field research. I was uncomfortable about doing fieldwork
among strangers whose lives I would invade, whose knowledge
I would appropriate, and to whom I would give nothing in
exchange. I would at the end of the fieldwork, return home,
get a degree and make a career for myself. This power
differential could, I realized, change. I realized that my
informants would know how dependent I was on their
cooperation in my field research and, being a single woman,
there was a potential for the power balance to be reversed.

The ensuing question is, then, must we relinquish

field-based research? It was anthropology that had provided me with an understanding of different colorful textures of cultural lives around the world, and furnished me with an "anthropological lens" to see the commonalities of patterns that underlie the textured fabric that we call culture. In order to "defamiliarize" ourselves and "others" we have to do field research. It involves observing, hearing and experiencing to learn about the way of life in another culture. The legacy of the tradition of fieldwork in anthropology defines and distinguishes the anthropological perspective from other social science perspectives. The experience of fieldwork is said to transform us through a kind of rite of passage, the liminal phase being the period when we are in the field. Without it, the discipline's founding fathers claim, we cannot vividly evoke the rich texture of the culture we study.

Even though this chapter sets out and situates my research methodology, this was written at the tail end. After I finished my research in "the field," I attempted to think "reflexively" (the trend in the neocolonial era) about my research project. I realized that the end product would be very different from what I had stated in my research proposal. The research methodology I had proposed was "scientific," starting with several hypotheses and the kinds of data that I would require to test those hypotheses. This was not my first ethnographic research experience, so I knew

how problematic scientific methods are in field situations.

My choice of community had been influenced by a variety of factors. Unlike many anthropologists, my study was not oriented to study a community, rather it was issue-based. The issue that I wished to study was spirit possession and its various implications in healing and in the development of self-identity.

Originally, I had planned to work in the Tehri Garhwal district of Uttar Pradesh, India. However, I was persuaded by a research scholar (who had just completed her fieldwork in that area and was familiar with my research interest) to work among Jaunsaris (District Jaunsar-Bawar, west of Tehri Garhwal) who according to her were quite "traditional" in their lifestyle and who continue to practice traditional medicine. I planned accordingly and solicited the help of local bureaucrats to choose a village and to introduce me to the villagers. I was introduced as an "anthropologist" studying at a university in America, who was interested in learning about their traditional healing system.

The task of explaining why you are there is always a contending factor when the field site is a remote village and the researcher speaks and looks different. The village that became my base camp had been exposed to anthropological invasion before (Berreman 1972 and Majumdar 1962 had conducted fieldwork in the neighboring villages), but some people made it very clear that I was being tolerated. I did

face the wrath of a number of politicians who suspected that I had connections with the CIA and, as no foreigners can enter that area, that the institution had hired a "desi" (from the plains) to spy on the army base not too far from the village. They did eventually leave me alone, but not before I showed them the permission letter from the Indian Ministry of Education and my research proposal.

Once in the field, it took me several months to build networks and alliances to enable me to start researching the issue that was central to my doctoral research. I had been maintaining my "objective distance;" I was the anthropologist. So the villagers treated me as an anthropologist. I was the participant observer, religiously observing and taking notes on their oral texts and daily activities.

To an ethnographer, successfully establishing oneself on the "inside" of a culture is a goal achieved through participant observation. It is an art to be mastered. It is not, however, to "go native" and collapse the objective distance which is so essential a feature of scientific inquiry (Bourdieu 1990). This is a fundamental methodological consideration for an anthropologist in the "field."

However, is it possible to maintain the fragile balance between the subjective distance and the objective distance while conducting anthropological fieldwork? Rosaldo

criticizes this preoccupation with objectivity as the valid scientific method and argues that "social analysis can be done--differently but quite validly--either from up close or from a distance" (1988:188).

The issue of "participant observation" brings to the forefront both the authenticity and the limits of knowledge gained from such a practice. We get a feel for what it means to be a "native" of the culture through participant observation. A few ethnographers have pointed out, and rightly so, that one has to be born into it to truly sense it. For it is through the process of enculturation and socialization that the practical sense (local knowledge) flows from the body inscribed by the habitus (structure). But what about being able to maintain "the objective distance from the object to play the game as a game while waiting to leave it in order to tell it" (Bourdieu 1990:34). This consideration, I feel, is more an issue of our political awareness as anthropologists and how we collect and analyze our data.

I had two basic concerns: my location in Indian society and in the U.S. academia; and my own non-experience with spirit possession. As a socio-cultural anthropologist and as a feminist, I characterize my location within the academic discipline of the first world at the margin. I have sense of belonging to the "first world" but not being in it. In the "first world," I am characterized as a

graduate student from the "third world" and often called upon to give the "native's point of view." As a graduate student conducting research in the Indian Himalayas, I was in the eyes of Jaunsari people, an outsider, not a "typical Indian women" (*bharatiya nari*). My status as a researcher from a foreign land with acquired foreign ways, and my position as a woman still unmarried at the age of 30 definitely characterized in their minds my location outside the Indian soil. Nonetheless, my location was much envied by the women - I was independent, authoritative, free to make my own decisions, and without any responsibility of familial burdens. These qualifications make my space seamless, belonging to neither qualification, and yet contained by the bifurcated images. It is from this location I seek to understand Jaunsari culture.

I certainly never, at any point during my fieldwork, experienced possession by spirits, an experience central to my analysis. Neither did I attempt to participate in rituals which would enable the spirits to inhabit my body. Did I then not fail in my anthropological endeavor? I argue that had I experienced spirit possession, my experience would not be in any way similar to that of a Jaunsari woman. My experience of spirit possession would depend much on my habitus and my appreciation of shared human conditions.

I feel that despite my non-participation in possession rituals, the description and analysis that follows is as

meaningful and authentic as it would have been had I participated, although I am aware of the limitation that this position has in terms of the primary data.

In the field I was involved in a number of events and rituals and in everyday routine life. Because I had made an effort to learn their language, they felt I was serious in doing research in their community and tolerated all my incessant questions and patiently answered me. Affectionately they would call me the "daughter of the village" (*dianthuri*) and took pride in escorting me to distant villages to document spirit possession rituals.

My research interest in spirit possession focused on the experience of possession and the role it plays in the contestation of resistance to cultural attitudes and rules. This called for focused interviews with individuals who have experienced possession. By amplifying the individual's experience within a given cultural context, I have attempted to link agency with structure. I focused on the sequence of possession events and my interviews involved extended dialogues centered around the individual's perception and interpretation of those events. To acquire additional information about past events, I collected the life histories and memories of these women.

I also interviewed women who had never experienced possession. The interviews focused on their perceptions of spirit possession, the "possessed" and the types of persons

who are most vulnerable to possession by spirits. I elicited their responses to certain private possession episodes and their interpretation of what was going on. This has enriched my data and helped me to see/interpret the events from different social positions. I also questioned them on their life problems (*dukh*) and life-stresses (*pira*) and the logic behind the strategies they came up with to cope with them.

The knowledge of indigenous cosmology is essential to understanding the underlying structure and logic of the praxis. I documented in detail the symbols, patterns, hymns, and spirits associated with each possession ritual. I interviewed individuals at length on the categories and methods of classification of spirits that are known to possess people and the myths and legends associated with those spirits in order to understand the hierarchical structure of the local pantheon and its relation to pan-Indic patterns.

After my return from the field, I found myself searching for a coherent story, sifting through the various ambiguities, multiplicities and contradictions of "facts" in the fieldnotes and "headnotes." As an ethnographer, I was faced with not only the incongruity in the fieldnotes but the task of ferreting out the logic and structure that underlie the contradictions and inconsistencies in the data. Another task that troubled me was trying to be authentic in

representing people's lives, while not running the risk of disclosing information that would hurt my informants. In order to maintain the confidentiality of people's lives, I have taken the authorial license to create composite characters. I am aware that, in a sense, I manipulated the data. However, I have been careful to maintain their authority by documenting stories about them and trying not to be a ventriloquist by speaking for them.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Considerations

Historically, since the emergence of medical anthropology in the 1970s, medical anthropologists have appropriated a number of key terms and concepts from biomedical discourse. However, in recent years the field of medical anthropology has had to face a barrage of criticism for its rampant medical bias in its treatment of biomedicine as a "natural system." It has been accused of being a handmaiden to biomedicine and hence to capitalism.

The regular appearance in medical anthropological texts of such terms as health, illness, disease, clinical reality and cure indicates the inheritance by medical anthropologists of the assumptions that underlie the biomedical model, the most important assumption being the mind-body dichotomy. This inheritance has been a serious handicap in cross-cultural research, as a growing body of evidence suggests that the biomechanistic model is anything but universal (Kleinman 1988, Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1990, Taussig 1980).

Drawing most heavily from the poststructuralist genre of Foucault and the feminist philosopher Susan Sontag, Scheper-Hughes (1990), in a vigorous critique of the reification of medical anthropology, has raised some epistemological issues and confronted the limits and cultural assumptions of scientific thought. She argues (along with Taussig 1980, Comaroff 1982, 1985 and Young 1982) that the objectification of illness and healing into isolable entities has lead to the medicalization of every complaint and disorder, even of social problems, and to the conceptualization of the body as a machine and of illness as purely a biological phenomenon. Further, Comaroff (1982) points out that the same existential questions are raised when exploring both the explanations of disease and the explanations of the divine. Hence, this leads to the creation of artificial categories in analysis and to the conclusion that there may well be a religious dimension in all forms of healing.

Taussig (1980) has shown how, in modern society, by denying the human elements embodied in symptoms, signs and therapy, we "mystify" them and "reproduce a political ideology" in the guise of science. He delineates two themes: (1) the reification of symptoms, signs and treatment, and (2) the medicalization of social problems. This reification shifts attention away from the contradictions of social structure to focus instead on the

problems of the individual. This leads to treating symptoms and signs as "things" instead of focusing on institutions, which are the root cause of the symptoms. Taussig also points out that illness and healing, far from being biological phenomena, are "ideological practices" that reproduce social relationships and that are products of particular historical and social processes.

Echoing Taussig's sentiments, Scheper-Hughes calls for the "demedicalization of life in modern society," and suggests that we look at social realities like "affliction," for "ours must be an anthropology of affliction and not simply an anthropology of medicine" (1990:197). This point has been amplified by several others who advocate that we look beyond illness and disease experiences to other life experiences such as suffering (Hahn 1984), misfortune (Worsley 1982) or sickness (Young 1982).

The medicalization of research on spirit possession is one such example (cf. Csordas 1987). The fundamental tension between the reductive and mechanistic model derived from biomedical research and context-related phenomenological studies is magnified in the case of spirit possession research. The emphasis on the somatization of spirit possession reduces the whole analysis to the biological body.

I find Scheper-Hughes' invitation to an "anthropology of affliction" very appealing. She resists

compartmentalizing and reducing human experience to one domain of human experience--the medical domain--and proposes that we take into consideration other aspects of culture such as social, political, personal and aesthetic aspects. This suggestion resonates with the model proposed by Good and Good, who are antagonistic to the mechanistic and reductionistic model of biomedicine, and who propose to view culture "as configurations of meaning and discourse in terms of which human reality is constituted" (1981:174). They recognize that for an effective analysis of human action we need to explore the dialectics between the individual (who shapes and is shaped by the structural forces) and the structure. The biomedical model, by focusing on the individual, reduces the experience to individual biology. Those who focus on the individual emphasizing the psychological aspects are equally problematic for they reduce complex reality to constructions of individual psychology. This is to say that the trend suggested by Scheper-Hughes (1990), Young (1982) and Hahn (1984) is of great import not only in medical anthropology but in anthropology in general.

Recently, anthropology as a whole has seen a theoretical reformulation, a reconfiguration of theories in which the dialectic between the individual and structure has become the central concern. This theoretical shift gained its momentum from the poststructuralist emphasis on actor-

oriented anthropology and from feminist scholarship, which centralizes the subjects and their actual experience. By understanding the logic embedded in the dialectical relationship between the individual and the structure, we hope to get a picture of how structure defines the social reality and how the people within that structure define themselves. This helps to deconstruct our own concepts and biases to present how the cultural context of the society influences the definition of Individual and provides us with tools to effectively portray the Other. So, it is no surprise that psychological anthropology has resurfaced with its emphasis on the study of how the self needs to be defined within a cultural context known as the behavioral environment.² Within the culture and personality school of thought, Individual was seen as culture writ large, as an automaton, a puppet working under the direction of culture. The new theoretical insights from postmodernism, poststructuralism and feminist works have pointed out that the individual is an active agent interacting with others to contest, negotiate and construct a meaningful and viable world. Another critical insight has been in the revision of the meaning of everyday life to uncover the "subversive" meaning and intent that lie behind the most ordinary and mundane activities (Bakhtin 1984, Comaroff 1985, de Certeau

² This has been pointed out by Ortner (1984), Marsella, DeVos & Hsu (1985), Jackson and Karp (1990).

1984, Taussig 1987).

These shifts in the focus of contemporary cultural anthropology have resulted in bracketing the researcher's concepts and categories and in attending to the local constructions of logic and concepts in order to interpret and convey the experience of the Other (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1987). The anthropological discussions of the experience of the Other have been informed by Husserl's concept of lebenswelt--life world--which is central to the analysis of the relationship between the individual and his/her taken-for-granted world. This perspective enables us to discern the relationship between the individual's experience of human suffering and the context in which the individual's experience is embedded. This accentuation on experience in the study of the dialectics of self and culture brings under examination certain key concepts proposed by psychological anthropologists--namely self, personhood and the body. In fact, Scheper-Hughes (1994) characterizes the decade of the 1980s as "theoretically driven by a concern with the overlapping domains of body, self, emotion, reflexivity and resistance" (229).

Several studies have suggested *embodiment* as a central paradigm in medical anthropology (Scheper-Hughes 1994, Csordas 1990). Csordas implicates "embodiment" as a "methodological paradigm" in the study of culture and self,

with the "body" as the productive starting point. The body possessed by spirit, according to Csordas, becomes the space for interaction with the spirit. Hence it is not surprising, Csordas argues, that possession is often restricted to somatic changes or illness. But Csordas points out that the "body" is the "existential ground of culture" (1990:5) where social, political and moral issues are dealt with.

Body has always been a topic of interest among structuralists and symbolists, who see an exchange in the meaning between the social and natural worlds. Traditionally, concern for the body meant recognizing the extent to which bodily considerations mirror the concerns of the group, emphasizing coherence and continuity. The body, thus, emerged as the microcosm of the social world, embodying and naturalizing the social structure in this process.

In her classic study of cosmologies, Mary Douglas (1966, 1970:11-18) draws our attention to the symbolic equations between the natural human body and the associated social systems and points out that the control of the natural body reflects the axis of control of the social body--the social structure. Highlighting the theme of the human body as a "natural symbol," Douglas (1970:93) states that:

The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular

view of the society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the other. As a result of this interaction the body itself is a highly restricted medium of expression.

There have been numerous monographs that stress this homologous association between the human body and social structure, showing how body is used as a cognitive map to represent native cosmology, village structure, social categories and identities. For example, T. Turner (1980 in Scheper-Hughes 1994), writing about how societies reproduce the kind of bodies they need, developed the concept of "social skin" to express how the social categories are "inscribed" on the body-self. He describes the body as a "symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialization is enacted" (1980:112 in Scheper-Hughes 1994).

Body symbolism works on several levels. Foucault (1979, 1980) goes beyond the "social skin," with its emphasis on coherence and consensus, to reveal the violated, defeated, and fragmented bodies in order to show the effect of political struggle operating on the body. In her essay "Embodied Knowledge" (1994), Scheper-Hughes notes the importance of the "Foucaultian body" in stimulating critical thinking in contemporary medical anthropology. The interpretive medical anthropologists eagerly appropriated this third level of body symbolism--body politic--with their concern for the alienated, afflicted, and suffering body.

Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987), following Mary Douglas (1966, 1970), regard the human body as a "natural symbol." They prescribe a view of the body as a site for a power struggle for personal, social and political ends. Borrowing the concept of "embodied personhood" from B. Turner (1982), "social skin" from T. Turner (1980) and "biopower" of Foucault's body politic, they try to relate the sentient body to its social and political aspects.

Deconstructing the biological view of body, Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1990) suggest viewing the body as a "symbolic artifact," naturally and culturally constructed; a product of historical process. They focus and analyze medical anthropology's body along three axes which correlate to the three epistemologies in anthropology:

- (1) Body-self, which relates to the phenomenology of body or lived-experience
- (2) Social-body, or the image of the body as reflected in social relationships and social structure and in epistemological issues raised by structural-functionalism and structuralism
- (3) Body-politic, referring to social and political control as emphasized by poststructuralism as a domain of inquiry

These three levels of analysis are separate but overlapping.

According to Scheper-Hughes (1994), the "body" in critical medical anthropology emerges as a space (she calls it

terrain/locus) where social truths and contradictions are reproduced, and as a space for contestation, negotiation and creativity.

One caveat, however, comes from the Kleinmans who have often been criticized for their emphasis on clinical reality to account for illness. They write (1991:276):

The interpretation of some person's or group's suffering as the reproduction of oppressive relationships of production or the symbolization of dynamic conflicts in the interior of the self, or as resistance to authority, is a transformation of everyday experience of the same order as those who pathologize reconstructions within biomedicine. Nor is it morally superior to anthropologize distress, rather than medicalize it. . . illness is reinterpreted as social role, social strategy, or social symbol. . . anything but social experience. . . we are suggesting that anthropological analysis (of pain, passion and power) are at the risk of delegitimizing their subject matter's human conditions.

Scheper-Hughes (1994) also notes that what is missing from the body social and body politic is the human agent. What is being ignored is the existential and lived experience of the body-self. And I would add here, that before we talk about the phenomenological aspects of the body--body as lived experience--we need to define the cultural construction of the physical body and the sensing body-- the body inhabited by us every day.

Approaching the notion of the body along the three axes is an useful heuristic device, but it has neglected the cultural construction of the physical and sensing body--as an embodiment of experience. Although Scheper-Hughes and

Lock's conceptualization of the body seems to confirm and reinforce the Hindu self as sociocentric, this is an incorrect interpretation. As we will see later in this chapter, Marriott has shown that there is continuity between a Hindu person and his or her physical and social world, a view that holds the Hindu personhood as dynamic and always transforming. This misinterpretation hints at the need for consideration of cultural conceptualization of self, body and personhood and resonates the call for emphasis on "embodied agency."

Scheper-Hughes and Lock locate a number of events where mind and body, self and other, become one. They point out that these events are "seething with emotions," an experience of "mindful body." One such event is spirit possession, a domain where the experience and perception of the body, from the conceptualization of the self and personhood, is integrated, experienced and expressed (1987:29). Thus exploring spirit possession, my area of research, was an important point of entry into the ethnopsychological conceptualization of the Jaunsari people. My research focuses on how people make meaning in their daily life (the "production of meaning"), how they seek to predict and control events and how they deal with existential issues of human conditions. My line of analysis is guided by insights from phenomenology and social interactionism with its focus on subjective experience in

human suffering.

Within the broad formulations of structure and agency, the power of theory lies in connecting everyday life experiences to the social institutions which shape and define them. By making these connections concrete, the social institutions may be seen as real aspects of daily experience and activity. Since people come to know the world through their everyday life activities, it becomes imperative for ethnographers to focus on the daily lives of the people they write about.

By teasing out the meanings embedded in the links between daily life and social institutions, we begin to understand the construction of self as a dynamic social process, the product of everyday life. By calling attention to the specific experiences of Jaunsari women who are possessed by spirits, I am calling attention to a social phenomenon which brings about changes in the daily lives of these women. By focusing on everyday life, I will be able to identify changes in the social relations of individuals possessed by spirits, and also be able to examine how this restructuring of social relations affects and brings about transformations in the self. The self is "altered" when one is possessed by a spirit. Through spirit possession, one's "former self" as defined by certain social relations, is transformed by the spirit and becomes actively engaged. The "altered self" or the "emergent self" is therefore my

central concern, as it brings to light the dynamic concept of self and more specifically the relationship between spirit possession and the reconfiguration of the social relations of the individuals possessed by spirits.

My main argument is that spirit possession has healing powers since it provides an articulation of suffering and affliction as well as an interpretation of contradictions and tensions in the social order. The healing process involves a continuous and persistent attempt to make this possession meaningful. By providing a new meaning for the experience of possession, women are able to transform their sense of self and recontextualize their experience.

In the Quest of a Common Language: Semantics of Spirit Possession

Though the belief in possession by spirits is found in many societies³, the experience of possession, as ethnographic documents reveal, is manifestly different in each. Notwithstanding the limitations of taxonomy, classification and typologies, some sort of general language is necessary, argue those interested in cross-cultural comparison. Literature on spirit possession is replete with

³ Bourguignon (1973) has found that in a sample of 488 societies in all parts of the world, 437 (90%) are reported to have one or more institutionalized, culturally patterned forms of "altered states of consciousness;" 251 (52%) of these societies associate such experiences with spirit possession.

terms such as possession trance, trance, spirit-mediumship, shamanism, alternative states of consciousness, altered states of consciousness, exorcism, and adrocism, to name a few. A critical glance at the distinction between trance and possession as propounded by Bourguignon (1976) reveals artificial clustering of a range of otherwise diverse cultural phenomena (Lambek 1989:37) and smacks of a naturalizing paradigm, a powerful mechanism of legitimation in western discourse. Boddy (1994) cautions that although these arbitrary terms and typologies provide a heuristic device for comparative purposes, these are achieved at the expense of context and reflect analysts' theoretical perspective, personal inclinations, and cultural baggage, and can obstruct the complexities of the phenomenon they analyze.

The definition of spirit possession I find most useful is a state or condition, indigenously interpreted, resulting from the hold exerted over a human being by external forces more powerful than the host. These external forces may be deities, human ancestral spirits, or ghosts of local and foreign origin. The external force may also be another living human with special powers, as in the case of witches (*daag*). The hold exerted on the host varies and may take specific forms requiring different treatment--from expulsion of an intrusive spirit to the binding of the spirit to the host.

This definition includes those states heuristically distinguished by Bourguignon as "trance," and "possession trance" and by Firth as "spirit possession," "spirit mediumship," and "shamanism." Interestingly, all the typologies and classifications rest on assumptions that lie at the heart of the naturalizing paradigm. As pointed out by Lambek (1989:39), in Lewis's model "spirits are amoral creatures in settings in which peripheral and subordinate members of the society (notably women) are possessed, whereas spirits uphold morality in societies where it is those in authority (notably men) who enter into trance." This results in the reification and polarization of the main and peripheral cults and the ignoring of intermediate cases.

In a similar way, Bourguignon (1976) indicates the correlation between the type of social organization and the presence of trance or possession with simpler societies more prone to possession than strong hierarchical societies who are more likely to show trance. Again this distinction suffers from the naturalization of cultural practices.

The definition that I proposed earlier in this section derives from the particular belief system prevalent in the culture I was observing. In my proposal, I had made a distinction between possession and trance that was essentially similar to Bourguignon's. However, on my first visit with a woman healer, this distinction fell apart. My innocent inquiry, "do you call the spirit (i.e., go into

trance voluntarily, hence indicating authority) or does the spirit come to you (indicating involuntary act)?" was met with an angry reply. "I may call the spirit all day long but the spirit will come if it so wishes." Ultimately then, what is at issue is not the distinctions used to build typologies for cross-cultural comparison but the idea of trance and/or possession as a "human social and historical activity constrained by cultural models" (Lambek 1989:36).

Among the Paharis of Jaunsar-Bawar, there are a number of terms that are comparable to the English term "spirit possession" defined above. The most common expression is *bharna*. Until the spirit is identified, that is until the time a diagnosis is reached, the villagers may simply refer to the person as being troubled by *dhat*, or, they may directly label the symptom: trembling (*kampan*), fainting (*phit*), paralysis (*sun*), or grunts or monosyllabic sounds (*matribhasha*). These movements, are however, differentially evaluated. For example, if the movements are graceful, it is believed to be *Khel*--movement induced by a deity, while jerky movements are believed to be induced by nefarious spirits, referred to as *dhat* or *chaya*.

When a person performs *khel*, the spirit is said to "come" (*ana*), "ride" (*chardna*), or "inhabit" (*vaas*). When a person becomes dispossessed, the *bharna* is said to "come down" (*bhar utarna*). The host is said to become the vehicle (*doli/dori*), signifying that the relationship between the

host and the deity may be a permanent one. When a deity of the highest order comes regularly to the same healer, he (as mostly men are possessed by the "all powerful" gods) is said to be "descended incarnations" (avatars) and to have a *sthan*--a throne of some sort--implying the power of the king to dispense justice. Gold (1988) reports that in Rajasthan the priests, while possessed, may be referred to as *cauki*--a square stool. She cites Komal Kothari's (1982:31) understanding of the meaning of *cauki*--as a "judicial seat," and hence shrines, by extension, become a space where justice and morality are defined, constituted and dispensed.

When the possession by spirits that enter the human body is not desirable, the spirits are referred to as attached (*dhat lagna*), jerky movement (*kampan*) or shadow (*chaya*). These metaphors refer to a spirit which strikes, attacks, or invades the possessed person, and hence is potentially maleficent. Gold (1988) interprets *chaya* as connoting benevolence and protection (as in shade from the sun); however, the narratives I collected always refer to *chaya* as frightening and polluting--in this context the term shadow connotes darkness (for example, frightened by its own shadow or a priest getting polluted by a low-caste person's shadow).

Desirable or positive spirit possession is evidenced by *khel*, which calls to mind another term, *lila*, a word referred in South Asian literature meaning "divine play."

Gold (1988) calls our attention to the continuities between the play of such deities as *khel* and *lila*, and refers to the play as theatrical play. The use of the word *khelna* for possession was reported by Carstairs (1961) in Mewar, by Wadley (1975) in Uttar Pradesh, and Erndl in Punjab (1984, cited in Gold 1988). In contrast, the word *lila* (divine play) refers to "playing" of great divinities or gods with the highest powers. *Ramlila* (Lord Ram's divine play) and *Pandavlila* (or *mandavana* in local parlance) staged in Jaunsar-Bawar are popular dramatic renditions about incarnations of great divinities such as Ram, the hero-god of Ramayan, and Pandavas, the heroes of Mahabharat--two epic legends also celebrated in other parts of India.

Another aspect of possession in Jaunsar-Bawar is worth mentioning. In the literature on spirit possession all over the world, possession by spirit is always manifested by a set of very similar symptoms: trembling, shaking, panting, abrupt gestures, graceful dancing, and/or glossolalia. Even the Jaunsari children mimic these classic symptoms of spirit possession. However, not all who are believed to be possessed show these symptoms. The Jaunsaris also recognize latent possession--possession by spirits without the classic symptoms clearly indicating possession.

Here I am referring to signs which may be considered as an indication of possession. For example, successive deaths in a family may be diagnosed as the result of a spirit which

has possessed the house or, a child crying incessantly may be diagnosed as being spirit possessed. In this context, then, miscarriage, sterility, disease and death may be interpreted as signs of possession. These are cases of indirect attack by the external force.⁴ In considering cases of spirit possession, Jaunsaris do face the problem of authenticity. Is the possessed feigning?

In all the cases mentioned above, one could apply the definition of spirit possession delineated earlier in this section, in the sense that possession refers to an indigenously recognized state of being as under the control of an external force, either directly or indirectly. There is then, arguably, a case for applying the term spirit possession as a blanket term for viewing all possessions prevalent in Jaunsar-Bawar. However, to explicate the richness of the phenomenon under study, I have used indigenous categories in the analysis of my data, while at the same time recognizing that the term possession means a range of behavior. In doing so I am facilitating comparison with similar phenomena in other parts of the world.

I will now proceed, after this lengthy discussion of some of the terminological and contextual concerns, to the discussion of the various frameworks under consideration here.

⁴ Nuckolls (1991) has a very fitting term for victims of such indirect attack --moral hostages.

Frameworks for the Study of Spirit Possession:

Belief in magic, witchcraft and spirit possession have long held a special fascination for anthropologists and continue to capture the anthropological interest. One can, in reviewing the literature on spirit possession, easily trace the discipline's theoretical evolution and detect the pulse of the current academic scene (Boddy 1994). For example, the study of spirit possession has become important in two major topics of theoretical interest reflecting the fashion of the time:

- (1) embodiment as a paradigm for Anthropology (Scheper-Hughes 1994, Csordas 1990, Stoller 1989, Taussig 1993),
- (2) selfhood or identity as culturally constituted and reconstituted (Boddy 1989, Brown 1991, Corin 1994, Crapanzano 1980, Lambek 1993, Taussig 1987).

Both of these concerns resonate the current concerns of the discipline as a whole in its emphasis on praxis/practice theory and the representation of the Other.

In recent years, two major review essays have traced the movement and trajectories of various theoretical and epistemological debates on spirit possession and suggested where they might be going (Boddy 1994, Lambek 1989). Boddy and Lambek both concur that traditionally anthropologists, in considering spirit possession primarily in its practical, instrumental and physical manifestations, have limited

their study to the medical dimension.⁵ They address the need to conceptualize spirit possession as a "human social and historical activity constrained by cultural models" (Lambek 1989:36) and to locate this activity in the reconstitution of self and identity (Boddy 1988, 1984). The turning point, according to Boddy (1994), was the publication of Crapanzano and Garrison's collection *Case Studies in Spirit Possession* (1977). The trend they see, and as several recent studies indicate, is toward transcending the subdivisions within anthropology (Medical, Religions, Conflict Resolving) to locate spirit possession in the wider social and historical contexts. Presented below are some of the salient debates which have informed my framework and questions that I have raised.

Numerous theories have attempted to explain the phenomenon of spirit possession. Functionalist perspectives have examined the role of spirit possession in promoting social cohesion (Berreman 1972), and in providing a means for low-status individuals to manipulate their social position in a stratified society (Lewis 1988). Other researchers have focused on the role of spirit possession in alleviating individuals' anxiety over failure (Freed and Freed 1990) and managing stress (Lewis 1988; Crapanzano &

⁵ Csordas has pointed out that this progressive medicalization of spirit possession is very typical of Anglo-American literature and in contrast French studies of spirit possession have emphasized the religious, aesthetic and most importantly the quotidian relevance.

Garrison 1977) and mental illness (Skultans 1987).

Psychiatric and psychoanalytic perspectives have been prominent in studies of spirit possession, especially in South Asia. Kakar's (1982:82) exegesis of Indian systems of "mental health" recognizes spirit possession as a cultural phenomenon, but focuses mainly on the individual. Kakar moves from a context mode to a text mode, locating healing in a psychoanalytic explanatory framework. Obeyesekere (1981) analyses ascetic-ecstatic women who have left their home to become "priestesses;" his interpretation emphasizes the role of repressed desire in possession states. Carstairs and Kapur (1976) characterize possession simply as the manifestation of "hysterical" symptoms; similarly, Varma, Srivastava and Sahay (1970) and Teja, Khanna and Subrahmanyam (1970) treat possession as a psychiatric problem of the same order as anxiety, depression, and psychosis.

Classic functionalist studies argue that women use possession to protest their subordinate status, describing possession as "a war between the sexes." Psychiatric and psychoanalytic studies tap the old idea of women's presumed susceptibility to "hysteria." While both perspectives make valuable points, they do not attend closely to two significant problems: (1) the recognition of spirit possession as a process through which women (and men) make sense of the problematic of everyday life; (2) the social

and psychological differences between people who participate in possession and those who do not.

Several recent studies on spirit possession incorporate the key concepts from feminist anthropology and ethnopsychology and offer useful conceptual guidelines for an actor-oriented, meaning-centered approach to spirit possession (Boddy 1988, Claus 1984, Nichter 1981). These studies view spirit possession as a culturally appropriate medium through which women address the contradictions in a society that legitimizes male dominance and as a social reality in which women actually exercise a significant degree of power. This raises questions, for each local setting, of whether and how women are "empowered" by spirit possession. Does spirit possession constitute an experience of "power" and "control" for Jaunaris? What does this mean in women's own terms? In what ways is "power" gained through possession reflected in the domestic sphere? These questions emphasize the importance of interpreting themes and images in narratives of possession.

Boddy (1988), for example, analyzes spirit possession as an experience in which possession trancers expand and regenerate their own sense of self and recontextualize their experiences; she raises fundamental questions of gender identity and selfhood. She draws on the relationship between sexuality and fertility, and identifies them both as domains which define gender identity on the one hand and

the social and cultural construction of self on the other. Spirit possession is seen as a cultural experience which helps the participants interpret themselves and their society.

Kapferer's (1991) analysis of demonic exorcism in Buddhist Sri-Lanka, which is derived from Mead's theory of social interactionism, shows how healing constitutes a permanent removal of the spirit, which not only breaks down the patient's disturbed self but rebuilds her original self.

Both Kapferer and Boddy in their analysis in Sri Lanka and Sudan, respectively, go beyond a simplistic explanation as to why women more often than men experience possession. It is true that in specific cases, factors like feelings of oppression, status ambiguity and inner psyche disturbances may motivate women to possession by spirits. And interestingly, the attributes of spirits correspond to cultural typification or constructs about the essential nature of women. For example, menstruation, and child birth, which define "womanhood," are considered polluted states and as such are vulnerable to spirit attacks. Further, women's domestic activities expose them more frequently to polluting objects such as cleansing dirty dishes and clothes.

These perspectives also examine spirit possession as a system of communication. Spirits may be seen as symbolic of symptoms and spirit possession as an idiom for certain kinds of illnesses. Thus socially sanctioned behavior interpreted as spirit possession takes the place of stigmatized or

deviant behavior and is interpreted as illness. Some researchers see illness as an idiom for possession, a way of articulating the feeling that one may be possessed.

Claus (1984) uses symbolic and cultural approaches to examine the meaning and symbolism of spirit possession in Tululand (India) and to highlight the significant categories through which possessed individuals define and differentiate their possessing spirits. Addressing the limitations of viewing the phenomenon of spirit possession in medical terms, he calls for an "ethnography of spirit possession," which is "the documentation of the process by which individual experience comes to be interpreted through a system of collective Symbols" (61). Thus this approach explores the dialectic between the individual and the meaning system which is socially and culturally constructed.

Using a similar meaning-centered approach, my framework is based on the necessity of understanding spirit possession in terms of its symbolic nature and the dynamic meanings this has in the ongoing lived world of people. My attempt has been to demonstrate how Jaunsaris articulate and conceptualize suffering and find ways to cope with it in a given social order. For example, I have tried to demonstrate how women have appropriated religious metaphors and other idioms to address and cope with the ambiguities and complexities that result from a social order structured by polyandry. My effort here is an attempt to move toward a

theory which examines women's activities and women themselves in order to make visible their experiences.

In my analysis of Jaunsari culture and spirit possession rituals, I have paid special attention to narratives of possession. I am especially interested by the way the narratives are organized, have a particular syntax and meaning order. The narrative here is approached here from a "critical phenomenological perspective" as espoused by Good (1994), who is interested in exploring the "imaginative linking of experiences and events into a meaningful story or plot" (118). Drawing upon studies of phenomenologists who studied individuals with psychopathology and other disabilities, Good (1994) examines dimensions of perception and the perceived world as an approach to understanding illness and experience.

The narratives of illness, Good argues, have less to do with affective dimensions of experience (as these sensual and affective dimensions resist objectification to symbolic forms). So he suggests that we focus on how dimensions of the perceived world are "unmade," broken down or altered, as a result of serious illness, as well as on the restitutive process of the "remaking" of the world" (131). This narrative turn in writing on illness experience, illuminates how illness and its experience are constituted through interpretive practices.

The restitutive process, according to Good, involves two linked interpretive practices: (a) symbolization, and

(b) narrativization. He shows in his study of chronic pain experience, that the diagnosis itself is a form of symbolization. It is in the interpretive process in which the origin of suffering is "invoked." The symbolic naming of the source or origin of suffering serves not as a simple metaphor or as a reflection of disorder in the social structure; rather it serves to "formulate" the object of treatment and hence organize a set of social responses and therapeutic activities. Good (1994) argues that one of the central efforts in healing is to symbolize the source of suffering to find an image around which a narrative can take shape. He directs our attention to the provocative analysis of the role of symbolization among the Dinka, by Godfrey Lienhardt. In the case of the Dinka, the possessing spirits represent the grounds of Dinka experience. To name the origin of suffering is thus a crucial step in remaking the world.

Narrativization, on the other hand, is a process through which "the lifeworld is reconstituted" (133). Narrativization, as defined by Good, is a process of "locating suffering in history, of placing events in a meaningful order in time. It also has the object of opening the future to a positive ending, of enabling the sufferer to imagine a means of overcoming adversity and the kinds of activities that would allow life experiences to mirror the projected story" (1994: 128).

Narrativization is about "why" a certain event occurs, "when" and "how" it does. Consequently, the event is placed in time, history, place, and in the context of lived experience and the social world --"its effect on the body in the world" (133). In his proposal for a theory of illness experience, Good has assigned central place to narrative analysis. The narrative analysis enables us to understand the experience of an event by placing this event in relation to other events and in experience in life. And as we shall see, the narratives I have collected are inevitably derived from the lived experience and the lifeworld of Jaunsari people, filled with spiritual forces, cosmological prescriptions, *Dharma* and other such practices and ideologies that regulate structures of social relations and power. And as a number of anthropological studies have pointed out, an illness event is held as a moral event and accordingly invokes "moralizing judgements" and becomes a source of "contested judgements" (Good 1994:134). The ethnographer's task then, is to uncover and anticipate the underlying symbolic structures in cultural terms, elucidate potential meaning and illustrate how these structures and meaning give form to "distinctive forms of lived experience."

To see the world from the other's point of view is to discern the interpretive practices and structures that people employ is to make sense of their subjective experience. In my analysis of spirit possession in

Jaunsar, I will use three analytical concepts from Good 's (1994 :135-164) analysis of Turkish epilepsy narratives. These concepts are: emplotting, subjunctivizing, and positioning. The "emplotment" of an event refers to the plot through which an ordered story is constructed and authored. So there is an underlying structure to a story and there is an engagement of the reader in the sense making of the story. In the case of an illness, the plots are about predicament, a continuous endeavor, and suffering. These stories give texture and meaning to the larger life story and uncover the various ambiguities and contradictions that exist in culture and at the same time bring coherence to events.

As the story unfolds from one event to the next, Good points out, the story becomes more diversified and multireferential; new episodes introduce new twists and opens up potentials for reevaluation of the past events, and hence the motives, intentions and context. This is what Good (1994) describes as the "subjunctivizing" of illness narratives. The subjunctive mode of narratives are maintained by the provisional quality of the story in which new events alter the story or a new angle thrown in by a different narrator or a telling of the story in a different way. All these give a "creative potency" to the story. Good argues that this indeterminacy of the illness reality fosters a continuing reevaluation and reinterpretation of past events and reopens new possibilities for the future.

Thus, the subjunctivizing tactics of narratives provide insight into the nature of illness experience.

The narrative "positioning" of suffering refers to the pragmatic of illness narratives. The narratives are intersubjective and dialogically constructed. The stories are positioned among authors, narrators and audience and reveal the structure of social relations and power.

In choosing to explore spirit possession, its meaning and experiences in narrative form, I situate my work in the line developed by Boddy (1988), Good (1977, 1994), Kapferer (1991), Kleinman & Kleinman (1991), and Scheper-Hughes (1994), stemming from the traditions of existentialism, phenomenology and social interactionism. For guiding my analysis, I will begin by considering the embodiment of spirit possession from the perspective of practice theory; I will identify the process of symbolization accomplished first by the diagnosis of spirit possession and later, by the whole process of initiation and healing. In the conclusion, I will discuss three key ideas--body, affliction (*dosh*) and spirits--that locate these processes in Jaunsari culture and society.

Spirit Possession in Jaunsar Bawar:

Belief in possession by spirits is common throughout India (Babb 1975; Berreman 1972; Castairs and Kapur 1976; Claus 1984; Crooke 1896; Freed and Freed 1990; Kakar 1982;

Majumdar 1962). Spirit possession figures in popular belief and also in ancient texts such as the Mahabharata and the Puranas. Jaunsar-Bawar, in the western Himalayan hill tract of Uttar Pradesh, shows important continuities with all-India Hinduism, while it also provides a unique social context in which to examine questions about women and spirit possession.

Religious life in Jaunsar-Bawar is primarily concerned with maintaining proper relations with the supernatural beings who control the village and family life (Berreman 1972). Many of their spirits can be traced to the great gods and goddesses of Hinduism, but others cannot. Possession is a common means of diagnosing and alleviating difficulties of different kinds. Its nature varies with the type of spirits involved.

Spirit possession is related to the position of women in India in general and in Jaunsar-Bawar in particular. In Indian society, according to some scholars, women are subordinate to men and experience a variety of physical and social conflicts (cf. Ghadially 1988). Women do not enjoy the same prestige and authority that men are accorded, and the vast majority of public roles in rural Indian society are not available to women. The notion of male superiority and the cultural belief that a husband has authority over his wife gives rise to a gender-based hierarchy. However, if we go beyond formal authority and investigate specific ways that women use their power, we see that they do

influence and manage the men in their lives and their own lives as well (Wadley 1980).

My study focuses first on spirit possession as a village institution. Areas addressed include: (1) types of spirits and their relationship to the deities of the local Hindu pantheon; (2) the incidence of possession among various social categories; (3) the range of "possession performances" from public festivals to private episodes; and (4) the attributes and activities of ritual specialists who deal with possession. I am especially interested in the language of possession performances, its images of male and female, and its representations of "power."

Focusing on the phenomenon of spirit possession among Jaunsari women, I found that experience of spirit possession cannot be understood in terms of symptoms and illness, rather the experience has to be understood as being deeply embedded in the social fabric of Jaunsari social and cultural order and explored for its social, political and personal implications.

Because spirit possession is essentially an act of intrusion by an external force, it is not surprising to find metaphors in possession narratives which reflect concerns of maintaining boundaries. In my analysis of "symbolic structures" of spirit possession, I found elements that correspond to many classic concepts that characterize Hindu thought and action, namely, concepts of self, personhood and

body. The underlying principles that were generated from these cultural patterns were the principles of balance, becoming, functioning, flowing, channeling, maintaining, mixing and transforming. These underlying principles constitute the Transactional Logic that inform Hindu thought and action.

Marriott (1976:111) directs our attention to the elaborate transactional and transformational culture of Hindus in the representations in *Dharmasastra* and other epics on such topics as marriage and gift giving. He cites several ethnographies that document the elaborations in actual activities and institutional regulations such as feasts (Marriott 1968), and service and trade (David 1973). The classical texts of *Caraka* and *Susruta* that document views about health and diet relate the intricacies of transactional and transformational logic.

The Hindu body, Marriott reports, according to classical texts is made up of phlegm, bile and air and these elements are "fluid" and therefore "movable," "mixable," "combinable" and "divisible," and in varying proportions are all pervasive in the world of humans. Unlike the Western self that is closed, bounded, and mutually integrated, the Hindu person is open and always in flux. As a result, the Hindu self is constantly conscious of maintaining its boundary and hence its social identity through appropriate interactions and transactions.

Despite the perennial theorizing in South Asian literature in terms of binary opposition--purity or pollution, egocentric or sociocentric, and spirit or body--it was clearly evident that there is continuity between a Hindu person and his or her social and physical world. Dumont (1970) incorrectly interpreted this as the sociocentric personhood of Hindus, as opposed to the egocentric personhood in his society. Marriott was one of the first to point out the continuity between a Hindu person and his or her physical world. This has now been well documented in many other societies. He points out that, for a Hindu, "every living genus from the moment of its conception shares defining qualities (*gunas*), power (*shakti*), and action (*Karma*)" (1980:231) and together these define its corporate code (*dharma*) which through appropriate conduct (*acahara*) nourishes and sustains the genus. All human persons are composed of "coded substance." The South Asian concept of substances refers to body (*sharira*) and blood (*rakta*), and that of code refers to *dharma*. Marriott sees a Hindu person as an "embodied moral code." However, these moral coded substances are not fixed. Personhood in Hindu thought is conceived of as "channeling and transforming, heterogenous, ever flowing changing substances" (Marriott 1976:111). Further, because action and actor are one, action transforms actor. The individual could, through transactions, affect his or her own internal

order. Therefore, one could change one's substance through right actions--right eating, right marriage, etc. This view of flowing and striving persons strongly contrasts with Dumont's view of South Asian thought as being concerned with the closed, changeless and bound structure of the caste system.

Criticizing Dumont's formulation of Hindu conceptual schema in terms of binary opposition, Marriott argues that the Hindu world and classificatory schema are instead triads and pentads (3 *gunas*, 3 subtle elements, 3 forces, 3 *dosas*, 5 basal elements, etc.). While Dumont argues that the Hindu individual is encompassed by the society, Marriott sees personhood in Hindu society as "dividual." The coded substances that make up a person further comprise coded particles that may be shared or exchanged with others. It then follows that through direct (sharing food, water and bodily contact) or indirect (as in "gaze," *nazar*) transactions one can bring about a change in the coded substance of a person. This transactional logic, therefore, is an important marker for defining personhood and body. Caste identity, according to Marriott, is defined by the quality of coded substance. The caste ranking can be then measured either by the degree of interaction and exchange of substances that are themselves ranked in value (Transformational Theory), or by the quality of the coded substances in the actors (Attributional Theory). What is

missing in Marriott's transactional model is the "meaning" in transactions (Wadley 1975).

Notwithstanding the various limitations of Marriott's "transactional model," I find it extremely helpful in understanding what Comaroff (1980) calls "grammar of therapy." It provides a foreground to demonstrate how human actions are evaluated and what their implications are. In my analysis of narratives of spirit possession cases, I found that the healing was organized through directed transactions between the spirit, the healer and the patient, and it resulted in the desired transformations.

Because the nonduality of action and actor is assumed in Hindu thought, the therapeutic efficacy of a directed transaction involves correct performance of the healing ritual and the *sakti* embodied in the key participants. The *sakti* of the healer is based on an association with the power of the spirit that inhabit the healers.

The brief discussion above provides a number of analytical constructs, interpretive practices and metaphors that can be used for analysis of possession; either as elicited through interviewing or as observed in natural discourse setting. In my research on spirit possession, exploring the "symbolic structures" and examining the beliefs relating to possession by spirit, and to the things that bring possession about, I found that this experience permeates every aspect of human existence. My inquiry

pertains to two basic questions:

- (1) How do we make sense of spirit possession within the context of the relationship between self and society? That is to say, if the self is truly a social construct and individual selves are constituted and reconstituted in the course of social interaction, how does the influence or presence of spirit affect the social interaction and, as a consequence, the construction of self? This process of the reconfiguration of self is my central concern.
- (2) Spirit possession in Jaunsari culture is organized around the central theme of suffering (*pira*). I am most concerned with discovering precisely how a particular person consciously comprehends his or her suffering and misfortune, what meaning he or she ascribes to the problems and possibilities encountered in life. The focus is on how the person subjectively views the lifeworld and how they actively engage in their remaking their lifeworld in meaningful ways.

Chapter 3 .

Jaunsari: An Ethnographic Introduction to the Area and Its Social Structure

At the heart of any anthropological research is what has been called ethnographic fieldwork, the traditional research method employed to describe, document and uncover a particular culture and its people. Let me begin with my journey to the so called anthropological "field" at the foothills of the Himalayas. My journey which began in the United States of America was also a journey of return to my native land to meet my family and friends at Delhi enroute to the "field of my dreams" - Uttrakhand. To most Hindu Indians, Uttrakhand, the hilly tracts on the Northern part of Uttar Pradesh is *Devbhumi*, the abode of gods and goddesses. To some affluent Indians, the Himalayas is a landscape of escape from the throat-rasping, energy sapping heat and dust storms characteristic of the summer in the plains. And to anthropologists a paradise in the periphery peopled by "tribals" or the "exotic." Jaunsar-Bawar, in the Northwestern part of Uttar Pradesh is peopled by a polyandrous community and for this reason alone has

attracted the attention of number of anthropologists, local and well as "phoren."

My journey to the field of dreams began one winter morning in New Delhi on a date that had been selected as auspicious by my mother. The district magistrate of Dehra Doon (Jaunsar-Bawar is a sub-division in the district of Dehra Doon) was already notified about my research interests. Equiped with a permission letter from the ministry of education and a letter of introduction from a bureaucrat (who was a classmate of the district magistrate of Dehra Doon), I set off for the field. I wanted to catch the early bird express special to avoid the crowd and reach Dehra Doon in time to meet the district magistrate and proceed to the "field" the morning after. The bus did leave on time but without me, I was late. The next bus was a "video coach" and cost five rupees extra. The extra charge was for the videos that would be shown to make the journey less boring! Once we crossed the "Yamuna pool" (the bridge over River Yamuna) to enter the national highway to Dehra Doon, one could see what lay beyond the smog of wintertime in Delhi. The roads were lined by tropical trees and the land beyond was green and yellow, as the mustard plants were in full bloom. We passed through several small towns where the bullock and horse carts carrying vegetable were parked on both sides of the road, taking up a large part of the business highway. With the help of ear-piercing, screeching

brakes, the master driver drove us through the mired highway as if he were in a roller derby.

Dehra Doon, a small township at 1000 metres above sea level is flanked by the Siwalik ranges in the west and Garhwal Himalayas in the north and east. As one approaches Dehra Doon one is captivated by the awe inspiring view of the Himalayas. Eventually we reached Dehra Doon, but the eight hour trip had me totally exhausted. A three-wheeler flagged me down and promised to give me the best deal for transportation for the day and a hotel to freshen up. He was disappointed that all I needed was a two kilometer ride to the District Magistrate's office. He had hoped for a kickback from the local hotel.

I met with the district magistrate Mr. Anand Kumar that afternoon and he arranged a meeting with the sub-divisional magistrate Mr. Sunil Chopra for Jaunsar-Bawar, later that evening. We, the subdivional magistrate and I, decided to leave the next morning for Chakrata, a major town in Jaunsar-Bawar and the summer office of the subdivision. We set off the next morning at 7:30. The path winding upward from the Doon Valley into the Garhwal hills offers a view that can captivate one's heart. As the road cleaves through the mountains, the natural landscape changes drastically. Kalsi, the winter office for the subdivision, is a small embarkment town where the Tons and Yamuna rivers touch each other. From here one can look down to the smoggy Doon

valley.

We drove on to Chakrata, where Mr. Chopra had organized lunch and a meeting with some prominent Jaunsaris of the area. I met with the principle of the Chakrata High School, a Jaunsari lawyer who has done research among his own people and the Patwaris who knew the area as well as the blue prints of the Garhwal Land tenure they were responsible for. After the morning meal, we set off in a Jeep to skirt around the various folds of the Garhwal Himalayas looking for a village that would suit my needs, with a room for board and a medical hospital not too far away.

From the jeep I could see the majestic landscape --the backdrop of the undulating slopes of the Himalayas with villages dotted all over the sloping landscape and surrounded by cultivated terraced fields and forests of rhododendron, and deodar. It was a magnificent sight, kilometer after kilometer.

The Region and Its Identity:

Jaunsar-Bawar lies in the Himalayan foothills bordering Himachal Pradesh, the Tibetan border and district Tehri Garhwal, about 550 kilometers north and slightly east of Delhi. Composed of various folds of the Himalayas and bounded by the Yamuna River in the east, by the Tons river in the west, and by the junction of these two rivers in the south, Jaunsar-Bawar roughly forms a triangular land mass.

Hanol, the holy land for all Jaunsaris and abode of *Mahasu Devata*, is situated on a small tract of land west of the Tons river. [see Figure 1]

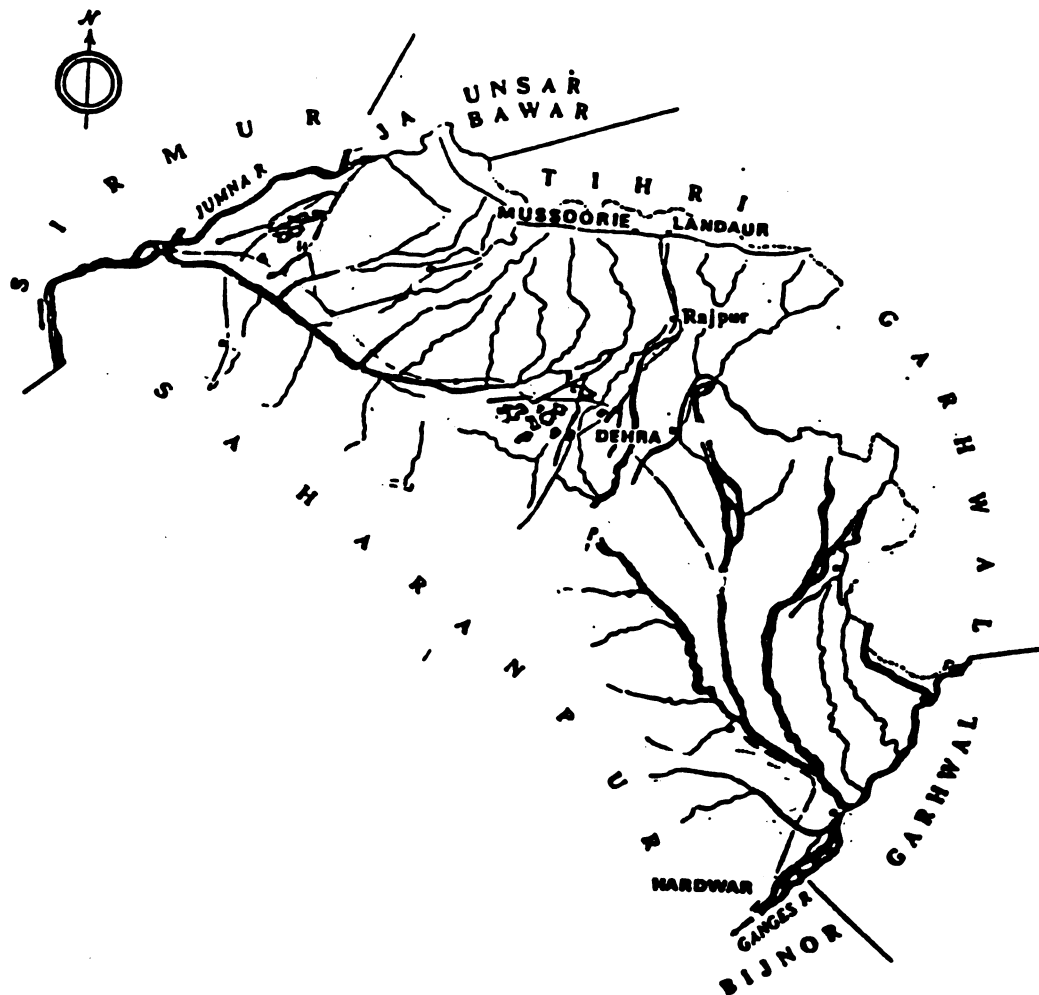


Figure 1: Sketch-Map of Uttrakhand (Source: Williams 1874)

The *Paharis* (the mountain folk) believe that because their living area is a part of *devbhum*--the abode of gods and goddesses--they are ritually cleaner and purer than the *desis* (the people who live in the plains. The Jaunsaris [see figure 2], a subgroup of the *Paharis* of western Uttrakhand, are cultivators and herders by tradition, and they are organized in small hamlets, surrounded by terraced land. Over the past 30 years (since their special protection as scheduled tribes in 1962), the Jaunsaris have been drawn into the urban migration labor system.

The nature of identity is central to any discussion of any community. Who are the natives? Identity categories holds a very prominent position in anthropology and its representation of the other. What does it mean to be a Jaunsari or a *Pahari*? Documented below is a myth which informs the logic of the different cultural identities experienced and imagined by Jaunsaris.

Once upon a time there was kingdom in the foothills of the Himalayas in which lived a king who was very sick. All the healers, physicians and priests from the neighboring plain states were consulted but to no avail. It was suggested to the king and his family by a mendicant sadhu that a holy person and shaman who lived in the mountains would surely be able to cure the king.

Soon a cavalcade was dispatched to invite the holy mountain man to come down to the plains to heal the king. After a long search, they found the holy man. Much to their chagrin and horror, they found him covered with a film of dust as if neither water nor soap had ever touched his body. The king's men, judging the mountain man from his appearance, were skeptical about his ability to effect a cure.

Nonetheless, with no other options left, the king's men invited the healer to accompany them to the plains in order to heal a moribund king. The mountain man agreed to see the king and soon they were on their way back to the plains. Shortly after they had descended about 2,000 feet, the healer washed his hands and feet thoroughly in a spring. Another 2,000 feet toward the plains, the healer sought out a spring to wash his face and hair. As they progressed toward the kingdom the healer took a full bath in the Ganga River which flows at the foothills of the Himalayas.

When asked by the messengers why he was behaving in this perplexing manner, the healer said, "we *Paharis* (the mountain folk) are pure and ritually clean, as we live in the *devbhum* (the abode of gods and goddesses). You who live in the plains do not share this sacred space and hence need regular ritual ablutions to retain your purity.

This myth was narrated to me by Bisma, when she was asked to elaborate on what distinguishes *Paharis* from *desis* (the people who live in the plains). She deduced:

All the impurities from the atmosphere settle on the plains; do you not notice how difficult it is to breathe in Dehra Doon? All this pollution pollutes the minds of the *desis* as well. We *Paharis* are very honest people and this is innate in us, as we share the *bhumi* (the soil, here referring to the Himalayas) and space with the gods and goddesses. However, the air in the mountains is fresh and clear. Do you not see how the *desis* come to the mountains for a pilgrimage, to clean their souls and minds?

I pointed out that *Paharis* too venture out of their mountain abodes to "take a dip" in the Ganga or Yamuna--which purifies the soil it touches--to ritually wash away their sins. Bisma, taking in this argument, said "but the source of the rivers is in the mountain."

Here, Bisma's logic reflects the Hindu belief that substances in the soil affect the inhabitants' physical and

mental well-being. The Hindu individual is regarded as "fluid," and easily susceptible to changes brought about by foreign elements that enter the body. The soil has transformative power, and in the absence of any pollutants, there is no need felt for cleansing one's physical body. The food grown in the soil is ingested by the inhabitants and mixes with physical substance of the individual. Thus the soil on which one lives influences the individual's makeup even more than regular ritual bathing. Bisma suggested that soil has more transformative power than water. Whereas water cleanses the "dirt" of the body and the soul, the soil's substance enters and transforms the body, thereby transforming the whole person.

Although *Paharis* have a common identity in their contrast to the *desis*, their specific identity is no less important. The *Paharis* of the Himalayas encompass 3 distinct groups--Pauri, Garhwalis, and Jaunsaris. These groupings may seem to be the result of administrative categorizations, but each *Pahari* group does mark out its own identity. For example, the Jaunsaris practice fraternal polyandry, and this sets them apart from the other *Paharis*. The Jaunsaris pride themselves on being successful agriculturalists, and some associate this success with the soil with their polyandrous practices.

Further, Jaunsaris focus on tribal identity, as opposed to the Garhwalis and Pauris who favor a focus on caste

identities within their societies. Recently, these different forms of affiliations have been a major source of foment among these groups. The Jaunsaris, as a result of their tribal identity, have been able to avail themselves of tribally-affiliated reservation quotas, and many Jaunsaris are in prestigious government service positions that are unavailable to the caste-oriented Garhwalis and Pauris.

Local History:

Little is known of the early history of the central Pahari-speaking people and the region. The earliest outsider account is G. R. Williams' Memoir of Dehra Doon (1874). William was an assistant superintendent of Dehra Doon in 1871. He began to collect materials for a historical and statistical memoir of that district from 1871, and in 1874 he published the first history of this valley. Replete with Eurocentric interpretations, Williams describes the "manners and customs" of the people of Jaunsar-Bawar as "verging upon absolute barbarism."

It is almost needless to add that there is a considerable amount of freedom between the sexes. Another very marked peculiarity in the habits of the people is their extreme uncleanliness, all the more conspicuous on account of the comparative fairness of their complexion, and scantiness of their clothing, the nature of which is familiar to everyone who has ever had the occasion to make a journey to a hill station. The superstition of these mountaineers is as gross as their filth and immorality. (William 1874:61)

The immorality to which he refers is the practice of polyandry among the Jaunsaris. Despite the book's shortcomings, Williams provides a valuable and informative description of the region and people, tracing its history in myths, legends and folklore from the chronicled history from the sixteenth century to 1873.

In the ensuing century, Jaunsar-Bawar has attracted the attention of anthropologists and sociologists who were interested in the exotic institutions of the tribal people. The Jaunsaris became famous as "a fossil of the age of the Mahabharata" because they claim descent from the Pandavas, the heroes of this famous epic (Munshi, 1954). A number of community studies exist, including Murdockian-style ethnographies by Berreman (1972), Majumdar (1962), and Saksena (1954), to name a few.

These studies present two major interpretations of the origin of the Jaunsaris. Both interpretations agree that the Jaunsari social world can be divided into two major divisions, the *Doms* and the non-*Doms*. According to one theory, the *Doms* are assumed to belong to an early indigenous group which inhabited the mountains. They are considered to be ritually inferior, comparable to the lower caste groups in the plains. The non-*Doms* assert themselves as people from Jaisalmer, Rajasthan who migrated to the hills about 300 to 400 years ago and regard themselves as the descendants of the Pandavas. The other theory refutes

the autochthonous status of *Doms* and asserts that they were brought by the *Rajputs* who entered the hills (see Majumdar 1962). Both *Doms* and non-*Doms* refer to themselves as Jaunsaris or *Paharis*, depending on the context.

Social and Administrative Structure:

The Jaunsari social world is differentiated into social categories that follow the pan-Indic caste hierarchy. The caste groups are ranked relative to one another and are associated with an occupation. The four main caste groups are *Brahmin*, *Rajput*, *Bajgi*, and *Dom*. The *Brahmins* are ritually most pure and are divided into the *Paboch* and *Bamon* groups. The *Paboch* are considered ritually more pure than the *Bamons* because of their vegetarian diet, and hence their *vidhya* (knowledge) is considered more powerful and effective.

The *Rajputs* are landowners and agriculturalists who trace their roots to Rajputana, now known as Rajasthan. They are divided into two groups, the Khos and the Rawat. The *Bajgis* are drummers, tailors, and basketmakers. Some *Bajgi* families are known as *Deyhardh* because of their association with the temple. The low caste, *Doms*, are also internally differentiated into *Dom* (or *Chamar*) and *Kolta*. The *Doms* are the tanners and the *Koltas* are the landless agricultural laborers.

The local unit of administration is called a *khat*. The *khat* is the traditional local unit and comprises a number of villages. Traditionally this local unit was not only a unit for administrative purposes, but it also functioned as a unit for ceremonial purposes. From the time before Raja of Nahan was ruling the land, and long before the Nepalese conquest in 1804, *Sardar sayana*, as he was locally called, was the leader and spokesperson for the entire *khat*. The collection of revenue (*malgujari*), was the main responsibility of the *Sardar sayana*, and his entitlement was a commission of 5% of the revenue collected. The four most influential *sayana*, bearing the title of *chauntra*, constituted a senate which exercised control over the whole. They also managed all internal affairs, being arbitrators and judges in civil and criminal suits. They had the power to delegate punishments: flog, fine, imprison, mutilate and execute. This was before the British took over in 1815. The British Raj retained the system of representative government of *sayana* and *chauntra* and arbitrarily fixed the revenue on the whole area of Jaunsar-Bawar in a lump sum. The *chauntras* were responsible for the collections and received a small salary of Indian Rs. 40-100 (in the year 1848) besides fees in money and kind for every case decided before them. The *Sayanas* continued to receive an allowance of five percent of revenue collected and various fees for the performance of specific duties.

When the *U. P. Panchayat Raj Act* was enacted in 1949 (Cohn 1955), the powers and responsibilities of the *sayana* were adopted by a nominated village person, known as the *pradhan*. Although the *pradhan* looks after the distribution of resources and settles local-level conflicts, the position of the *sayanahari* is not totally lost. The Jaunsar-Bawar Zamindar Abolition and Land Reform Acts were partially successful in liquidating the stronghold of *sayanas*, and yet to date the *sayana* household is still the most prestigious and, in some villages, the most landed of all households. In fact, quite a few of the *pradhans* hail from former *sayana* households. The *pradhan* is not responsible for collecting revenues, the 39 *khats* in the whole of Jaunsar-Bawar have been distributed among 13 *patwari* circles for revenue and administrative purposes.

Dadaji (Male, 85+) remembers that the *sayana* of the village of Laccha was responsible for *malgujari* (the collection of revenue) but the *sayana* never paid any of the taxes he collected. It was Charnu *sayana* of the village of Bisoe who paid off the debts and in return became the (owner) *malik* of the 16 villages. The descendants of Charnu *sayana* continue to live in the village of Bisoe, and in fact one of his descendants Sham Sher Singh Chauhan is now the village *pradhan*.

The Village Bisoe and Adjacent villages:

The Jaunsari community I studied was composed of 4 adjacent villages (namely Bisoe, Laccha, Dwinya and Khunna) in Khat Bahalardh in the subdivision of Jaunsar. Because of geographical, historical and interfactional links, it is appropriate to include these villages within the boundaries of the community. All the villages were anywhere from 2 to 5 kilometers from Nagthat, which is a small township on the motorable road and is positioned at a comfortable height of 1,980 meters above sea level. [see Figure 2]

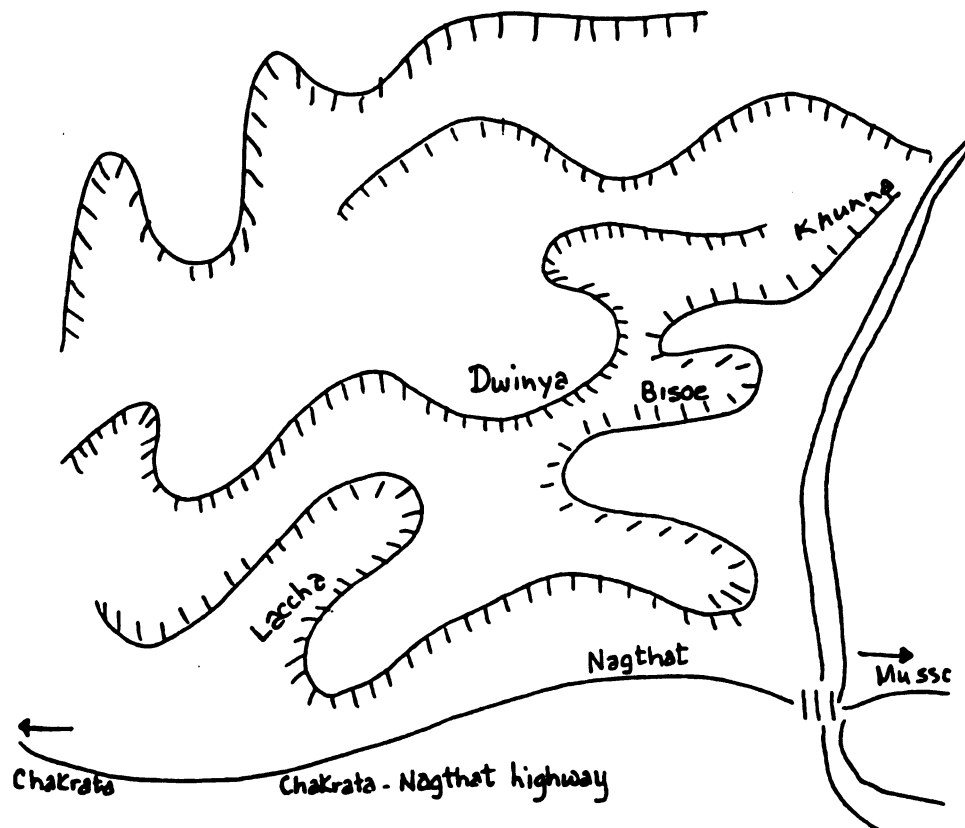


Figure 2: Sketch-Map of Jaunsari-Community Studied

The village of Bisoe, with a total population of around 250 people living in 23 households, became my base camp. The citizens of the villages of Bisoe and Laccha are predominately *Rajput*, occupying the big houses, with a few families of *Bajgi*, living in smaller houses surrounding the big houses. The village of Bisoe attracts a number of visitors from distant villages because it is the site of the temple which is the abode of the region's principle god *Mahasu devata* and because an annual festival, *jagra*, is celebrated in the month of August on the 7th day of the light fortnight moon. This temple, according to the villagers, has a long history and connects the villages which form my field area. The legend which every villager is eager to narrate is transmitted as an oral tradition. Among the current residents of the village of Bisoe there is general agreement about the legend, which refers to events in the village more than 200 years ago. The legend is as follows:

Near Dwinya is a water spring. We all knew that there was a snake who lived there. One day, a Brahmin woman from the village of Dwinya was washing her clothes when she was visited by the snake who opened his mouth to reveal a gold umbrella. This was the miracle. It has *sakti* (power).

The woman left her clothes and her *dantu* (head scarf) in front of the snake and carried the gold umbrella back to her house, where she placed it on the top of the sacred book of the Jaunsaris--the

Bagoi. The *devata* was established. This happened in the household that belongs to the *vakil* (advocate); his great-grandmother told us this *katha* ("story").

That night the woman's father-in-law had a dream in which he was visited by *mahasu devata* who expressed his wish that a temple should be established in the village of Bisoe for him. The woman's father-in-law inquired how he would know where in Bisoe they should lay the foundation for the temple. The *devata* smiled and told him that the *sutra* (connection/thread) would appear in the form of small black ants.

The next morning, the villagers found a trail of black ants which formed a boundary in the middle of a field facing east, almost in the middle of the village. The whole *khat* had collected there, all 16 villages. All the *khat* members cleared the ground and laid the foundation for the temple. This entire temple was raised without any monetary donation, only people's time and their hard work.

This legend forms a basis for inter-village relationships and binds them in a historical space.

Even today, the villages of Bisoe and Dwinya share the water spring which has become a landmark in the story, a tale which lies at the interface of myth and history.

Dwinya is a predominately *Brahmin* village, with a few families of *Kolta* who live on the outskirts of the village. The inhabitants of the village of *Khunna* are *Dom* and *Kolta*, with a number of *Rajputs* living on the slightly elevated portion of the village.

Next to the main *Mahasu* temple in the village of Bisoe, there is a *devata* temple for the *devata's 52 virs*

(warriors), which are locally known as *chera chatak*. There is also a Kali temple on the outskirts of the village.

Like most *Pahari* villages⁶, Bisoe and the other villages are built along the contour of a hillside or a ridge (with altitudes ranging from 1,500 meters to 2,300 meters above sea level), with terraced fields and cattle posts surrounding it. Each village hamlet consists of 15-25 households with the dominant caste groups, the *Rajputs* and/or the *Brahmins*, occupying big houses in the center of the and other castes, such as *Bajgi* (the drummers) living in smaller houses surrounding the big houses. The lowest castes, the *Doms* and the *Koltas*, usually live in a village hamlet of their own on the outskirts of the land-rich hamlets.

There are no street names, and the houses are not numbered. Correspondence is generally addressed to the village name, Post office Nagthat. There is no regular arrangement of the houses, although traditionally most of the houses face south. The village houses mostly consist of two stories with an open courtyard in the front. What follows is a generalized account of a domestic dwelling, outlining the traditional set-up in a polyandrous household and their continuity in modified forms accomodating a variety of household forms. As will be elaborated in chapter four, in the domestic cycle of polyandrous

⁶ See Berreman (1972), Majumdar (1962) for ethnographic details about village layout and economic and political institutions.

household, we observe a variety of marriage forms: monogamy, fraternal polyandry, polygyny, which affects the living arrangements.

In a typical arrangement for a polyandrous household, the houses are split into three levels. The garden level houses the livestock, firewood and a storage for grains and lentils. The open courtyard is the center of much domestic activities such as cleaning, washing and drying grains, and chopping firewood. The middle level has one room and a verandah on two sides. This room is used by the *botha* (the eldest brother--the patriarch) and the *ghariawi*. The stairs from the middle level opens into the small room and serves as entrance to the living area for the guests. The small room is often used as storage for water and in some houses a small bath area is constructed. Also in the upper level is the kitchen and one big room. Usually the kitchen is the responsibility of the first common wife (*ghariawi*) and faces the front courtyard. The large room is the living area during the day and in the nighttime serves as a sleeping area for younger brothers, their wives and their children.

The village water source is a naturally-occurring spring which may be anywhere between 1 to 2 kilometers from the village. The villagers have tried to pipe the water

into the village, but due to ridges in the hillside, the source is not very reliable. During the summer months, shortage of water is acute.

In addition to a house in the village, a majority of the villagers have a second house in the valley, the winter home, known as *channi*. During the winter months, the cattle and other livestock is moved to the valley to escape the bitter cold of the winter months. Also in the valley, during the winter months, the Jaunsaris grow winter crops and a vegetable garden.

One of the interesting features of the villages is miniature houses that are erected in the middle of the fields. These miniature houses, I was told, are houses built in the memory of *paap* (sins) which were accrued by the family for failing to realize the suffering of a family member who eventually died from his or her sufferings (*pira*). These houses serve as daily reminders to the villagers of the moral codes as grave warning of what might befall the village, or the household, if those codes are not followed. The houses are mostly erected in the memory of women, and stand in stark relief on the flat plane of the fields, reminding the onlooker of voices and words, stifled and silenced. I will deal with the placement of these houses and their effect on village life in later chapters.

Beyond the village and terraced fields, in the higher altitudes are the forests, forests of rhododendrons, oak and cedar, locally known as *Danda*. The *Danda* represents the "wild," where spirits live and where men go to hunt wild animals. Beyond the *danda* is the terrain of *Indrapuri* associated with supreme divine beings.

The movement between the domain of domestication (the hamlet and the terraced fields) and that of the wild and undifferentiated (*danda*) is carefully governed and is of fundamental relevance to Jaunsari perceptions of well-being and affliction. The domain of domestication is centered upon the promotion of fertility in women, livestock, and land; both women and men are equally involved. In the domain of wild we are faced with fierce animals (hunted by men), and spirits (who have the power to control mortal beings). In addition, the wild is known for its plants that have the power to heal. Because women are considered "lightweight," and hence vulnerable to wild animals and spirits, their movement to and from the *danda* is carefully monitored. Women and young adults enter the terrain of *danda* to collect fire wood but this is done as a collective activity during daylight hours. Men, who are stronger and hunt wild animals, are less vulnerable but they too fear the

wrath of spirits. A number of supplications are made to the spirits of the forests before a hunt. The *danda* is wild, dangerous, and beyond the control of humans. It is also a space occupied by the spirit known as *Matris* who belong to a higher order than humans.

Chapter 4

Gender, Kinship and Marriage in Jaunsar-Bawar

This chapter will examine the practice of fraternal polygynandry⁷ among the Jaunsaris and how it conditions the social relationships of men and women. It will also show how polygynandry gives rise to gender ideology and kinship relations which sustain a patriarchal structure that is lodged in the family. Closely following Rubin's (1975) lead, this chapter will explore the ways in which affinal relations engendered by polygynandry reproduce hierarchical relations between a woman and her affines, a relationship that emerges from and feeds back upon the wider cultural notions of the relationship between women and men. Finally, this chapter will also delve into the ways in which divorce compensation and marriage arrangements articulate with the male authority structure and this in turn with gender conceptions.

⁷Polygynandrous marriage refers to the marriage of 2 or more women to men who are brothers. This kind of marriage system is different from group marriage where no particular individual has exclusive marital rights over any of the spouses.

The Jaunsaris traditionally practiced a rare form of marriage: fraternal polyandry--the marriage of one woman to several men who are brothers. There is a strong indication in early Himalayan ethnographies⁸ that women in polyandrous societies enjoy a fairly high "status." Women do not observe purdah⁹ and enjoy greater freedom in their natal home than women who live in the plains of Uttar Pradesh. This raises interesting questions about patriarchy and the cultural construction of gender and kinship.

One of the general ways in which patriarchal practices oppress women is by controlling women's sexuality and reproductive capabilities. Identifying paternity as the sole determinant of the custody of children is another important element that perpetuates this patriarchal social system. At the surface level, polyandry seems to present an anti-structure to patriarchy, as polyandry requires that men relinquish their exclusive control over their wives' sexuality and reproductive opportunities. Further, polyandrously married women do enjoy a lot of attention, particularly sexual attention, as they are bearers of the future members of the household. It can be argued, invoking the logic of binary opposition, that since polyandry is structurally contrary to polygyny and since polygyny leads

⁸ Jain (1948), Majumdar (1962), Saksena (1954), and Sen (1956) to name a few.

⁹ Purdah is the Hindu system of secluding women by making it a rule that they cover their head and face.

to the devaluation of women, it then follows that women will be highly valued in polyandrous societies.

As we shall see, however, the features of polyandry may serve to strengthen the power of patriarchy in a polyandrous marriage pattern. In fact, Levine (1988) argues that these apparent paradoxes of polyandry may be no more than constructions reflecting the cultural bias of the researchers themselves, who belong to a monogamous society. In monogamous societies, exclusive rights over one's wife are considered the most important aspect of social control. Besides, polygyny, which is far more common than polyandry, may seem more plausible and perhaps more agreeable to a male eye. As Berreman (1975) suggests, this fascination with polyandry reflects an androcentric bias which plagues much of early ethnography.

Numerous feminist theories have been put forth to understand the institution of patriarchy and the oppression of women. Feminist theorists have called our attention to the various manifestations of patriarchy and especially the various mechanisms of control which are explicitly and implicitly interwoven into the fabric of everyday life. Common to all is the position that the use of gender as a social category is fundamental to the analysis of social life and that the idea of gender as a category of analysis liberates sexual differences from "constraining naturalistic assumptions" when it is viewed as a cultural construct

(Ortner and Whitehead 1981). Following this logic, gender refers to the social relations between the sexes and may be seen as the product of social and cultural processes.

Ortner and Whitehead (1981:19) in Sexual Meanings point out that men in a culture are almost always defined in terms of role categories whereas women are defined in terms of cross-sex relations. This is so because all social activity associated with males is culturally accorded a higher value, while women are always defined in terms of their relationships with men. Therefore, analysis of gender hierarchy should involve cross-sexual relationships. Rubin (1975) has argued that we need to focus on family and kinship to demonstrate how they mediate women's position in the society. Firestone (1970) has located oppression within the family, with women's reproductive role and domestic activity being the tools of oppression. Therefore, it is through an analysis of the kinship and marriage systems that we can begin to understand the root of the production and reproduction of the gender ideology.

According to Ortner and Whitehead (1981), cultural symbols are not mere reflections of social structure but are invested with meanings which shape the ways in which an actor participates in society. This is the "common sense" (Geertz 1983) world of the actor. Ortner and Whitehead also suggest that cultural symbols which constitute "structures of prestige" (caste, sex, class, age) are of the greatest

import for the cultural construction of gender, and further that "prestige considerations" are everywhere centered upon "socially dominant male actors." These structures are direct expressions of definite beliefs and symbolic associations. Hence, these prestige structures, by reflecting the symbolic order, are legitimate in ordering certain hierarchical social relations. Male prestige is closely involved with relations with women and therefore with the centrality of kinship and marriage. Ortner and Whitehead (1981:22) argue that: "the prestige system highlights certain cross-bonds within the total range available in society, insofar as they are central to generating and maintaining status."

Rubin, in developing and extending Levi-Strauss's analysis of alliance theory, argues that the exchange of women in marriage serves as the foundation of human societies. By extension, marriage becomes critical to a man's social standing (Ortner and Whitehead 1981). Ortner and Whitehead (1981) point out that domains of kinship and marriage are crucial in understanding gender ideology and the sphere of prestige relations. They argue that it is the prestige structure which mediates between the organization of kinship and marriage and gender ideology. I argue that in Jaunsari culture and society, *Bhaichara* (brotherhood) is a prestige structure that is culturally articulated and justified, and that this structure gives rise to a

supporting gender ideology which in turn is self-sustaining.

Taking into consideration the centrality of gender and kinship in defining the web of actual social relationships, I will try to explicate the tacit and implicit consequences of polygynandry for kinship and gender relations in the domestic lives of Jaunsari women. How the relations between men and women are articulated depends substantially upon kinship, which is defined and established by variables such as sex, age, position of the family within the community (especially for marriage and other such alliances¹⁰), and caste. In a family, a person's individual status is defined by relative position in a sibling set, varying with kinship role and age. By paying attention to the variables which articulate relations between and among men and women, I hope to illuminate the gender ideology of the Jaunsari culture. To explore gender and kinship relations in Jaunsar, I interviewed women about their attitudes towards polyandry, polygyny and monogamy.

The Jaunsaris practice what in anthropological terminology is known as fraternal polyandry. This is an arrangement in which brothers are united in one marriage and maintained as a single household. However, across the development of the household, one can observe a variety of marriage types, including monogamy, fraternal polyandry and polygyny. Although ideally polygyny occurs in cases where

¹⁰ see Krengel 1990.

the first wife is unable to bear children, polygyny in combination with fraternal polyandry is the most common form of marriage in Jaunsari society and accounts for 38-53% of all households [see Appendix A]. So common was this type of marriage that a new term--fraternal polygynandry--was coined by Majumdar (1962).

The Jaunsaris understand the polyandrous aspect of their society through legends of origin and descent. The Jaunsaris regard themselves as descendants of the Pandavas¹¹ of the Mahabharata and regard their land as *devbhmi* (the land of devas). The sharing of a wife is a cultural prescription, and being able to live in harmony renders prestige to the family. The bigger the household is, the higher the prestige of the family. Men lose face if families divide, and they take great pains to control their behavior in order to prevent this from happening. Jealousy and rivalry among the brothers are suppressed. In the socialization of male children, there is an emphasis on the importance of solidarity among brothers. For example, Ramlall (age 92) explained that sharing a wife and living in harmony under one roof is possible only when there is *prem* (love) between brothers. Further, sharing a wife builds solidarity among brothers and integrates the family. Also, this system prevents the division of land and animals and

¹¹ The five Pandava brothers shared their common wife Draupadi.

thus facilitates a higher standard of living, and counts for more votes in the political decisions made by the family.

While Jaunsaris believe that they are descendants of the Pandava family and understand the practical benefits of polyandry, their own explanation for choosing fraternal polyandry is grounded in and reinforced by a world view that *dosh* (a careless breach of cosmological prescription) originates from a faulty division of land. By choosing to have a common wife, every generation has only one set of heirs, and thus, the family is able to avoid a division of land. However, monogamous marriages among brothers would necessitate a division of land. One of my key informants, Dadaji, narrated several stories in which misfortunes like miscarriage, childlessness, death of household members and animals, bad harvest, and sterile land and women could be traced to a *dosh* which was born from the unfair distribution of land. He considers *bhratav bhav* (solidarity among brothers) an extremely important ingredient in the recipe for family prestige.

Let me illustrate this point with a case study: I met Vikram (age 45+) at a local healer's house. He was consulting the healer because his brother had recently died and both of his wives were unable to have children. Both of his wives had several miscarriages. The healer divined

dosh, which took the form of a *ghat* that was put¹² on Vikram's (individual # 15) lineage by the divided kin from the previous generation.

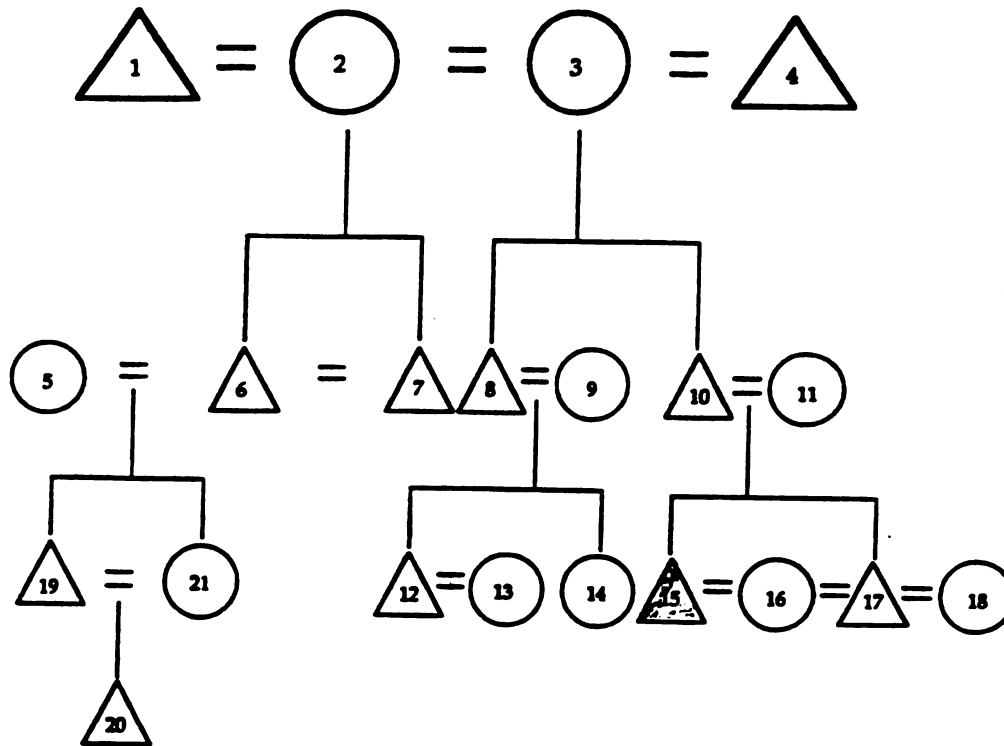


Figure 3: Kinship Diagram

In many ways, this case reveals the kinds of conflicts that may arise when a family divides their ancestral property. Among Vikram's ancestors, individuals 1 and 4 were brothers who were married to individuals 2 and 3.

¹² Ghat is "put" by leaving a desired wish at a shrine along with a sacrifice.

Individuals 2 and 3 each had two sons. The cleavage in the family's solidarity first started when individual 8 was monogamously married to individual 9. He wanted to set up his household and wanted his share of the property. Individual 6 was the *ghar ka botha*--the head of the household--who gave a meager portion of the ancestral property to individual 8. Later on, individual 6 wanted to separate from individual 10 and forced 10 to go to 8 for his share of the property, as 8 and 10 were from the same mother.

Individual 8 was already upset at the unfair division of land. He had to give a portion to 10 from his already scanty share. Individual 8 put a *ghat* on individual 6. In Vikram's narration, it appeared that division of the family had caused a lot of "hurt" to the victims and the "hurt feeling" (*gam/ahh*) was later "born into" individuals 20 and 15 as *dosh*. Vikram (individual 15) felt that if individual 20 accepted the mistake of the past and joined hands with individual 12 and him, it would be enough to "cut the *dosh*." This situation, Vikram considered, served as a timely reminder of the practical advantages of polyandry.

In a polyandrous marriage, although all brothers have equal conjugal rights and obligations to their common wife, the eldest brother (*jethang*) always has more access to the common wife, as well as having exclusive paternal rights. The eldest brother is the ultimate authority; he is *ghar ka*

botha (the head of the household). He is the one who brings the wife home with his name and initiates sexual relations with her. This is somewhat paradoxical, for this unequal status among the brothers can threaten the fraternal solidarity. The question is then why do the younger brothers agree to a polyandrous marriage? For the Jaunsari men who are not the eldest in the family, the choice is between economic security and social prestige or freedom and economic uncertainty. Vikram's case study does throw light on the double bind facing the younger brothers.

The membership in the household is kin-based and consists of a common hearth (*chulla*) and a common purse. The household is the basic residential, social, religious and economic unit in the community, with patrilocal residence, patrilineal descent, patronymic designation and patriarchal authority. All the earnings and agricultural products of a household are pooled together in the hands of one man, the *botha* (who is almost always the eldest brother), and one woman, the *ghariawi* (the first common wife).

A typical Jaunsari household will have three generations: the *ghar ka botha* (the head of the household), his wife or co-wives,¹³ brothers of the *botha*, their children and their children's wives and children. There is a variation to this composition as male out-migration and

¹³ Co-wives are rarely, if ever, sisters.

seasonality also affect the composition of the household. For example the *channi* (the winter home) is usually looked after by younger brothers and one of their wives. This spatial division of the household, even if only for the winter months (November to March), enables the unity of the household to be maintained by minimizing co-wife friction.

Unlike the Hindus of the plains, with whom monogamy is the only form of marriage permitted, Jaunsari society allows a variety of marriage types, including monogamy, fraternal polyandry and polygyny.. Therefore, it is not unusual that simultaneously in any family one can observe associations which might be monogamous, polygynous, polyandrous or polygynandrous in nature.

Also, in the development of household, one can observe a variety of marriage types including monogamy, fraternal polyandry and polygyny. This variation may also be the result of a particular phase in the domestic cycle of the household, but male out-migration and seasonality also affect the composition of the family. In order to describe and understand the coexistence of these arrangements of family and marriage, it is useful to observe one household over time (after Berreman 1975:134-5). The changes that a typical household undergoes are illustrated in the following example. This fictive household is a composite structure constructed from the various experiences of individuals in different households.

Let us assume that three brothers were married polyandrously in 1920, when the eldest brother took part in a marriage ceremony (*simlaith*) with a 15-year-old.



Five years later, a second wife, a 20-year-old, was married in the same manner as the first, becoming the second common wife.



The domestic group in this generation then became, structurally, a fraternal polygynandrous one.

Ten years later, the youngest brother migrated to the city as a government employee and told his brothers that he wanted one of the wives to live in the city with him. The domestic group was thereby transformed into 2 households, one polygynous household in the village and a monogamous household in the city.



village)



With the passing of another 10 years, the eldest brother in the village might have died leaving a typical monogamous family.

1940

 $\Delta = 0$

Following the death of the eldest brother, the other brother requests his youngest brother to return home, creating a typical polyandrous household. This then describes the cycle of a domestic unit, with the same value system supporting it in every phase (Berreman 1975).

The productive labor of women and men is equally valued, but women are also valued for their reproductive capabilities. The children born in a polygynandrous family have several mothers and fathers. The children call the eldest brother *baba* and all the other fathers are also called *baba*, with their name or the activity they perform prefixed to it. For example, the father named Vikram could be called Vikram *baba* or *ghair baba*, meaning the father who looks after the cows.

The children do recognize their own biological mother, but call their mothers *ma* with a prefix that refers to the natal village of the mother. For example, *Pabo wali ma* refers to mother who is from village *Pab* and *Dasau wali ma* refers to the mother who is from village *Dasau*. As a daughter-in-law, one is called *buhari* with the name of the village as a prefix. As a wife, one is *ghariawi* (the first common wife) or *gharwali* meaning "wife." To a married woman, all of the brothers she is married to are known as *khawand*, but there are no kinship terms to distinguish her relation with the brothers.

In Jaunsar, as in the rest of Indian society, it is the moral and religious obligation of parents to contract proper marriages for their children. Traditionally, proposals for marriage (*mangna*) are made by the parents of the bridegroom and, if consented to by the girl's father, the promise is solemnized by a *gauna*. This involves an offering in cash (a 1-Rupee coin) by the bridegroom's kin to the bride's father. The villagers were quick to point out that the *gauna* money is not bride price but a symbol of the promise. This exchange is considered to be the betrothal, and marriage takes place once the girl reaches puberty.

Before the formal marriage ceremony, the bride visits her future home for major religious festivals. The practice of "asking/begging" for a daughter-in-law (also known as *mangna*) is considered by Jaunsari men as evidence of the higher status of *Pahari* women than that which is accorded the women of the plains. They argue this because in the plains the bride's parents have to make offerings to the bridegroom's family in the form of a dowry.¹⁴

Female children are considered burdensome, and this compounds the poor status of women. Some older Jaunsari men recounted stories of the era when marriages were fixed even before a child was born. In practice, often a man with sons would ask another man whose wife was pregnant to "reserve"

¹⁴ Illegal since the passage of the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, but widely practiced nonetheless.

the child if it was a girl for his son(s). Now, with the influence of the mainstream culture of the plains, young men and women are in favor of monogamous marriages; but they do realize that in some cases (landed agriculturalists) polyandrous marriage is necessary and so conform to the practice. Puran, a clerk at the bank in a nearby township, expressed this attitude:

I am working away from home and cannot support a wife or family with my earnings. But I can make this money go a long way if my wife stays at home and works the fields. We have the cash and the produce from the field. I realize that, being away, someone needs to look after my wife, and if my younger brother shares my wife he has a vested interest in looking after her. This works very well with me. The woman is happy, my brother is tied to the village, I bring in the cash, and we are all happy.

Marriage ceremonies are performed only when both the bride and the bridegroom are previously unmarried. Second marriages are less often ceremonialized than first ones. All brides who would be *ghariawi* are virgins, but women who have been previously married are likely candidates for the position of second wife. The Jaunsari do make a distinction between women who can or cannot be a *ghariawi*. Previously married women are not considered less pure, but a *paboch*--vegetarian *Brahmin*--will not accept food cooked by *choot* (previously married) women. Another consideration is that marriage must take place within the social space of one's caste but outside the geographical space of one's own village.

The Jaunsari marriage is very distinct from the Brahmanical Hindu marriage (which is usually practiced by orthodox Hindus in the plains) in that it is not only devoid of religious symbolism and requires the bride to come to the bridegroom's village for the ceremony. For example, *Kanyadan*, the father's gift of his daughter to the bridegroom, the most important ceremony in Brahmanical Hindu marriage, is absent. Also, in the Brahmanical tradition, the fire (*agni*) is the divine witness and sanctifier, whereas in the traditional marriage as practiced by the Jaunsaris, the divine witnesses are the four distinct spaces--east, west, north and south--which constitute the cosmos. The marriage ceremony is simple and involves the holding of the bride's hand by the bridegroom and the taking of the vows of marriage. The traditional marriage which sanctifies the polyandrous union is known as *samlaith jharjerae*.

As Jaunsaris adapt to the monogamous marriage pattern of the orthodox Hindus, elaborate vedic rituals are finding their way into the marriage ceremony. As with the orthodox Hindus of the plains, the bridegroom comes to the village of the bride where *kanyadan* ceremony is performed. The father of the bride provides a dowry. The ritual paraphernalia, brides's costume and jewelry portray eager acceptance of the mainstream Brahmanical culture of the Hindu Indians.

Among *kanyadan* marriages divorce is rare. This type of

marriage could be interpreted as involving women as a "gift of a virgin" instead of a "secular transaction" as is the case in polyandrous union. In marriages which involve a secular transaction, the transacted goods can be returned, hence the possibility of divorce. But gifts cannot be returned, and where women are given as "gifts," divorce is rare.

Ideally, the relationship of wife to husband is one of complete devotion and servitude, for the husband is her *malik*, or owner. The wife will not call her husband by his name but will use the generic term *malik* to refer to her husband(s). Though the the patriarch (*botha*) is the decision maker, most Jaunsari men discuss with their wives about household finances, there were some who considered this no affair of their wives. During meal times, I observed, women comment on things that needed immediate attention (for example, shortage of grains, extra help for harvest season, etc.), recite incidents and events that might interest the family, or forewarn about tensions building in the neighbourhood. Many women told me that in privacy their husbands listen to them and take into consideration their opinions on different issues.

A household can have more than one dwelling; one is in the village and one, known as a *channi*, is usually the winter home located outside the village. *Channis* are usually built for animals on the foothills to escape the

harsh winter at the higher altitudes. The *channi* is usually looked after by younger brothers and one of their wives. This spacial division of the household, even if only for the winter months (November to March) enables the unity of the household to be maintained by minimizing co-wife friction.

The local discourse on brotherhood, kin identity and personhood seems to correspond to abstract conceptualizations propounded by Marriott and Inden (1977), Daniel (1984) and Egnor (1978). In Hindu society, kinship and gender identities are formed and transformed by a code of bodily substances, in accordance with the rules of purity and pollution. A person carries a template which is coded into their soul and which can be transformed by sharing food, bodily fluids, and through their actions (*karma*). The Hindu personhood is regarded as "fluid," easily susceptible to changes brought about by foreign elements that enter the body. Hence, the body is carefully guarded from elements that pollute it. After marriage, a woman becomes emotionally and physically identified with the kin-group of her husband through sharing natural physical substances or "coded substance" as coined by Marriott and Inden (1977). The coded substance that is transferred from a man to a woman during sexual union is said to transform her kin-identity. According to this Hindu belief in the fluidity of the person, sharing a wife would be tantamount to sharing natural physical substances (coded substances) with each

brother. Hence, I suggest that by sharing a wife the brothers become closer emotionally and physically. Also, sharing in this transformation further cements their commitment to each other and builds a stronger kin-identity.

Although the man usually takes the lead in initiating sexual relations, the onus falls on the woman to treat all of her husbands fairly in sexual matters and keep all her husbands satisfied. It is common for woman to select her sexual partner by manipulating situations to suit her best interests. There is no set pattern, but the mother-in-law may regulate the sleeping pattern of the family, especially in the first few days of marriage. But as there is no set pattern, women find it a tremendous strain (both emotionally and physically) to maintain a balance in performing conjugal duties fairly with all of their husbands.

Most of the marriages among Jaunsaris are of the fraternal polygynandrous type. This family structure threatens the unity of the common household because the wives not only have to balance their conjugal duties with their husband's, but also have to fight for their husbands attention without disrupting the peace of the household. Again, the onus falls on the co-wives (*sok*) to maintain domestic harmony.

Let me share 2 cases which throw light on the realities of the women's experiences and reveal the social relations that underlie polyandry. What I want to emphasize here is

the role of the woman in connecting and building solidarity among the brothers at the cost of her own well-being. These case studies very poignantly tell us about the realities of women's experiences in polyandrous unions.

Lakshmi Devi (age 38-40):

Puran and Param decided to remarry because they needed an extra hand to work in the fields. Their first wife did not live in the village but worked in the nearby township as a *dai* (midwife) in the local Red Cross hospital. Lakshmi, who became the second wife to Param and Puran, was quite vocal with me about the frustrations and traumas in her life.

Lakshmi was 20 when she was wedded to Puran in a traditional polyandrous marriage. The first night after the marriage was spent with Puran who was the eldest brother who naturally had the right to initiate and establish sexual relations with the new bride. She still remembers the night very vividly. Puran was drunk and forced himself upon her and left marks all over her body. The next night, under the direction of her mother-in-law, she spent with the younger brother Param. Param was horrified to find "ugly marks" on her body and decided that Lakshmi would be solely his wife and that she had no further obligations to entertain Puran.

About 20 years has passed since then, but little has changed. Puran still visits her in the fields and

forcefully enters her body. She does not tell Param about this as this could result in the division of the household, the blame for which would fall on her.

It is quite evident in this case that the problem of compatibility between a wife and all of her husbands can complicate and jeopardize the future unity of a household. Sometimes a specific brother might not like the wife and will let the family know about it, or the wife may prefer one of the husbands and let her preferences be known. However, an ideal (*izzatdar*) Jaunsari woman is a married woman who can maintain a household despite the difficulties of her situation. When brothers do set up different households (the reasons for which are various), the wife is deemed responsible for the partition. The most common complaints are that she is *jiddi* (has a quarrelsome disposition), or that she does not treat all of her husbands alike.

Pratima and Vimla (both in their early thirties)

Vimla and Pratima are co-wives. Both of them were wedded to the first brother Sham Sher. Vimla, the first wife of Sham Sher, was the only wife for about 12 years before her mother-in-law died suddenly and the family needed help for working in the fields. The men kinfolk decided to bring a woman to the family to help out. So for Rs 5,000 the brothers were able to marry a woman, Pratima, who had

been divorced twice. She had no children from her earlier marriages.

Pratima is considered very attractive, and, much to Vimla's annoyance, is favored by her husband Sham Sher. Vimla had agreed to this alliance because it would lessen her household work, and she had been made to believe that Pratima was intended for the younger brother. Vimla favors monogamous marriage and finds it difficult to share her husband with another woman. She has even attempted suicide.

Pratima was told that she was being married polyandrously into this family. But after the tension that followed Vimla's attempted suicide, she discouraged Sham Sher from meeting her in the fields. Where could she go? By that time, she had 2 children and her parents were dead, so she could not even return to her natal village. All of this has resulted in a tension-filled environment which stifled both Vimla and Pratima.

Vimla had been losing a lot of weight, which had been diagnosed as an attack from *daag*. Pratima was the most likely candidate for having made all of this happen. However, Pratima was herself possessed by a *matri*, which had caused her much physical and emotional discomfort. In June of 1994, Vimla died at a local hospital.

To a Jaunsari woman, maintaining a joint household is not only physically strenuous but it is a tremendous drain on her emotional energy and well-being. Her self-esteem

depends on her capability to maintain a joint household even if it means repressing her desirability, her sexuality and her own emotional and spiritual well-being.

However, a woman who finds her life in her partner's village unbearable can initiate the dissolution of her marriage. This, in local vernacular, is known as *choot*. Divorce or *choot* is commonly practiced and can be initiated by either a man or a woman. A divorce is permitted for reasons of adultery, barrenness, having a quarrelsome disposition (*jiddi*), carelessness in household work, laziness or refusal to love in harmony. Whether initiated by a man or a woman, the blame for initiating divorce is usually placed on the woman. After the divorce, she is referred to as *daag* (a witch), especially if she has failed to give birth to live children, or *tej* (cunning and of "loose morals").

In cases where a woman initiates *choot*, her father has to pay compensation to the former husband(s). It would be ethnographically inaccurate to equate compensation money as a bride price or bride wealth. The divorce involves writing out an invoice (*rashid*), documenting that the fact that family jewelry was returned and *choot* money was given as compensation to the former husband(s). To stop divorces becoming a business for profit, the panchayat regularizes such a divorce by fixing compensation money. If the woman wants a divorce, the husband and his family get the custody

of her children. If, however, the divorce is initiated by a man and his kin, the woman may take her children with her.

Choot is negotiated between the woman's male kin and her male affinal kin. The woman has no say in this negotiation, even though she may initiate *choot*. Thus, the institution of marriage, including remarriage and divorce, is male dominated, which further strengthens the ideological structure of patriarchy.

Remarriage is as common as divorce. This should not, however, be interpreted as resulting in women having more choices and options. Because women are highly valued as agricultural laborers and reproducers, the cultural value of women in the hills depends on their ability to perform. As one young Jaunsari man, disgusted by this tradition which he felt degrades women, suggested, his society is like a huge *mela* (gathering) where women are bought and sold like cattle.

Sexual relations outside of marriage are tolerated for men, while women face different standards of morality depending on their marital status. As a wife, a woman (*rianthuri*) has her sexuality controlled by her affines in the village, but as a daughter (*dianthuri*) she is free to have sexual relations in her natal village. This is another cultural features that distinguishes Jaunsaris from the other *Paharis*. Berreman (1972) reports that this cultural feature is more pronounced in Jaunsar-Bawar than in any

other part of the Garhwal Himalayas. Marriages between people of the same village are tolerated even less than intercaste marriages.

Jaunsari women have very few economic and jural rights.¹⁵ Daughters can not claim shares in the parental property but the father has to provide whatever is necessary for marriage ceremonies. Land and livestock cannot be inherited by women. Though there are very few money-making activities within the village, a woman has several possibilities of acquiring cash. Jaunsari women do earn small amounts of money through selling home-brewed liquor. This kind of money is earned without the knowledge of their kinsmen. Midwifery, teaching and weaving carpets are new money-making opportunities available to women as the Government of India and its various programs are encouraging girls to stay in school. I must add here that the incidence of women working outside their domestic sphere as *dai*, teachers or teacher's aide are insignificant. In my sample of 4 villages with a total population around 800, there was only one woman who was employed as a *dai* in the nearby township and a few girls were being trained to weave carpets. So even though women are considered an "economic asset," they are nevertheless economically dependent on

¹⁵ Jain (1948) for a detailed description of *dastoor ul aml* or Jaunsari customary Law.

their male kin. Saroj laments:

What is the use of "taking choot" from my husband and becoming a burden on my *maite* (natal village). I will be a burden wherever I go. At least I have more status as a *rianthuri* (married woman) than a divorced *dianthuri* (unmarried woman) in my *maite*.

Jaunsari women find themselves belonging neither to their *maite* nor their *sasural*. A number of women pointed out that because of the curse of being born a woman ("*karm* of my last birth") their lives are so hard.

Conclusions:

A critical analysis of the social relations that maintain polyandry reveals that in Jaunsari culture and society male prestige is closely linked to relations with women. It is the woman who mediates the relationships between brothers and who shoulders the responsibility of maintaining solidarity among them. Brotherhood is a prestige structure and it becomes the imperative of the family to keep the brothers together. What better strategy than to bind them to a common woman. If common property and residence hold brothers together, a common wife would further increase the obligations between the brothers. In other words, women are used to strengthen the bonds between the brothers.

This suggestion is illuminated by the fact that although women can initiate a separation, the ultimate control over consenting to and dissolving marriages is in

the hands of the male kin. I have made an attempt to show how marriage and kinship rules directly strengthen the male authority while having a negative effect on women's selfhood. This chapter provides the social context for a meaningful analysis of spirit possession in Jaunsar-Bawar.

Chapter 5-

Jaunsari Cosmology

This chapter documents the local construction of the world and those categories that form the basis for understanding the existential dilemma that perplexes any ordinary being. In an attempt to construct what I have called Jaunsari Cosmology,¹⁶ I have sifted through my field notes to determine categories of powerful actors. As "power" is an important attribute that defines these categories, I have emphasized the power hierarchy of supernatural and natural forces. The last section of the chapter is devoted to understanding the relationship of a person to the cosmogenetic bodies and supernatural forces.

The Jaunsaris recognize the existence of the high god-- *Devata Mahasu*; his three brothers *Chalda*, *Bassi* and *Pabassi*; his army (the *bir* and *pir*); and numerous deities called *Matriya*. They honor *Siva* and *Kali* (devi), the great deities, and they also closely identify with the Pandavas of the Mahabharata and consider themselves their direct

¹⁶ By Cosmology I refer to that aspect of culture which forms the philosophical basis for the interrelation between the various categories of actors that constitute the various worlds and the rules that govern these actors.

descendants. And just as the Pandavas are worshipped as ancestors, the Jaunsari also worship and pacify spirits of those humans who died due to neglect and misdeeds on the part of their family. In addition, Jaunsaris recognize certain individual humans (*nordai*) who have special powers that may be benevolent or evil.

The universe, according to the Jaunsaris, is stratified, with the *Indralok* (upper world) above, *Mrityulok* (underworld) below, and the *Prithvi* in the center. There are a number of *loks* (worlds) between the upper world and the underworld (7 below the center and 7 above the center), but to most Jaunsaris *Indralok*, *Prithvi* and *Mrityulok* form the three-tiered indigenous cosmos.

Each *lok* (world) has its respective spirits, which in turn have their own hierarchy, and each *lok* is defined by its denizens. The *Indralok*, which is above the high mountains, is the home of the major gods and goddesses. The *danda* (mountain top) is closer to the upper world, and is the home of the *matriyas*. The *Mrityulok* is inhabited by nefarious spirits, while *Prithvi* is where humans live. The inhabitants of *Mrityulok* are the spirits of humans who had a premature death or died unfulfilled a condition, variously known as *masandh*, *bhut*, *pret*, or *heyrdh*. The cremation grounds, which are considered to be continuous with the *Mrityulok*, are areas where malevolent spirits roam free. The shaman, who resides in the *Prithvi*, is seen as the

mediator between the beings of *Indralok* and *Mrityulok* and he or she acts on behalf of the humans inhabiting the *Prithvi*.

In addition to the three *loks*, the *Jaunsaris* also recognize nine *grahas* (planets).¹⁷ In accordance with the Hindu astrological system, a villager *Bamon* will develop a *janam kundalini* (horoscope) upon the birth of a child. The horoscope is calculated by taking into account the date of birth, the time of the birth and the first two letters of the child's name. Two levels of analysis develop for use with this chart: the ruling number and the relation between the planets. The date of birth, according to certain rules, is calculated/manipulated to determine the ruling number. The time of birth helps to calculate the asterism (*nakshatra*) under which a child is born. The particular *nakshatra* one is born under is therefore defined for the person from birth and determines the planetary influence (*rashi*) on his/her life. Each planet has certain attributes which affect the mental, physical and spiritual strength of the person. For example, people born under certain zodiacal signs (*rashis*), like Gemini (*Mithun*), Virgo (*Kanya*), Cancer (*Makar*) and Pisces (*Meen*), are vulnerable to possession by spirits because these *rashis* are considered "naram" (soft) or "halka" (light). In their local theory, it is believed that a person's psychological makeup (*vaiktitya*) is often

¹⁷ The nine planets correspond to the 7 days of the week, and the remaining two are rahu and ketu.

governed by a dominant *graha* (planet).

The birth chart is consulted for major decisions and for finding out the "cause" of suffering and misfortune. It also helps to predict anxieties and problems that might afflict the individual, and finds solutions to them. Each year, a number of publishing houses bring out an almanac (*jantri*) which is vigorously and extensively consulted by *Bamon* and *Paboch* of the community.

Mahasu:

The history of *Mahasu Devata*, the high god, is linked with the village of Hanol, which is the destination of the ultimate pilgrimage for all Jaunsaris. Tana Nana, the *deyhardh* of Bisoe, narrated the legend of the birth of *Mahasu*:

Near Hanol, on the bank of the River Tons, was a village named Mahendreth where the four *Mahasu* brothers "took birth." In the olden days, Mahendreth was a village of Bhatt's. This village has since been destroyed. During the time when the village was a flourishing, a demon named Kirmir Dana "took birth" in the River Tons. He used to eat humans and would not allow any humans to use the river.

The villagers had agreed among themselves to send him one man in return for the temporary use of the river. Soon many villagers had been sacrificed so that the river could be used. Then came the turn of a Brahmin named Urna Bhatt. The demon had already eaten Urna Bhatt's 7 sons and 7 daughters. Urna had been trying to kill the demon and, the night before the fateful day, he had a dream about 4 warrior brothers *Mahasu* who lived in Kuru Kashmir and understood that with their help he

could kill the demon.

When he woke up from his dream the next morning, Urna left for Kuru Kashmir with a silver stick and chanted reverentially *Mahasu's* name. He had to overcome quite a few obstacles. He had to fight lions, tigers, bears, and snakes. It was in the darkness of the night that he reached his destination. Once he was there, he had to face 51 *chatak* (*bhut-pret*) and 52 *bir* (warriors). Some wanted to eat him raw and others wanted to roast him.

It was the *mantri* (ministers) Kailu Kapla Vir and Sukhrirdh Vir who explained to the 51 *chataks* and 52 *vir*s that Urna Bhatt had nowhere to go and had come to them for help. So the *chataks* and the *bir* explained to Urna that he should not panic and that he would come to no harm. They said that on Sunday, when the drums are beating the Regjhega Tal, the 4 brothers would appear outside of their palace. At that time, Urna should get hold of the forth *palki* (palanquin) that will go to Chalda's and present his case. Chalda promised to kill the demon Kirmir and asked Urna Bhatt to return to Mehendreth.

On the first Sunday after his arrival they said Urna should plough the largest field using blades made of gold and with a plough made of silver, and in the furrows he would find that the 4 brothers would take birth. Urna acted accordingly and Botha (*Mahasu*) was the first to appear followed by Chalda, Bassi and Pabassi. Soon the whole army appeared on the field. In no time the demon was killed by Kailu Kapla Vir. The villagers dedicated a temple to Botha in Hanol, where he is seated to this day. Chalda decided to move around in Jaunsar-Bawar and Bassi and Pabassi left for Garhwal.

Various regional interpretations of *Mahasu* exist. Some Jaunsaris identify *Mahasu* as *Siva* (Maha-su = Maha siv), while some equate him with *Rama* (pointing out that both *Rama* and *Mahasu* have three brothers). Most Jaunsaris agree that *Mahasu* is the highest god in the cosmological hierarchy. It is believed that the laws have been laid down by *Mahasu*

and should be followed by all people in their everyday living.

Apart from the temple of *Mahasu* at Hanol, there are temples in different villages which are dedicated to *Mahasu*. One such temple was erected in the Village of Bisoe after it was approved by *Mahasu* in a person's dream.

Pandavas:

The *Pandavas*, the heroes of The Mahabharata, are considered to be the ancient ancestors of the Jaunsaris. For most Jaunsaris, the *Pandavas* are the model of brotherhood and provide validation for the existence of polyandry. The story of Raja Virat, who is believed to have given shelter to the *Pandavas* when they were in exile, is a part of their oral repertoire and was recounted to me several times as evidence that the *Pandavas* lived in Jaunsar. Bhairat Khai, an old fort, located about 5 kilometers from the Village of Bisoe is evidence of the existence of the kingdom of Raja Virat. This story also appears prominently in the Mahabharata.

Mandavana is the annual ceremony to honor and worship the Jaunsaris' direct'lineal ancestors, the *Pandavas*. It is a dramatized rendition of their local history¹⁸ eulogizing

¹⁸ See Sax, William 1992

the solidarity between brothers, presenting ideal womanhood as portrayed by Draupadi Rani as the ideal wife and Kunti as the ideal mother, and legitimizing the practice of polyandry. To most villagers, Mandavana is an annual festival celebrated for the welfare of the village. This ceremony removes any *dosh* that the village may "carry" and requests the *Pandavas* to control the powers of ghosts and demons.

The festival may continue for as long as seven days, depending on the financial situation of the village or on any crises which may arise. It is a performance at which a number of chosen villagers are possessed by the *Pandava* spirits. Briefly, *Mandavana* is a ritual that focuses on the well-being of the village or the local unit (depending on who is the sponsoring unit). Since polyandry is the basis for the well-being of the community, it is celebrated and eulogized with songs like:

*Sewa manya koiki kunta, meri sat ki mata
dharam ki sewa manya meri pita pando raja
jayee ke jerma sat ke pancho pando bori bhai bandh
sewa manya meri yudhistir maharaj
sewa manya meri devi draupadi
nahi lena mere pandov, hari haridwar birdi ka dwar
nahi lena mata hari haridwar
nahi lena pando yudhistir maharaj.*

Respect to mother Kunti, Mother of the truth
respect to religion, and to the father of the *Pandavas*,
to whom was born the truth of five *Pandava* brothers
respect to my great King *Yudhistir*
respect to my devi *Draupadi*
We will take ritual a bath, my *Pandavas*, at Hari's
Hardwar,
Birdi's door
We will take a bath mother, at Hari Hardwar

We will take a bath, pando Yudhistir Maharaj.
 This song is sung to encourage the people to participate in *Mandavana*, to allow the spirit of *Pandavas* to "ride them," and, in return, to become recipients of a ritual bath at Hardwar.

Devi:

Although *devatas*, especially the *Mahasu devata*, are considered the most powerful (*virat sakti*) of the gods, *Devi* is next in the hierarchy as far as *sakti* is concerned. Whereas the *devatas* have regular followers and a fixed calendrical ritual, *Devi* has a limited following and no rituals associated with her. Most Jaunsar households have a *kuldevi* (household devi), namely *Vaishnudevi*, *Nagarkot*, *Jawala*, etc. *Devi* may *vas* (reside in, possess) human bodies and provide *prakash* (light =insight) for their hosts. The hosts are considered to have *sakti* and are believed to have a "healing touch."

Pokhu:

Every time the word *Pokhu* is mentioned, the Jaunsaris will bite their tongues and touch their earlobes as a way of asking for forgiveness. *Pokhu* is a divine being who is feared because of his destructive powers and the expedience

with which he operates on behalf of the people when they call upon him to intervene. A legend traces the power of *Pokhu* to the special *vardan* (gift) from *Siva*. *Pokhu* was a *rakshash* (demon) who, as he took his last breath, remembered *Siva*. *Siva* bestowed on him the *vardan* that *Kaliyuga* people will worship him in the tradition of *Asura* (a demon). *Pokhu's* birthplace is *Netwar*, a region north of *Jaunsar*, where the *Kauravas*, the enemy of the *Pandavas*, are worshipped.

The *Jaunsaris* describe the power of *Pokhu* as being as dangerous as a *bijli* (lightning/thunderbolt), which only causes destruction and loss. A woman described *Pokhu* and his power as follows:

His influence is like the impact of thunderbolt: it finishes (*khatam*) anything on which it falls. For example, I have an enemy, and I think of *Pokhu* in my mind and I debate and think that lightning should strike that person or that the person loses face, and it is not long before the impact can be seen. . .very fast impact and then the person dies or loses everything he/she has.

In some areas of *Jaunsar*, especially in the west (the area bordering *Himachal Pradesh*), a similar spirit is worshipped, locally known as *Brijat*.

Matri:

Matri is a cultural construction of a kind of wind (*hawa*) which has no physical form but belongs to the female gender. She is believed to reside in *indralok* (upper

world), and is variously known as *jogini*, *yogini*, or *hawa*. There are as many as 64 *jogini* forms and there is some sort of a configuration among them. They could be related to each other as sisters, they could be occupying a different space (in terms of different spatial direction), or they could be categorized in terms of the symptoms or afflictions they cause. While domesticated plants and animals are protected by the higher *devatas*, the domain under the jurisdiction of the *matris* is the wild-forests, *danda* (high mountain peaks), jungle animals and plants. To enter their domain, one needs to seek their permission, for example if hunting or lumbering has to take place.

Given the formlessness of the *matris*, Susan Wadley's (1980: 23-24) analysis of *sakti* as symbolized by the wind is pertinent here. Wadley in her research in Tamil Nadu found that the qualities of wind correlate with the character of demons and lower gods and contrasts with the character of higher gods. As one *Bamon* put it, "*hawa* is constantly present and so is the presence of *matri*." For the *Jaunsaris*, *matris*, like the wind, are relentless, always moving, without a form, and are always in search of *pinds* (bodies) to reside in.

Matri is believed to be attracted to beautiful women, to the color red, and to ornaments. She might decide to reside in a woman if she is attracted to her. This form of possession may manifest itself in the form of an affliction

or bodily change. She may also "stick" to a person, for the person may be carrying a *dosh*, or she might protect a person afflicted by malevolent spirits. *Matri* may be an avenger, protector or "soul mate." However, *matri* is easily angered by abusive language, noise and human excreta. These attract the attention of *matri* and anger her. It is said:

A well respected man from the Bawar region of Jaunsar-Bawar was a flutist, and would graze his goat on Kharamb, one of the highest peaks of the Chakrata hills. These hills were also known to be the residence of higher-order *matris*. Although *matri* had warned him in his dreams not to play his flute in the hills, he continued to play his flute, while keeping an eye on his grazing goats.

One day he climbed a tree and fell asleep while watching his flock of goats. As he slept, he dreamed of several women plotting whether or not to kill him. This frightened him and he woke up immediately and found himself in the midst of a dense jungle. Although he found his way home, he never played the flute again in the hills. He also appeased *matri* by paying his dues.

While the *matris* are generally attracted to women, they make no distinctions between caste groups. This is well illuminated by the Myth of *Daagar Tila*:

During the time of British Raj, a certain British couple was hiking to a mountain top, locally known as *dagar tila*. They were told to be careful, as the *matris* wandered there. The couple did not believe these stories, but all of a sudden the British woman's jaw twisted and she fell to the ground. The man then pissed in her mouth and the woman's face regained its shape.

Although there are at least 64 different forms of *matri*, they can be easily dichotomized into symbolically opposite categories that are mutually exclusive, not

complementary to each other, and coded by color. They are *succhi matri* and *masan matri*. The *succhi* in *succhi matri* is a Jaunsari version of the Hindi word *sudh* (pure). The *succhi matri* resides in the high mountain peaks (*danda*), while the *masan matri* lives in the *marghat* (cremation ground), which is near a stream (*neuar*), and is mostly found in the foothills of the Himalayas. The characteristics that define and configure the two *matris* are clearly in binary opposition.

<u><i>Succhi matri</i></u>	<u><i>Masan matri</i></u>
* pure	* polluted
* white, red, solid	* black, printed
* wheat flour, cotton thread	* <i>kala mung</i>
* vegetarian, no oil	* Nonvegetarian,
* mountain peaks, earth	* lower level, near water source
* morning	* night
* <i>Purnima</i> (full moon)	* <i>Anus, amabas</i> (moonless)
* auspicious	* inauspicious
* no sacrifice	* sacrifice
* the victim remains the <i>dori/rath</i> (vehicle)	* the animal sacrificed becomes <i>dori</i>
* <i>bonth</i> (tie together), or request to leave	* always exorcised

Some Jaunsaris recognize a third category of *matris* known as *kali*, while some others consider *Kali* as a *devi* and place her on a higher level than the rest of the *matris*.

The Jaunsaris believe that *matris* take possession of humans at will and affect their physical and mental well-being. Under their influence, the soul strays (*atma bhatak jati hai*) and the person may experience dysphoria. The host may also have some somatic symptoms such as stomach ache,

headache, nausea, loss of appetite, heart palpitations, squeezing sensations, etc.

Succhi matris cannot be exorcised; they can either be placated from time to time or assimilated into a permanent relationship with the host. In other words, possession by *succhi matri* is lifelong. Over a period of time, individuals possessed by *matri* can tap into her *sakti* and use it to heal people. In contrast, *masan matri* is always exorcised as possession by such *matris* is not desirable.

Kali:

Kali, in Jaunsar, is a generic name for a number of deities known for their nefarious activities. To some Jaunsaris, *Mahasu* is *Kali's* *mama* (mother's brother), while some refer to *Kali* as *Mahasu's* *beti* (daughter). The image of *Kali* in Jaunsar has a broken neck, and a legend¹⁹ explains that *Kali's* neck was deliberately broken by *Mahasu*

¹⁹ A similar myth popular in Bengal explains the need to control the dangerous female power *sakti*. *Kali* was sent by gods to fight a demon and his army. Crazed with her victory, she did not stop killing and the earth was near destruction. The gods sent *Siva* to stop her, and as entranced as she was, she did not notice that *Siva* was lying at her feet. When she stepped on him, an inexcusable act for a Hindu wife, she stuck her tongue out in embarrassment, and that stopped her rampage. The explanation the Jaunsaris give for her hanging tongue is that when *Mahasu* in his attempt to control her rampage and stop destruction of the earth and her people; *Mahasu* struck her neck, her tongue jerked out. In Bengal, *Kali's* image is always worshipped with *Siva* lying under her feet. The *shakti* is rendered positive and benevolent by *Siva's* control on her. This is similar to the reason why *Mahasu* broke her neck.

to make her less ferocious.

The first Sunday of every month is dedicated to *Kali* and a goatling is sacrificed in her name. The color red is associated with her and her *dori* puts a vermillion mark (*tilak*) on their forehead. Her *doris* have the power to heal people.

Paap:

Paap literally means sin and, in Jaunsar, *paap* is believed to be passed on from generation to generation and is, in a certain sense, an "ancestral cult." A *paap* is born (*janam leti hai*) from hurt feelings caused by exploitation, torture and/or neglect experienced by a person, which feeling drives him/her to commit suicide. The resultant *ahh!* (a cry of anguish or angst) "takes birth" as *paap*, which is perpetuated in one's family line and possibly across kin and caste boundaries. It is believed that one may even get the *paap* of animals. Once the *paap* is "born," the *paap* may "rise" or "come" from time to time (possession being one possible avenues) in the form of misfortune in order to demand justice for those unjustly exploited or hurt. The Jaunsaris recognize three kinds of *paap*.

When a man commits suicide or has an unnatural death because of the hurt caused by somebody, a *purus paap* is "born." When a woman dies or commits suicide, a *kanya paap* is "born" and depending on the party responsible it is either *rianthuri* (if her in-laws were at fault) or

dianthuri paap (if her natal household was involved). In situations where sudden death of a pregnant woman occurs, the household is said to be "stuck with" (*lagti hai*) *ostri-purus paap*.

To show respect for *paap*, a locket is made with figures engraved on it and is taken to Hardwar for ritual obligation. In some cases, on return, miniature wooden houses are constructed for *paap* for pacification, and every *sankranth* of *jaith* (May-June) it is honored and worshipped.

The *paap* is considered a type of affliction (*dosh*) and is believed to be permanently attached to the household. It is manifested in misfortunes like death (sometimes of the entire clan), infertility, and miscarriage, and it is also said to effect animals and harvests.

Daag:

Some individuals, generally women, are endowed with evil powers. These evil forces are not an inherent force but are learned skills that can be used to generate power. These evil powers are used by *daags* to cause sudden deaths in families and cattle. "A *daag* eats (*khana*). " They are active at night and especially on moonless nights (*anus*). When I asked villagers how one becomes a *daag*, who selects them, and where they are trained, they gave me contradictory information. They indicated that the *daags* themselves do not know they are *daags* which contrasts with the perception of

learning their skills. However, all agreed that the power of Brahmins is superior to the evil power of daags. This is not surprising given the stronghold of Brahmins and the gender ideology that favors males in that area. The Jaunsaris illustrated the difference in the two powers with the help of myths:

Myth # 1:

The daags meet every *bhado* at *amabash* (no moon) on the top of a high mountain known as *Ghitya Dhat*, which is also the place where *Bisu mela* is celebrated at *sankranth* in *baisakh* (April-May). The daags get drunk, rip off their clothes and dance in the nude. One year, the *Bhola* villagers (the village very close to *Ghitya Dhat*), fed up with the obscenity and amoral character of these meetings, decided to attack one such gathering. They carried with them fully-loaded rifles, but when they reached the *tila*, the daags had transformed themselves into *lomrhi* (foxes). The foxes threatened the villagers never to disrupt their meeting again. The villagers were unable to fire bullets because the power of daags had converted the ammunition into water.

Myth # 2:

The villagers were very frustrated by the disruptions that the daags caused in their lives. They decided to engage a *Bamon* who was reputed to be the possessor of *murtiman sakti* (great power). The *Bamon* arrived with his assistant and requested a *hukka* (a pipe). When the assistant entered the kitchen, the *ghariaya* put her hand inside the hearth and handed the assistant some burning coal for the *chilum* (the top portion of the *hukka*). This was an indication (*chinha*) that the woman was a daag and was trying to scare them away. The assistant informed the *Bamon* about this incident. The *Bamon* was not worried. That evening, the *Bamon* assured all of the male members of the village that by the next morning he would be able to identify the daags in the village. To help him

he asked the men to bring a piece of their wives' jewelry.

When the *Bamon* retired for the night, all of the *daags* got together to find a way out of this predicament. When the *Bamon* fell asleep, the *daags* removed the top of the roof to eat the *Bamon*. But the *Bamon* knew of this already. When the *daags* removed the roof, the *Bamon*, using his *sakti*, extended the walls of the hut so that the roof of the hut would not fit. He challenged the *daags* to put the roof back, and, if they failed, he would expose them to the public. Because of the inferior knowledge of the *daags*, they were unable to extend the roof of the hut. The *Bamon* agreed to let them go if they presented him with a piece of their jewelry.

The next morning, in front of all the villagers, the *Bamon* collected all the jewelry from the male members of the village, and then matched it with the jewelry he had collected from the *daags*. In this way he was able to identify the *daags* in public, showing the superiority of his knowledge.

A similar myth, along the same story line, was narrated to me about a *daag* who was the wife of a *Bamon* from the village of Dwinya. She was his first wife and was childless. The villagers' perception of a *daag* is of a woman who is usually ugly, with a protruding tongue, big teeth, and loose hair falling on her face.

In the sacred text, *Bagai*, which provides *yantras* and *mantras* for killing a *daag*, she is portrayed as a woman who has fire coming out of her mouth. This, I was told, is the weapon of the *daag*, and through her words she brings about destruction. She has learned the skill of using words (*mantras*) to cause "things to happen." Her power to destroy is analogous to the destructive power of fire. However, her

power to destroy can be controlled by *Bamons*, whose power is greater and who can neutralize the power of a *daag*. The most powerful of all is *Pokhu*.

It is common to see cactus plants placed at the opening of the chimney to prevent the *daags* from invading the households and its members. *Daags* are said to use the chimney or the opening in the ceiling (*khatai*) to exit or enter houses. In a similar manner, the *daags* are able to enter a person's body through any opening (without being seen) and eat the kernel organs--the heart and liver being their favorites. They are skilled at eating the inside of a fruit without leaving a trace of their activities; a piece of fruit may look healthy from the outside and yet have nothing inside. The human victims may show no signs of skin damage but may have no heart or any other vital organs left. *Daag* are said to be responsible for causing miscarriage, sterility or barrenness in women. Unable to bear children themselves, they are jealous of fertile women. *Daags* attacks their victims in such a way that they can see the *daag* but are totally paralyzed ("the body feels like a huge boulder") and cannot do anything. These symptoms are similar to the symptoms of narcolepsy--sleep paralysis in which a person is paralyzed while conscious.

A woman walking alone at night or very early in the morning is branded as a *daag* (this is possibly a way to curtail extra-marital relationships within the village).

All of these images mentioned in the above paragraphs construct what is considered non-feminine among Jaunsari women--childlessness, greed, destructiveness, and causing death or ill-health. A *daag*, in the mind of Jaunsaris, connotes a negative image of what it means to be woman.

Bhut-Pret:

A *bhut* or a *pret* is the soul of someone who dies accidentally or unnaturally before he/she has led a "full life." The soul wanders around as if it is still attached to this world and is unable to transcend or take rebirth. It is believed that *bhut* and *pret* are totally under the control of higher gods and act as their *chela* (follower). In fact, they do errands for the *devatas*.

Heyradh is particular type of *pret*--the soul of a pregnant woman. She is feared by women as she can take away from them what defines womanhood for Jaunsaris. It is believed that these particular *prets* are vulnerable to *daags* who have the learned skill to control them and make them do whatever their hearts desire.

Cheradth are the souls of very young children who die at infancy or at the time of birth, and whose *antim smaskar* (final funeral rituals) were unsatisfactory. They are under the control of *daag* and are known to be the *daag's chela* (follower).

Divine Humans:

This category consists of humans who have special powers (*divya shakti*--the power to see) and who bridge the gap between the supernatural forces and lay villagers. They have the ability to see things beyond the perception of normal humans, with the "light" (*prakash*) provided to them by the knowledge they garner from reading sacred texts (as in the case of enlightened *Bamon* or *Paboch*) or by the *shakti* of spirits that possess them (as in the case of *Mali*, *Matriya*, and *Masanya*).

Pir:

Pir, a Muslim hero's spirit, is consulted for afflictions which are the actions of *bhut* and *pret*. During my research, I met only a couple of *pirs* (individuals who are possessed by *Pir*) who were sought after as healers for special cases of "fright."

Dunkin:

Dunkin is the Jaunsari perception of the "evil eye." Some humans, especially women, have a personal attribute which is an inherent quality enabling them to cause harm with their "gaze" (locally known as *nazar*). This inherent

quality cannot be changed even if the person wills it. One may, however, with the help of a healer, remove the effects of the "gaze."

Nordei:

Nordei is a term used for lay people, who as mere humans, they are prone to make mistakes.

Conclusion :

This chapter provides the backdrop for the human actors straddled between the separate worlds of benevolent and nefarious spirits. I have tried to chart out a cosmological map that will help navigate through the case histories featuring both human and divine actors and will provide an understanding of the dilemmas faced by these actors and their fellow humans. This, I hope, will throw into relief the various cultural schema, logic, rules and interrelationships and guide us in addressing issues of suffering, affliction, and misfortune in the Jaunsari community.

Chapter 6

The Lives and Rituals of Healers

This chapter is a record of the life histories, diagnoses and healing rituals of several traditional healers. My primary objective is to do ethnography, to document in detail the symbolic system of the healing rituals that is the foundation of Jaunsari healing tradition and to present the logic that informs the workings of such systems of healing. It is important to keep in mind that the healing tradition that emerges from this discussion is a reconstruction on the part of the researcher that pieces together the accounts and curing practices of the healers under study. This is not an ethnoscientific study of Jaunsari ethnomedicine.

The specialists who are the focus of this chapter are those special human beings who have the "power" (*sakti*) to establish communion between the living and the spirits of other cosmic domains. The Jaunsaris, however, distinguish between the different specialists by classifying them in terms of the means by which spiritual power (*sakti*) is gained or obtained. The "power" is either achieved by the learned knowledge of sacred texts (*vidhya*) and/or by the

power (*vardan*) vested in humans by the spirits of the upper worlds or under worlds.

The learned power of communicating with supernatural worlds is almost always exclusively the domain of the caste of Brahmins--the *Bamons*. The *Bamons* are specialists who gain their power to heal or alleviate afflictions by learning to use the *Bagoi* or *bhagyabahi* (the book of fate). This text is written in an ancient script (*kashmirilipi*) quite different from the devnagri script (Hindi). The same text is used by the *Paboch*. However, the *Paboch* are considered to be of the higher caste, more pure than the *Bamon* who eat meat. The purity of the *Paboch* results from their vegetarian diet. As the *Paboch* are considered more pure, their healing power is believed to be more effective.

The *Mali* (male diviners) or *Matriya* (female diviners) are healers who have gained "power" or *sakti* as a special gift (*vardan*) and are selected by the spirits who are known to possess them. The hierarchy that exists among the *Malis* and *Matriyas* reflects the position of the possessing spirits within other cosmogenetic environments. This hierarchy also mirrors the existing caste and gender hierarchy in Jaunsari society. For instance, a woman from a higher caste would be possessed by a spirit which has a lower status than the spirit that possesses a *Mali*, who, although, belong to a lower caste, is a male. Similarly, a *Malis* belonging to a higher caste would be possessed by a spirit which has a

position higher than the spirit that may possess a *Mali* who hails from a lower caste.

There is another category of practitioners known as *Masandhya*. These practitioners usually belong to the lower castes, the *Doms* and the *Koltas*, and are assumed to communicate with nefarious spirits of the underworld. They are considered to be powerful mediators between the human world and the world of the dead.

Malis: Their Lives and Ritual Practices

The *Malis* (also known in some areas as *Baki* or *Bhagat*) are a group of male diviners who arbitrators/mediators between the superhuman forces and the layperson. They communicate with people under the ecstasy and spell of powers. Divination is done under the protection of the guardian supernatural force.

A *Mali* is a mouthpiece of a particular deity, and is selected by the deity himself/herself for whom he acts as the medium in the diagnoses of suffering and misfortune. The divination occurs when the supernatural force enters into the *Mali's* body and possesses it. The *Mali* then becomes the mediator, able to communicate with the divine forces and other spirits not considered benevolent.

Malihood is a legitimate diviner status. This status is legitimized by the blessings obtained at the temple of

Mahasu at Hanol. However, *Malis* differ in terms of their divinatory objects, style of divination, language and area of expertise, as well as their caste affiliation.

Becoming a *Mali* or *Matriya* is not automatic after having been "chosen" by the divine (a special calling). It involves the process of "habituation" (*bonth*), a process in which the deity is "tamed." This process can sometimes take months or years. The habituation ritual confers on the *Mali* the legitimate status of a diviner.

With the help of several vignettes describing *Malis* and *Matriyas*, I hope to highlight their similarities in order to (1) present the cultural logic that informs the workings of Jaunsari healing traditions, and (2) extend it to interject the local knowledge that suggests how people construct meaning from the events that design and shape their lives.

Bohri ka Mali (M55+):

Jagat Singh was the youngest of all his siblings and belonged to the local Rajput caste. In his description of his initiation to Malihood, he details a number of themes common to the experiences of a number of healers in that community. He recounts:

The first time devata "came" (*ana*) in me was when I was a Vth grader--I was 13-14 years old at that time. I have a brother who lives in the same house and has two sons. It so happened that one day the 2 boys "became together" (*saha lag Jana*) with *bhut-pret*--they came under the wrath (*prakop*) of

bhut-pret. It was 7 o' clock in the evening. With the *saha*, their hands and feet had been bent out of shape. Since I am the *bhagat* (*Mali*) of Lord Parushuram, when this happened my father advised that a fist full of wheat should be waved around my body and then *prasad* should be waved over the bodies of the boys. At that time, I was having my evening meal. As soon as I had the first morsel of *roti*, the *devata* came.

At that time the *devata* came in me in an elaborate way (*chant*). I could see him from a far distance and he came and sat on the roof of my house. It was then that my eyes closed and I could see no one other than Lord Parushuram. In one hand he carried a double edged axe (*fharsa*) and in the other hand tongs (*chimta*). I saw him in his *vikral rup* [frightful /formidable form]. He did not say much, only "son, go be responsible for *sangraha*." By *sangraha* we mean the ability to calm the spirits. For instance, I was responsible for destroying those under the influence of *bhut-pret*. With that advice, he disappeared.

After that incident, for three months at 4 o'clock every morning, he would enter (*praman*) my body and at 9 a.m. sharp manifest (*prakat*) himself. I would begin to tremble and shake (*chant*). Then over the next 3 months he began to come to me in the evening. He did not say anything. The words seemed stuck somewhere. This went on for another 6 months. This was because until I was purified (*suddhi*) I could not speak. When I was in a trance and people would approach me and ask me questions, he would not speak. I was not purified you know. How could I speak? Once this body (*pind*) is purified, I will speak. This went on for three months.

Then one day, He (Parushuram) told the people that a temple should be established in his name. The villagers were in a fix because no one knew of this lord. They asked him to reveal to them about himself, what needed to be done and where the temple should be built. He said that he would himself identify the spot on which the temple could be built. He searched for a space; it was very close to the village and with his *chimta* he drew the boundary of the temple. When the temple was near completion, He decided that it was time for Him to visit Renuka, which is his birthplace and the place where His mother is contained

(*samaee thi*). And that I need to go to Renuka and from there I will bring back a sign (*chinha*).

About 7-8 people accompanied me to Renuka. I was very young--14 years old at that time. The villagers were also thinking that it (my *kampan*) could be due to a *jhapat*, or due to *saha*: or that I had become mad. They were worried about me. I was after all a *bawala* [innocent or not knowledgeable]; who knows what I could do. I could run away or jump into the river or fall off somewhere. So there were 7-8 people to accompany me.

When we reached Renuka, we saw a man (*guruji*) on whom the devata had "come"--Parushuram. This man said I could not find a *chinha* so easily. We informed him that devata Parushuram "comes" in me. He was very skeptical but decided to hide a *chinha* in the lake somewhere and the next morning I was supposed to enter the lake and find it. Early in the morning at 4 a.m. we were prepared for the test. The devata had come to me at 2 a.m. and by 4 a.m. he had manifested himself and desired to take a bath in the lake. I started towards the river and the people who had accompanied me followed. I jumped into the lake and brought back the *chinha* which the *guruji* had hidden the day before.

The *chinha* was an image made in stone--the way images (*murti*) are. Not the image you saw in the temple (he is referring here to the temple that was established in his village). That image was made-to-order from Jaipur; it is made of marble. The *chinha* that I got is buried under the temple. The *chinha* proved that it was devata himself who "comes" in me, not one of his followers as the *guruji* had suspected. The *guruji* was now very open and declared that truly it was Parusharam's *prancharnd* (trance movements), that the *chinha* has a lot of *shakti* and that this door will remain open for me (Jagat Singh) and my companions. He enquired if I knew how to worship Lord Parushuram. I told him "Maharaj, I do not know anything, nor do I know the ways of worship. How will I serve Him?" The guru then taught me a hymn (*shloka*) and advised me to start his worship with this *shloka*.

I will tell the shorter one:

Kar Kalit kuthur pujo yarnd surari
guru charaneshu seva tat purn karti
surumani garbandhoyo karti bijaye
deyntu parushuram sarvada survadum.

Since then I have been responsible for the whole puja. If some saha attaches to someone, or dusth or bhut--pret attacks, coming to the temple alleviates these problems. All sorts of problems are solved: dusth²⁰ problems and progenyless people get the blessings (vardan) for children. Sometimes Maharaj refuses, but, when they start crying, Maharaj is overcome by compassion (daya) and gives his blessings. He hates when anyone cries at his doorstep.

It has been forty years between then and now. But this has not been continuous. I stopped for a few months. It so happened that if asked I would be able to give the name of the person, the village he was from, and if the person was involved in illegal dealings. I would name the person who was causing problems in someone's life and this wrapped me in a court case. Then it made the whole village miserable.

For instance, I would tell a woman that she was a dunkin and that she had eaten so-and-so person's son. Then the victim would take it to the court as evidence. Now the government does not recognize this. So when I became tied to several court cases, the harassment followed. The villagers called a meeting. All I wanted was to resolve problems, and now I was being dragged into conflicts.

In the meeting it was decided that an arji (request) be made to Parushuram: "You be compassionate and remove people's suffering (dukh), but never give names of the illdoer." The entire village shut their doors and windows and staged a protest outside the temple. They proclaimed "you must not give the father's name nor the mother's name." Maharaj said "this could never happen; I refuse to hear this." Hearing this, the villagers decided that if He did not

²⁰ dusth refers here to any nefarious spirit.

heed their request they all would commit suicide. Then Maharaj felt daya for them and asked them what would make them happy. "That, Maharaj, you bless the progenyless with progeny, drive the evil spirits, drive the *opri pari* (*matri*), show the way toward peace, give shakti to people so that they can follow the path you show them, but under no condition should you give any names."

Since then, naming stopped and devata was calmed down and stayed like that for a few years. When "he" would manifest I would feel bound, unable to speak freely as I had made a promise to the villagers--the trance (*prachandh*) would not appear fully. It has only been a few years that devata has manifested in his complete form. This started after I left the family life (*grahasthi*); I was married when I was just a child. I needed to focus on much bigger issues than family, the world which is full of sufferers (*dukhi* people), and this cannot be achieved remaining entangled with everyday problems of family life. Now I live in a separate house and cook my own food. When I am away from the village, I accept food from everybody except the food cooked by women who are menstruating. Paboch refuse food from all people because they fear *bis*.

According to Jagat Singh Mali, his ability to heal and divine is a special gift (*vardan*) from devata. He contends that a legitimate healer is born (*chosen*), not made. His "calling" came in various ways. Jagat Singh pointed out that the "calling" often takes the form of a sign (*chinha*)--legitimate evidence that the person is the "chosen one."

In his case, Jagat Singh indicated that the signs were many--his vision of Parushurama, dreams of Parushurama, regular trance behavior, and lastly the stone image. As he had shown enough signs to qualify as "the chosen," he became eligible to obtain permission to practice from the *guruji* at Renuka, who validated his experience as authentic. With the

stamp of approval from a reputed healer, he started his practice and began to build his own reputation as a healer.

To elucidate Jagat Singh's style of divination, I present a selection from one of his healing sessions:

When Lord Parushuram came to the drumming and chant of invitation, *Makhti ka Mali* became entranced. The spirit had entered his body. The drumming stopped and his "trembling" (*chant*) stopped and his trance was now more controlled. He began to speak in Hindi, his hand near his ear as if holding a telephone. "I am communicating with the spirit of Lord Parushuram," he informed the huge audience that had collected outside the Parushuram temple he had founded.

Moments later a woman started shaking violently. Her movements were so vigorous that her headgear (*danthu*) fell off. She was trying to speak but it seemed the words were caught in her throat. *Mali* placed his arms around the woman's shoulder and asked the spirit, "who are you? what do you want? why have you entered her body?" No reply, save her continued jerking movements. *Mali* reentered the temple and brought out a brass plate and a stick. He started drumming the plate with the stick, encouraging the spirit possessing the woman to speak. *Mali* repeated his questions. A hoarse voiced answered "I am *Shobhan pari*."

Mali: What do you want?

Woman: No reply.

Mali: Will you leave her body?

Woman: No reply.

Mali: What do you want?

Woman: No reply.

Mali started drumming the brass plate and tried to summon the spirit: "Hey *Bhagwan*, please speak what you desire (*icca*)."

In the middle of the sentence, the voice resurfaced: "*nahana mangta*" (want ritual bath). Mali promised her a bath in the Renuka Lake.

Mali: Any other *icca* maharaj?

Woman: *Jhuta kanna nahi*. (no used food)

Mali: *Thik hai maharaj*. (okay maharaj)
Accha maharaj, thik rup se jao. (okay maharaj,
 return in the right form).

The woman continued to breathe heavily and suddenly fell on the ground, very rigid.

Jagat Singh's expertise is limited to diagnosis. However, he does recommend appropriate practitioners who could conduct rituals which would alleviate the affliction. In his trance state and with the help of his guiding *devata*, Jagat Singh is able to control (*vash*) the spirits and involve the spirit in a dialogue in order to extract the cause of affliction and provide solutions. He added that in his trance state, with the help of the vision (*prakash*) provided by the *devata*, he can "see" where the people came from (the village, its layout), the reason that brought them

to him and the person or spirit responsible for his/her suffering. The vision or the psychic sight enables him to see beyond his visual perception and to transcend space and time dimension, an experience, Jagat Singh reasoned, very similar to watching t.v. "I can "see" the problem afflicting them. They do not have to tell me anything, the "prakash" throws light which lets me "see," just like a film you would see on t.v.

Makhti ka Mali (M65+):

Hari Singh describes his "calling" as "a pull" exerted by a divine force towards the local temple (*Kailu Mahasu*--a local name for *Mahasu*). This recurrent event happened when he was about 25 years of age. He would feel a great strength pulling him towards the temple several times every day. Everyone in the village thought he had gone crazy (*jhal*). This went on for several months, he had begun to lose weight and showed no interest in his work (he is a carpenter by caste and occupation). One day, as he danced in front of the temple, the *devata* manifested (*praman hua*) and spoke through his body (*pind*) to indicate that Hari Singh had been "chosen" to be bestowed a special gift (*vardan*). The whole village community gathered that evening and collected money for his pilgrimage to Hanol. The head Mali at the Hanol temple immediately recognized Hari Singh

and gave up his spot (*sthan*--throne) and saluted him "jai Maharaj."

Hari Singh's wife, Bijma, recalls that the head *Mali* was very impressed with Hari Singh and had predicted that one day Hari Singh would be known far and wide for his healing powers. Hari Singh stayed back in Hanol for over two years to be the head *Mali*'s assistant. Besides learning the rituals associated with healing through spirits, he gained a tremendous experience of the extensive problems that plague human beings.

Because the spirit that had chosen Hari Singh was one from among the highest orders, he never goes into a trance during healing sessions. He had been given the "spot" (*sthan* or *gaddi*) by the head *Mali* and, since then, every Friday, Hari Singh prays to Mahasu as he sits down to heal. Mahasu then enters his body and guides him. The fact that Mahasu has entered his body is not manifested by any movement typically associated with trance and/or possession, but his capability to heal is an evidence of this fact.

Hari Singh's expertise includes diagnosis and a knowledge of rituals which heal and cure people. This, he suggests, he learnt from his guru--the head *Mali* at Hanol. He calls his style of divination "healing through spirits." Under the guidance of his devata, he urges the forces that afflict his "patients" to reveal their identities and verbalize their desires. His seance by with imploring the

spirit with this prayer:

*Jai Shri Raghunath bothiya Mahasua
 Chatradhari antarjami Raghunath Ji
 Dori mey vas loaia aur sathya ka prakash kori
 nordei ke dhukh dur karna
 aun galti maphi kori
 dori ki mukhise va pindse
 sathya ka praksh kori
 argi devata argi kori
 kar Prakash
 dev kala se ana dev kala se jana.*

Hail Raghunath, Botha Mahasua
 omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient Raghunathji
 reside in the host (dori) and bring forth the truth
 remove suffering from humans
 pardon the mistakes and transgressions
 throw light on the truth
 through the mouth or the body of the host
 I am calling you, devata, I am requesting you
 come in the form of devata and leave in the form of
 devata.

Once the spirit manifests (*prakat hona*) itself, he exhorts the cause of its presence in the body of the host (*dori/doli*). In the dialogue between the *Mali* and the enticed spirit, the healing process begins. The diagnosis also involves throwing rice grains and catching them (*motia*). The *motias* he catches in his palm, the number and, the spacial location and association, are interpreted by him. They enable him to decipher the cause of *dosh* and possibly to remedy it.

To illustrate Hari Singh's style of divination, I present excerpts from the slightly edited fieldnotes of one Friday morning in the month of April at one of his "Friday clinics." The "Friday clinic" as I have named it, is a small structure (one room 10 by 14 feet) recently built on

the south side of the Chakrata--Nagthat highway. Located a short distance from the bus stop, this clinic attracts a number of people who are in despair (*dukhiari*).

By 8 a.m., there is a long line of people trying to register their names, as the service is on a first-come-first served basis. On an average day, the clinic draws as many as 35-40 people. This includes patients and their escorts. The healer spends anywhere between 5 to 35 minutes on each person. Beginning with a song of invocation (mentioned above), his diagnostic style combines dialogue with the spirits and the "patient," with interpretations of the number and design of *motia* and/or coin or paper money (given by the person seeking a remedy for his/her problem). Sometimes he looks at fingernails and palms as well.

Mali begins with a song of invocation. As he sings, he looks at the paper money provided by the person. He then picks up a few rice grains (*motia*) and waves them around the person's head and upper body. He throws the grains in the air and catches them. Opening his palm, he interprets the rice grains which have formed a design on his palm. With the help of the "light" (*prakash*) granted by his *devata*, he says, he is able to "see" the problems (*parashani*) confronting the person.

The interpretations drawn at this time set the stage for reaching a conclusion about the nature of the affliction (*dosh*). If he infers that the cause of the problem is the

anger of a spirit, he begins to implore the spirit to manifest itself and make his/her wishes known. If, however, the *dosh* is a result of the transgressions of norms, then the audience along with the *Mali* addresses the issue and a consensus is reached regarding an appropriate way to redress it. In this sense, the *Mali* is in the role of a vindicator of social injustice, over and above his role as a healer. The *dosh* might be the result of possession by an evil spirit, in which case exorcism rituals are recommended. The possession of an individual by evil spirits is indicated by "lines on fingernails," informed Hari Singh.

Hari Singh was an apprentice for the *Mali* at Hanol, and therefore his healing repertoire includes rituals associated with healing, traditionally the tasks of *Bamon* (discussed below). He has extensive knowledge of *mantras* and *yantras* (hymns and mystical designs) which he uses to heal people. This expertise has gained him quite a reputation and he has a thriving business of healing and curing.

Matriyas: Lives and Practices

The *Matriyas* are female diviners who may belong to any caste and are believed to be possessed by a particular *matri*. They act as a medium in the diagnosis of afflictions and existential dilemmas that confront her fellow humans, especially but not restricted to women. *Matriyas* are very

similar to *Maliss* in their specialty, which is limited to diagnosis and recommendation of appropriate practitioners for relevant rituals. Through a process of "habituation," a process comparable to *Malis*, a woman becomes a diviner (also known as *dori*).

Dwinya ki Matriya (F50+) :

Deepa Dei is a Brahmin woman from the village Dwinya. Though still married to her husband, she only lives with her daughter in Chakrata. Her husband lives in the same town, but with his second wife. She told me that as she was unable to deliver children in the first few years of being married, the family decided to bring in another woman.

Her first experience of possession was symptomatic of an illness. She describes the that she first experienced, which events later were diagnosed as *matri* possession. She remembers that:

I was married but until then had not delivered any children. It was the month of September (*bhado*). My two sisters (I was at my parent's house) were mimicking and making fun of other girls in the village. I too was involved in it and was drumming on a brass plate. A number of young girls were dancing in the courtyard in the front.

The next day, my sisters and I took our goats and sheep to feed on grass. There were a number of men and women who were singing and dancing--they must have stopped to rest on their way back from collecting wood. I started to dance and sing with them. Then, when we reached home, I felt as if I had a fever, I felt cold and was scared. My heart (*dil*) was confused (*ghabrai*). Then the *dhat*

(possession) "came." I was in that state for several days. My sisters took me to the nearest Primary Health Center.

When her symptoms did not respond to biomedical treatment, her family consulted a *Bamon* from the village who with the help of the sacred book (*bagoi*), "calculated" it to be the working of a *matri*. With the help of the *Bamon*, the *matri* revealed her name and her desires (*iccha*). The *matri* communicated that she was *Robhan Pari* and wanted to reside (*vas*) her body and in return would give her special powers which would enable her to alleviate people's problems.

Deepa Dei, on her return to her husband's village, faced many problems. Her in-laws did not agree with the predictions of the *Bamon* and refused to let her conduct seances every Friday. But every time she refrained from possession activity (*dhat*), she would become critically sick. "And then one day," she narrated:

A number of *dukhi* people had collected in my house. I had left my house to go to a nearby water spring (*devata ka pani*). On my return I found to my dismay that my in-laws had sent away the people who had come to visit me. The vessel in which I was carrying water fell from my hands, and I fainted. When I regained consciousness, I felt as if someone had beaten me up. My whole body was hurting.

From that day, for 15 days, I did not touch any food or drink tea or water. This worried my in-laws who took me to the nearby town for a full checkup. There was no problem found, so no solutions were suggested by the doctor. Then my father visited me and suggested that my in-laws consult a *Bamon* of their choice. Jagat Ram Joshi was summoned, who induced himself into a trance and revealed that in fact I was under the protection of *Robhan Matri*. He scolded my in-laws for being ashamed of this fact, and demanded that every Friday of April,

July, and October and every New Moon day, I should hold possession seances.

She recalled that, within a year, her daughter was born. Since then she had visited Hardwar (two times), Hanol (three times) and had taken a ritual bath on several occasions in the River Yamuna. On her visit to Hanol, she offered four silver coins to the *Mali* at Hanol who blessed and returned one coin to her.

Every Friday, before her seance, she puts the coin on a silver chain and wears it around her neck. As she sings hymns urging the *matri* to manifest herself, she places the silver coin on her forehead. She then enters into a trance and is ready to communicate on behalf of the people who come to her with their problems. As she put it, "every Friday I dance (*khel* = play) after which I feel light and I experience peace." It has been 30 years, and she continues to hold regular Friday seance sessions and prides herself on having initiated a number of other women in becoming healers themselves.

Khati Ki Matri (F40+) :

Bijma Dei is the *ghariawi*, married to three brothers who belong to the *Bajgi* caste. She first experienced possession when she was 12 years old. At that time on, she puts it, "I felt as if I was being pulled by some tremendous *sakti*." She was shown to the local *Bamon* who detected the

hand of the *matris*. He suggested that a silver locket with the image of the *marti* engraved be given a ritual bath in the River Yamuna and then tied around her neck with a red silk thread. However, this brought no respite from the power of the *sakti*.

Every time she heard the drums or singing, she would run out of her house and start running towards the fields around the periphery of the village. Her strength would be so great that it would take a few able-bodied men to carry her back to the village. This behavior worried her family members as she was not yet engaged, and it made many villagers suspicious about the possible *paap* (sin) wrath of the devata's anger that had manifested in the *dianthuri* of the family. This blemished the reputation of the girl and her family.

Bijma's family simultaneously consulted several *Bamons*, *Malis* and *Matriyas*. It was the *Matriya* from village *Dwinya* who calmed her down and tamed her spirit. *Matriya Deepa Dei* divined that the force that was pulling her to the periphery of the village was the *sakti* of the Goddess Kali, who desired that a temple be established outside the village. A temple of Kali now stands outside the village, and on the first Sunday of every month the villagers offer her fruits and vermillion. powder.

Bijma married when she was 17 years old and now has three children. In her house, she has a framed picture of

the goddess Kali, to which she offers incense every day. Every Sunday she conducts healing seances for people who come from neighboring villages seeking relief from their suffering.

Kandoi Ki Matri (F40+):

Rani Devi is a recent initiate and already has a large clientele. The village where she holds healing seances every Friday is only a two-hour walk down the hill from Chakrota, a town well-connected by bus to different regions of Jaunsar-Bawar.

Rani Devi's initiation into healing was very similar to that of many other women healers. She suffered from pain all over her body and no pain killers could ease the pain (*dard*). In the next few weeks, she experienced involuntary body movements followed by a total loss of sensation in the left part of her body. This happened during the harvest season, a very busy time for agriculturalists. Her family members were especially worried as she was unable to work in the fields. They summoned a well-reputed *Bamon* who diagnosed the symptoms to be the working of a *matri*.

Rani Devi decided that she must consult with *matri* specialists---the *Matriyas*. For the next 3 weeks, every Friday she visited Deepa Dei. During one of her curing ceremonies, the spirit demanded to be "tied" permanently to

the host, at which time Rani Devi began to dance to the rhythmic drumming of a brass plate. This demand of the spirit created a lot of tension in the family despite the fact that this was a "divine call" and Rani was the "chosen one." She began to experience an array of emotions that she could not relate to other experiences in her life. This is, she informed me, locally known as *bawala*--a state of mental uneasiness, instability and uncontrolled possession. She was conscious of what she was doing, but had no control over her activities.

With the help of her family *Bamon*, Rani Devi observed a series of "habituation rituals" (*bonth*) in which the *matri* afflicting her was "tamed" and permanently bound to her. In the series of rituals, the spirit "matured." The maturity of the spirit is indicated by the fact that the host is able to communicate with the spirit. She was now a *bocwan*--a person whose "tongue has opened" (i.e., can now effectively communicate with people and conduct divination on her own). The following year, Rani Devi made a pilgrimage to Hanol where she obtained a blessing and a silver coin from the *Mali* at the temple.

DISCUSSION:

In these short vignettes I have tried to highlight certain salient features embodied by the practitioners known as *Mali* or *Matriya*. The theme of the signs of calling (the idea of special selection) followed by legitimization from

those higher in the hierarchy is common to all the life history narratives I collected from *Malis* and *Matriyas*. Prophetic dreams, various childhood experiences involving possession, visionary encounters (*darshan*), periods of living in an untamed state (*bawala*) and the opening of the tongue" (*bocwan*) are common experiences among those who become healers. The special vision (*prakash*) which enables them to identify and discern the causes of and provide solutions to suffering is a gift (*vardan*) granted by the *devata* or other benevolent spirits of the upperworld.

Though divination styles vary, the diagnosis process involves the healers engaging in a dialogue with their guardian spirit or *devata* and the afflicting spirit. The idiom of vision (*prakash*) is articulated through their ability to discern and identify spirits, to map out time-space topographies of the various events of their lives and to detect the *dosh* that might have instigated the whole process of misfortune or suffering. From their dialogical space, they communicate for resolution as well.

The seances begin with prayers that evoke the power of sacred sites, and periodic pilgrimage to these sacred sites is a consistent pattern with all the healers. In fact, pilgrimage to sacred sites is an important part of the initiation ritual. Drumming and chanting *mantras* are the most common ways of invoking the spirit to manifest itself (*parkand hona*). Jerking movements of the body to more

controlled movements, as in *khel*, signal that the spirit wants to communicate its presence and/or its desires. Falling to the ground rigid signals the departure of the spirit. Whether this departure is a permanent one is by no means predictable. The spirit can manifest in any body of a person at its own will, without any invocation.

The curing ceremony typically involves a contractual relationship with the spirit. During the ceremony, the healer, with the help of *mantras* and rhythmic drumming, invokes and invites the spirit to introduce (*prakat*) herself. The patient enters into a trance, starts to dance and identifies the spirit. Actually, it is the spirit that identifies herself and makes her demands known. With the promise of fulfillment of her demands to her satisfaction, she agrees to restore the patient's health. This concludes the ceremony, but by no means puts a closure to the contractual relationship. She can intrude the spirit at her will and make new demands.

The contractual agreements are infinitely bargained and negotiated. In some cases, the spirit may decide to make the body of the patient her home (*vas*) in return for certain privileges. Rituals of habituation (*bonth*) are performed to tame the spirit and "tie" the spirit permanently to her host. In such cases, hosts become healers and are known as *dori* or *doli*.

Once a person has been identified as being possessed by matri, "curing" entails developing a viable relationship with the spirit. Close observations of the rituals and discussions with several healers and hosts reveal there is a common theme--a "grammar of therapy" that involves two processes that structure spirit possession in Jaunsar--transaction and transformation. The elaborate transactional and transformational culture of Hindus has been well articulated by McKim Marriott to indicate the idea that, for South Asians, the self is essentially nondiscrete and fluid.

In the contractual relationship, the spirit makes demands on the host (food taboos, sacrifice, taboos on activities which are polluting, ritual bathing), and the healer, on behalf of the host, bargains for restoration and maintenance of the well-being of the host. These "conditions" set out by the spirit bring about some positive changes in the life of the host. For example, a ritual bath makes a person "holy" having had all her sins washed away by the sacred river. The Jaunsaris call such people *nainu* or the holy people and interact with them with reverence.

The experience of possession itself is therapeutic. On leaving the trance, I have heard women saying how the ritual made them "feel light" (*halka*) or "at peace" (*man mey shanti*), affirming that the state itself has "intrinsic remedial powers" (Boddy 1988). The curative power of possession does not only derive from the experience of

possession but from the interpretation of the possession by the healer that provides a new meaning for the affliction.

The narratives I collected reveal another feature that was common to all the healers: the state of *bawala*. This state is described as frightening and uncontrollable and features considerable physical uneasiness. This was, however, followed by the "opening of the tongue" (*bocwan*)--a state of maturity. It is interesting to note here that these stages, reflecting the "development" of the novice, are very similar to those stages that shape the development from infancy to adulthood. *Bawala* is very similar to the state of an infant--not knowing where one is or where one is going. In contrast, *bocwan* is a state of "enlightenment"--one with *prakash* (vision)--and able to articulate (speak) what one can "see in this light."

In terms of the power objects and ritual paraphernalia used by the healers, there is a certain amount of mimicking of Hindu rituals--sprinkling *ganga* water around the space in which the healer sits, burning incense, applying vermillion on the forehead, etc. Whether conscious or not, it does establish a link with orthodoxy and gives the healer an official legitimacy. A number of healers hang pictures of local politicians and famous people they claim to have cured, which also creates an image of official status. In fact, as a healer's reputation spreads, the distance traversed by the patient becomes indicative of the

effectiveness of the healers and charts the healer's career.

Malis and *Matriyas* deemphasized the role of economics in their lives. As Jagat Singh puts it, because *Malis* and *Matriyas* are "chosen," their ability to heal people is a special calling, not an occupation ("a divine call" (*bulava*) to help people and not a business to make profit from."). *Dwinya ki Matri* fears that the gift will be taken away if it is made into a business.

Makhti ka Mali agrees with the other healers that the gift was bestowed on them so that they could alleviate suffering, and not so that they could make money. So they never ask for money, they only accept what people offer them. They feel that the money is a sort of reimbursement for the time they devote to healing people, adding that the money that is left on the "lap" (*jholi*) is barely sufficient to survive. I must add that my research into their healing practices conferred a new kind of legitimacy to this old traditional healing system, which clearly benefitted a number of healers.

Another salient feature directs our attention to the issues of power and struggle in spirit possession. While *Malis* emphasized the gift of healing (*vardan*) as an essential part of spirit possession, issues of struggle seem to concern *Matriyas*. This mirrors the power differential between the two genders in Jaunsari society. Rani's story and other narratives of possession stress that the body

becomes the locus of struggle. The family claims her duties as wife and/or mother; the "divine call" claims the body as the *doli* (vehicle) for the divine. Rani often confided in me about this tension in her mind: "there is a tug-of-war in my mind between the loyalty towards my family and the desire to be a healer. It is not that as a healer I will not fulfill my duties as a woman but my family will not have a total claim on my labor (body) or time."

So we see that the struggle between "loyalty and desire" provides a strategy to reclaim their bodies and their labor. In reclaiming their bodies (as a vehicle for the divine) they create their own metaphorical space, a space in which one has claim to her own life and time as well as a privileged position from which she is able to make a change in her life and in the lives of others.

Bamon and their Ritual Practices:

Bamon refers to a class of healer that almost always belongs to the *Brahmin* caste. As healers, they blend elements of popular Hinduism and Tantric *vidya* with indigenous beliefs about spirits to constitute a healing tradition distinct from that of *Malis* and *Matriyas*. Two categories of persons are found in the *Brahmin* caste--the *Paboch* and the *Bamon*. The *Paboch*, as noted earlier, is a group that traces its lineage from the *Brahmins* of Himachal

Pradesh. Placed ritually higher than the *Bamon*, the *Paboch's* mantras and yantras are considered more effectual and convincing. But ultimately, the *Paboch's* popularity depends on the therapeutic reputation gleaned from years of effective practice.

Although healing tends to be caste-specific, I found a few exceptions to this general rule. Kishnu, a *Dom* from the village of Khunna, had been an apprentice to a *Brahmin* and had learned the skills of a *Bamon*. He could read the *Bagoi* (scripture), diagnose, suggest remedies and, if needed, go into trance. He is not only popular among his caste group but among the Rajputs who avail themselves of his skills.

All *Brahmin* men do not become *Bamons*. Since it is not considered a profitable profession, very few *Brahmins* are now seeking apprenticeship. As one *Bamon* stated regretfully: "*Bamnai* is a dying art. People care only about their body so they run to the primary health centers and come to us in situations of severe *dosh* when it is far too late. We do what we can." The ones who practice *Bamnai* are those whose lineage has gained a reputation over time, as well as the very few who have visionary encounters telling them to practice it.

A novice masters the knowledge of the *Bagoi* and the rituals associated with the healing from his guru, who in most cases is the father of the novice. The student of *Bamnai* learns to read and interpret the *Bagoi* by learning it

by heart. He also accompanies his guru on his rounds of distant villages and gains "hands-on experience." Once the guru decides that the student's learning has reached a satisfactory level, he writes a *bagoi* for the student. This marks the student's initiation into the *bamnai*.

A *Bamon* who is a reputed healer gains popularity through his ability to use the *Bagoi* to resolve the problems perturbing people. In the role of a healer, they are judged by their mastery over *mantra*, and their complex use of *yantras* (ritual/mystical diagrams). The knowledge of the *bagoi* and skills associated with it are transmitted in a traditional way through a practicing *Bamon* to the apprentice (*sadhana*).

The *Bagoi* is scripture written in a script called *Kashmirilipi*. This book contains mantras, tantras, and yantras, for all kinds of afflictions and misfortunes. These designs, *mantras* and remedies are handwritten on long sheets of paper (earlier it was written on *bhojpatra*--a tree bark) and is wrapped in deer skin.

The *Bagoi* is consulted with the help of a solid rectangular bone, locally known as *pasa* or *goti*, which has four sides, each side having one to four dots. The *pasa* is flipped three times and the sum of the numbers is used to "calculate and search" (*anad-ganad*). The sum of the numbers refers to the page location, which page reveals the nature of the *dosh* and the ritual required to rectify it. The

Bamon here plays the role of an "interpreter" who can not only read the script but who can interpret the real meaning innate in the verses. This interpretative skill requires a considerable amount of manipulation to fit the requirements of his clients and to convince them of the scripture's veracity. It also involves the knowledge of chanting the mantras "correctly" in order to activate the power inherent in those words. The Jaunsaris believe that the "power" (*sakti*) of words and that the *vidhya* (knowledge) can never go wrong.

The prayer verses are comprised of a number of letters, numbers, and designs. The verses are of different types: while some verses reveal the nature of *dosh*, others provide a formula for remedy. A number of sheets are devoted to verses which contain geometrical formulas, distinct patterns that represent for each god and goddess of the Hindu Pantheon and the local spirits (e.g., *matri*).

The use of formulas of *mantras* and *yantras* is a very popular means of remedy. The operation of such formulas varies. The *Bamon* may write a *mantra* and/or *yantra* on a small piece of paper and then fold it and seal it in a small locket to be worn around the neck (*bhujri*). The power of the *yantras* and *mantras* may be ingested directly as well. For example: the *bhujri* may be soaked in a small bowl of water which the "sufferer" then drinks. Or the *Bamon* may blow *mantras* into a small handful of rice grains (*motia*)

which is then ingested by the person who seeks remedy.

The *yantras*, also known as *mandalas*, are geometrical patterns formed using colored sand and powder that are composed of lines, curves and dots (*bindu*), which patterns are formed on plates that the healer uses in ceremonies. The *yantras* have a special significance for the healer. As noted earlier, each deity has a specific design and the *yantra* represents the body of each deity. The *Bamon* is skilled in being able to invoke the power of the deity into these geometrical designs. As *Bamon* Hari Joshi put it, "the *yantra* with its contours binds the body of the deity and taps his/her power. Once confined within the *yantra*, it is held captive and cannot escape. At this stage, I can use my knowledge and skill make the deity do what my clients want." It is interesting to note here that some *Malis* have also learned to draw *mandalas* and have incorporated this style in their healing repertoire.

Apart from the use of scriptural formulas in *bhujris* and *mandalas*, there are several rituals which are monopolized by the *Bamons* as their sole copyright. The rituals of "habituation" (*bonth*) often prescribed by *Malis* and *Matriyas* are conducted by *Bamons*. Another very stylistic ritual managed by the *Bamons* is *chui--chalana*, a ritual which is performed in severe cases of *dosh*. Both these rituals involve inducing trance or possession. The third important healing ritual is "brushing and blowing"

(*jhar--phoonk*). This ritual activity is common among some *Malis* and *Matriyas*. However, the most common and most frequent rituals performed by *Bamons* are the healing *pujan* (sometimes recommended by other healers) and seasonal *pujans* (*SatyaNarayan katha* and *paat*) for the well-being of the household and lineage.

The *Bamon* also use *jantri* or *panchang* (yearly astronomical calendars) in conjunction with the *Bagoi* to offer remedies and suggestions. For instance, *dosh* resulting from the conflicting influences of planets-- *grahadosh*--is "calculated" from charts in the *jantri* that map the movement of various planets. This is very similar to the art of astrology practiced in the plains, and may be a recent phenomenon in Jaunsar-Bawar, indicating the almost complete intrusion of dominant great traditions from other parts of the subcontinents into this region.

Unlike the *Malis* who have a guardian spirit directing and counseling them during the healing session, the *Bamons*, with the help of their knowledge (*vidhya*), are able to invoke any supernatural force and tap into that force for diagnosis and healing. The healing sessions which involve the invocation of spirits, thus, resemble seances conducted by *Malis* and *Matriyas*. The difference is the use of scriptural knowledge by the *Bamons* to make it seem more "official" and hence more legitimate.

Masandhnya and his Rituals:

Masandhnya are believed to divine with the bones of the dead and with the spirits of the underworld. Their divination style involves "awakening" the *masandh* (nefarious spirits) [*masandh ko jaganevale*] and/or calling the dead [*mritak ko bulanevale*] to impart information about the causes of unnatural deaths. For example: in the case of a suicide, they will examine the exhumed bones of the dead person to provide information about his or her wishes and frustrations. The *Masandhnya* are known for possessing powers that are evil powers which are obtained by meditating on a moonless night in cremation grounds. Some *Masandhnyas* possess a book of figures (*yantra*) which they use to make charms (*bujhri*) and designs used during rituals of exorcism.

I did come across two *Masandhnyas*, but both refused to be interviewed. Considering the fact that they are believed to possess evil powers and are therefore marginalized, their reticence was not surprising. Despite this, I included this category of healers in this chapter as they played a significant role in healing people by exorcising evil spirits and in for finding answers for unnatural deaths, especially suicide.

Conclusion:

In the cases discussed above we saw a *Matriya* going into a trance and observed *Malis* remove *dosh* from the afflicted. We witnessed the transformation of a simple Jaunsari woman into a healer. In the life history narratives of the *Mali* and *Matriya*, the theme of "selection," (*bulava*) "vision" (*prakash*) and the "gift" (*vardan*) were the primary organizing feature, indicating that the people "chosen" had special abilities--to discern (*vichar*) and then provide the healing touch. Prophetic dreams, various childhood experiences involving possession, visionary encounters (*darshan*), periods of living in an untamed state (*bawala*) and the opening of the tongue (*bocwan*) were common experiences among those who become healers.

In the transformation of a simple person (*manush*) to a healer (*Mali* or *Matriya*), the host (*dori*) acquires a new identity, an identity that has power. Through the process of "habituation," taming of the spirit and the final initiation at Hanol, Jaunsaris believe that the spirit transmits power (*shakti*) to the *dori*. This *shakti* enables the *dori* to "see," "discern," and heal, to take control of her life and the lives of others.

These observations about healers, their lives and practices reveal how indigenous conceptions of power and its

generative capacities inform the workings of the healing system. The fact that a majority of the healers in my sample refer to their selection as a "special calling" suggests that it is power that is out--of--ordinary--beyond everyday life. It also suggests that the healer's journey reflects the emergence of a new self in a manner similar to the process of development of the self from infancy to adulthood. In the next chapter, we will take a closer look at the healing process, which further reflects the underlying principles that characterize Hindu thought and action.

Chapter 7

Narratives of Spirit possession

In this chapter, I will turn my attention to women who have been diagnosed as being possessed by spirits. Realizing the desperate marginality of women's voices in many ethnographies, this chapter will focus on women and present narratives in which women speak for themselves. Transcribed below are narratives and stories of women who had been diagnosed as being possessed by spirits. I see seances as providing a space for "talking back." The dialogues, performances and interpretations of their experiences reveal each woman's self-presentation, about what is problematic in her life and how she copes with them. The voices you hear are of women who are speaking for themselves and what is significance to them. This is not to say that women's voices you hear are untouched by me, rather they have been filtered, selected and translated by me; circumscribed and interpreted by me. In choosing to narrate the experience of possession, and perceptions and definitions related to possession, I have tried to retain the authorship by presenting to the best of my knowledge women's own stories.

In Jaunsar, the image of the feminine and femininity is still in the grasp of vedic/Hindu pronouncements. Girls are raised to be mothers, nurturers and strong individuals. The image of Sati Drapaudi as an ideal woman is inscribed in folk songs, rituals and myths. Drapaudi, who knows how to please others and bring happiness and confidence into people's hearts, has the power to read the "chal" of her enemies. She suffers on behalf of others. She is an example of the highest devotee. Her respect, great love and faith for Lord Krishna is an example of great devotion. In addition, she also has unlimited respect, love and *bhav* (feeling) for all of her husbands. This is her specialty. Veneration of murtiman *shakti*, which defines the power of Drapaudi, is a significant part of a young girl's socialization in Jaunsar-Bawar. Brought up to believe in polyandrous unions, Drapaudi becomes their role model.

Another image that informs the concepts of the feminine and femininity in Jaunsar is the model of Sita, the pure and chaste wife of Lord Rama. *Ramlila* (a play about Rama), which glorifies spousal faith and describes the trials and tribulations of Sita in her role as a wife, shapes women's experience of their sexuality and defines what essentially constitutes a woman's existence.

The scenario I outlined in chapter IV--the various problems that women face in polyandrous unions and in their lives within extended households--is very significant in

contextualizing women's possession experience. Those narratives will help explore the tensions between the ideal images that women are supposed to uphold and their own experience of their sexuality. Concentrating on finding the links between social institutions and women's daily experiences, I hope to show how women perceive their lives and how they create and make their daily experience and activity meaningful and bearable.

In this chapter we will also pay attention to the actual practice of the healing act. We are concerned here with the interaction of patients and healers and what this reveals about conceptions of suffering, affliction, and misfortune, as well as the patient's lived experience and the structure of therapy. The patient's own perception of her experience of possession and her interactions with the healer are grounded in a sociocultural and economic reality. This analytical link will also be explored. This will situate women's experiences in the context of actual social relations and help us to construct the cultural logic behind suffering, affliction and misfortune. For example, whether the possession results in illness or illness is the manifestation of possession, we will see clearly the cultural logic that informs such a distinction.

While I will discuss in greater detail the life history of patients and the nature of their complaints, I need to point out that some cases were collected in totality, while

others were collected "episodically." Also, a majority of the cases represent simultaneous resort strategies and high chronicity.

Each individual life history will be followed by a brief discussion of the symbolization and narrativization process that patients use to make sense of their illnesses and that constitute the cultural model of the source and meaning of suffering, misfortune and affliction. The final discussion will aim to construct the conceptual system (cultural logic/model/scenario) by which everyday realities are understood.

1. Roshni (F39+) :

Roshni is one of my principal informants and, of all the women I met, she seemed to understand my project the best, and became a willing collaborator and confidant. She enjoyed sharing her past experiences with me as much as she envied my life as a single person free from any obligation or responsibility. At the time I met her, she was the second and the last wife of two husbands, and mother of six children ranging in age from four to seventeen. It was her story that made me aware of how more than one spirit can possess a body. Roshni's life reveals what is significant and problematic in a woman's life--marriage, divorce, ties to her maite, childbirth and the envy of sterile women. Her

somatic discomforts were attributed to possession, and the healing process involved a continuous and persistent attempt to make this possession experience a meaningful event.

Roshni (F39+) recalls her first experience with the spirit: "Dhat started after I started having babies. The first time I had dhat was when Sunita was born, 17 years ago."

Once I suffered from heavy gas problems; my stomach would bloat up, urine and stool would stop. I went to Dehra Dun and was treated by a physician for 3 months. The doctor said that my intestines were weak and that I should have soft and light food--not heavy foods like fried food, meat--that can be digested (*hajam*) easily. This is my *bimari* but I have another *parashani* (problem) which makes me suffer (*dhukh*) and that is the problem that started with my first child delivery.

At that time Kavita was just a newborn my heart was at a loss and I panicked (*ghabrai*). I felt restless and nervous. Kavita was sleeping next to me. My *sokh* (co-wife) had just served me the evening meal. I put the first morsel in my mouth and I spit it out. I felt as if something was stuck in my throat--trapped inside. I did not tell this to anybody, but just laid there. As I was simply lying down trying to fall asleep, my heart was again filled with nervousness and panic. I sat up very rigid. My co-wife repeatedly asked me if anything was wrong but I did not answer. It was then that my co-wife called Thandyan ka Nana (the patriarch of the Thandyan aal). He took a black goat and moved it over my head. As he was doing this, I made a sudden swoop for the goat and grabbed her (the goat) between my teeth.

In the meantime, quite a crowd had collected outside our house and a pujari had been summoned. First, he waved and brushed an eagle feather all over my body. Then he brought a bunch of *kuska* (poison oak) which I ate. He made me inhale the smoke of black pepper and *ajwain* (a kind of aromatic seed) roasted in fire. When nothing could calm me down, he hit me with a *chimta* (tongs) and he himself was absorbed in a trance. Then began

the battle between the two of us. He grabbed my hair and pulled it between my legs in such a way that my body twisted around to form a circle. It was then that what was sitting in my heart and trapping my throat spoke in a masculine voice, saying "now I am dead." The pujari was under the influence of devata (*devata ka dhat*). The pujari's prognosis was that it was the *chatak* who had engulfed her enough to cause death (*mrityu jog*), but now the time had passed.

The next "attack" that I can remember was when Kavita was 2-3 years old. I was at my *maite* at that time. The same pujari was called who got rid of them. We consulted Kishnu of Kolta jati when I returned to my *sauraye*. He calculated (*ganat*) it to be *chatak*, which is similar to and resembles the *chatak of dunkin*. He requested the sacrifice of a baby goat (*kid*), a pig and a chicken after they were circled clockwise around my body. He then came out of my stomach (*pet*) and shouted "I am coming out." He had completely filled my body-spreading like *jahar* (poison).

Last year I again came under the influence of ghat. It was the month of *kartik* (October - November 1992), I remember. I felt it in my heart and my breath in the form of suffocation. My heart was in confusion. Then I requested water from Kavita, after which I fainted/passed out. A *Bamon* was called to *chant* (calculate and diagnose the problem). He saw *dista*, *matri* and *Masandh*. You see, it was Friday, *Marti's* day. She had entered my body to drive the *Masandh* out. When they battled inside my body, my whole body shook. On Tuesday, I had another *dhat*. Krishna of Kolta jati saw it as the work of *chardha*.

On several occasions, I was able to witness Roshni's attacks. One evening when I was preparing to go to bed, I heard piercing cries from Roshni's house. I ran out to find a crowd had collected in front of her house. Inside the house, I found Roshni lying flat on her back on the floor with her head on her co-wife's lap. Her whole body was jerking slightly but her head was shaking violently. Bijma,

her co-wife, was having a hard time holding her to avoid her head being bumped around on the hard wooden floors. All this time Roshni was breathing very heavily and making grunting noises. The women around her were watching very closely and Vimla was trying to pour some water into her mouth. Soon thereafter Roshni lost consciousness and fell stiff onto the floor. Outside, the men were discussing what needed to be done. They decide to call a *Bamon* this time. Her youngest husband summoned the *Bamon* from the neighboring village for *anad-ganad* and to predict *dista* and offer a remedy.

I was able to accompany Roshni to a number of curing ceremonies (9 to be accurate). The following passages describe trips to the Friday Clinic at village Makhti.

On this occasion, *Hari Mali* makes Roshni breathe incense and she closes her eyes and inhales. *Mali* chants a long mantra and drums on the brass plate that covers the earthen pot like a lid. Roshni's body slowly starts to make violent jerky movements and she starts speaking in tongues. *Mali* uses a knife, on the handle of which an eagle feather is tied. I tape-recorded the session and later Roshni and I, with the help of the taped version of the session, her own recollections and the *Mali's* interpretations, collaborated on the following narrative. *Cheradha* is the possessing spirit.

Roshni: I will not go. I have completely taken over her
stomach
(pet) and womb (kokh).

Mali: Pujan (chants his mantra)
I will always be behind you, never leave you alone.

Cheradha: I will leave her heart but not her *maite*.

Mali: Leave her body (*pind*).

Cheradha: Why do you want me to leave her *pind*? She is very lovable (*pyari*). When she was a mere infant, I had given her my *chatak*. Hey *Bhagwan*, what have I done to you? I will now eat you (*fem*).

Mali: Okay. You may eat me. When you eat me, you will know. but now go out of her *pind* in the most appropriate manner.

Cheradha: *Mali*, tell me, where should I go? I have no one who is born of me. Who do I give?

(*Roshni:* In my *maite* I know of a *daag* (witch). She had given me this *chatak*.)

Mali: Give it to the family which has nothing.

Cheradha: I will give it to my *bhabhi* (brother's wife)--in my *maite*.

(*Roshni:* *Mali* and I were under the influence of *devata*. I cried a lot and then the *cheradha* left me.)

Roshni and I stayed at *Mali*'s place for 4 days. *Roshni* repeatedly lost and regained her consciousness and spoke in tongues when under the influence of the "spirits." *Mali* advised her not to have meat or any kind of "hot" food.

Later, *Roshni* recalled her last vist to *Makhti*.

This was my last visit to *Makhti*. Remember, You were there. *Hari Mali--Makti ka Mali--*wants to make sure that there are no remnants of *Cheradha* left in my body. Only *matri*. I danced (*khel*) for *matri*, after which I passed out. When I woke up my body felt heavy but I felt better--peaceful. Our *kulpujari--Jagat Ram Joshi* of *Dwiyna--*will perform *puja* just to protect me from the *daag* from *Laccha* (my *maite*).

Mali told me that when a *pujan* was performed, the *dunkin* came to know about it. The *dunkin* lives in Laccha, she is *Ghar ki bothi*, has never born a child. She has a thick nose and is fat. She wanted me to remain in Laccha and serve her. She has even poisoned her co-wife.

I asked Roshni to take me to her maite and introduce me to the woman who Mali "saw" was the *daag* (witch). I promised to maintain confidentiality. Instead she informed me about the *daags* in Bisoe--in her *sasural* (the home of her in-laws). She named an *aal* (lineage) in which the mother-in-law and 2 of her daughters-in-law were *daags* (witches). A number of women have confided in me that they suspect the women of this household as having an evil "gaze" (*buri nazar*).

Discussion:

Roshni's opening statement, and her various physical symptoms, are very typical of women's stories that I collected. They reflect their understanding of the problems that plague them. The physical symptoms, however unrelated they may be to their experience, give them a legitimate reason to seek help. In most of the cases, the initial symptoms they report are stomach ache, headache, loss of appetite, or nausea. This process echoes what Good (1994) has described as the symbolization of illness narratives in reference to the need to "localize;" a "struggle for a name," an image around which a narrative can take shape.

The first help, outside of home remedy, is the local health center. If the physicians are unable to cure the

ailment, and the problem becomes severe, the therapy management group may now attribute the symptoms to supernatural factors. In cases where the symptoms involve recurrent fainting, or shivering and violent jerking movements, a supernatural factor is always attributed and the local healer is summoned. The local healer, through astrological prediction or divination, depending on his/her skill, may identify the specific cause.

This narrative and the reconstructed dialogue between the patient, healer and spirit reveal that women themselves link fertility and childbirth complications to possession. In his provocative analysis of Turkish epileptic patients, Good (1994) pointed out that stories have plots which give coherence, order and meaning and help people contextualize their experiences. They also help them to link their experiences to a number of other life experience. Roshni saw the link between childbirth and *dhat*, as exemplified by her opening statement "*dhat* started after I started having babies." The second episode she recalled was when Kavita was 2-3 years old and Namita was a few months old. Because there is a high incidence of infant mortality in the area, women fear the loss of their children, as this may call into question their femininity and womanhood. The ability to reproduce is a natural function of womanhood. After all, witches are thought to be ugly, childless "women" who enjoy eating unborn fetuses. Jaunsari women also believe that

possession by a witch or even glimpsing her nazar (evil gaze) can cause miscarriage or sterility.

Roshni also repeatedly drew upon certain metaphors which give us certain insights in her everyday reality. She used religious metaphors and popular images in Hinduism, such as the goddess battling with a demon for the soul of her host and winning. First of all, possession by both a goddess (in this case *matri*) and a demon, and later the eradication of the demon, leaves Roshni with the good spirit. The possession by a demon puts the body of the host in a polluted state and inversely the possession of the body by a benevolent spirit makes the body pure, and thereby divine. Also *matri* represents the ideal role of a woman--to protect and be responsible for the well-being of the family. In contrast, Roshni's representation of a *daag* as a childless and ugly woman refers to what is non-feminine--infertile and undesirable. This also reveals the resentment that might build up against a woman who has been unable to reproduce and is branded a *daag*.

Because *matri* is attracted by beautiful women, and will protect them from evil spirits, Roshni was trying to draw our attention to the fact that despite being an ideal woman she was suffering and her suffering should have some meaning. The last episode to which I was a witness was during the time of Roshni's first daughter's marriage. On a number of occasions she had voiced her concern about her

daughter's happiness in her new home. Surely she was worried about her daughter's acceptance in her new home and her ability to reproduce.

It is relevant to point out that Roshni's relationship with her co-wife leaves much to be desired. There has always been tension in the family since Roshni became the second wife and the privileged position of the first wife was curtailed. In fact, Roshni's co-wife tells the story in a different way. She locates Roshni's problem in tensions in her natal home.

As the story of Roshni unfolds before my eyes, it became very clear to me that there were several plots to her story. The process of narrativizing thus reveals potential ways of interpreting spirit possession and finding alternative approaches to alleviate the problem and bring it closure.

2. Punni: (F36)

Punni was married for many years, but never once became pregnant. So her husband Ram Lal Thakur married another woman, Namita. She too failed to conceive. Ram Lal Thakur's family is one the richest households in the village, so he could afford to take his wives to a number of "fertility clinics" in Dehra Doon and Delhi. This went on for five to six years and the trips to fertility clinics

proved fruitless and expensive. The family, now desperate, turned to *Malis* and *Bamons* for their expertise. They agreed that the nature of their affliction was a severe *dosh* that had "taken birth" a few generations ago. To propitiate and appease the *devata* and encourage it to help the family (identify the exact nature of *dosh*), the family with the help of their lineage *Bamon* had organized a three-day *pujan* (worship). On the third and final night, Punni became entranced and started speaking. The entity that had possessed her introduced itself as a *matri* spirit, and revealed that the nature of *dosh* was a female-male *paap* (*ostri-purus paap*).

This *paap* was later found to be emerging from Punni's *maite*. Punni's grandmother was polygynandrously married to four brothers. She had three co-wives. It is the norm that a woman should devote herself all of her husbands with equal love. But one of Punni's grandmothers liked one brother best of all. They made a promise to live together. Such an act is known as keeping "*nim dhoram*" (rules and obligations). Under this agreement, a couple promises to be faithful to one another for the rest of their lives, with *devata* as their witness. This family was divided later on. Unfortunately, this couple was separated during the course of this division, and, as a result, the agreement was broken. The *rianthuri* felt very bad about it, but it was not under her control. Distressed, she committed suicide.

As she was pregnant at the time, the *paap* that resulted was a male-female type.

Under the guidance of their lineage *Bamon*, Punni's father made an idol (a silver block with three female figures engraved on it) and took it to the banks of the River Ganga and gave it a ritual bath. The idol was brought back to the village and given a home--a miniature house in the family field. Punni's affinal family took her to Hardwar where she took a ritual bath. Thereafter, a number of children were born by her.

Very recently, the family witnessed a heavy loss of animals. Besides this, a number of family members had died. It was thus evident that either some serious *dosh* was involved in all this or someone had put a hex (*jadu*) on them. They had approached Hari *Mali* to reveal the source of their afflictions. It was at the Friday Clinic where I met them. *Mali* divined that a *Jadu* was in operation and recommended that a *Bamon* perform the ritual of *chui-chalana* to relieve the effect of the curse.

Discussion:

This case narrative highlights cultural understanding and the ways in which one can learn to cope with barrenness. I gather that the reason Ram Lal Thakur did not marry a third time was because it had become evident that he was the basis of the childlessness in the family. Although it was never stated as such, villagers would gossip about Ram Lal's

impotency. The fact notwithstanding, the wives were held responsible for it. In the search for a cure for impotency (or the women's barrenness), which was seen as a *bimari*, the first step was with biomedicine and herbal medicine. Finding no cure, Ram Lal turned to indigenous healers for remedies. Locating the cause of impotency and sterility in some kind of cosmic transgression erased the stigma from the people involved, and at the same time conferred a new meaning this situation.

It is interesting to note here that the kind of *paap* that surfaced was related to the unnatural death of a pregnant woman. This suggests that the repercussions of one's actions can often hurt future generations and can lead to the end of a lineage. The source of *paap* throws light on what Jaunsaris regard as the constructive functions of polyandrous families. If the family had not divided, the *rianthuri* would have had no reason to commit suicide. It also promotes what an ideal woman who is polyandrously married should do--love all of her husbands equally. Another example already discussed in Chapter IV deals with a very similar issue--the dynamics of the household which also have a great impact on women's lives. The case discussed below goes into greater detail.

3. Vimla and Pratima: (both in their early thirties)

This case study echoes the stories of many other women and raises the issue of the impact of polyandry on household dynamics and on women's lives. I have already introduced Vimla and Pratima in chapter IV, in order to illuminate the allusions and nuances of gender relations in a polygynandrous family. I also made reference to the fact that both the co-wives were experiencing physical and emotional discomfort.

Pratima was diagnosed as possessed by *matri* soon after her marriage to Sham Sher. Pratima, for her part, was not altogether happy with the possession, but as the years have passed, she has given in and accepted her situation as her fate. Over the last 6 years that she has been married, she has consulted a number of *Malis* and *Matriyas*.

Vimla too had a difficult time accepting Pratima as her co-wife. When it first became clear to Vimla that Pratima was Sham Sher's favorite, she left for her *maite*, leaving behind her three oldest children. By this time, she had 5 children and it was therefore too late to divorce and marry again. Moreover, her *maite* is one of the most prestigious families (treasurer for the temple at Hanol) in Jaunsar-Bawar, consequently divorce was not an option.

Sham Sher tried to ignore her stubbornness (*jid*) but when a year had passed and she had not return (he had sent his brothers on several occasions), he went to bring her

back home, himself. If Vimla had belonged to an ordinary family, this separation would have resulted in a divorce. But Sham Sher, who was an aspiring politician, knew that a divorce would cost him a huge number of votes in his constituency and so he relented. He made a promise to Vimla that he would not have a sexual relationship with Pratima. Vimla gave in and returned to her affinal home (*sasural*). Since then, the two co-wives have lived in a tension-filled environment. Fortunately for both, during part of the year (December-March), Pratima moves to the winter home (*channi*) in the foothills, which grants space and imparts relief to herself and her co-wife.

When Vimla was living in her *maite*, she had consulted a number of healers--*Matriyas*, *Malis*, *Bamons* and *Pir*. Multiple causes for her affliction were revealed, and a number of curing ceremonies held but none engendered complete relief. Her family suspected that she had tuberculosis (she was losing weight and coughing up blood) and had her treated in a hospital at Dehra Doon. After her treatment, she gained back considerable weight and was looking healthy. However, after her return to *sasural*, she has once again lost a lot of weight and had started consulting the *Mali* who runs the Friday clinic at Makhti. It was at that time that the *Mali* had revealed that a *daag* was after her life. No positive identification of the *daag* was made, although it was common knowledge that Pratima was

the prime suspect.

Pratima, on the other hand, left to go to her *maite* when Vimla returned. She was expecting her second child at the time. Even after two years, Sham Sher did not send anybody to bring her back home. She had to "swallow her pride" and return to her affinal home on her own. With tears in her eyes she recalled her humiliation and said she wished that "the earth should split open and swallow me." This is similar to a well-known episode from the Ramayana in which, the heroine, Sita, humiliated by her husband, calls upon the mother earth to open up to give her shelter. Pratima returned to her sasural home after two years. After all, she was a burden to her family and, after her parent's death, she would be at the mercy of her sisters-in-law.

Over the past three years, the co-wives have been living together, but a lot has changed. In his greed to become a politician, Sham Sher was forced to pay more attention to Vimla. Pratima, says "I am happier that Sham Sherji spends more time with his first wife; it has reduced the tension-level in the house. She even treats me better."

However, things were not quite as good as Pratima had depicted. I accompanied Pratima to her *maite* for Diwali²¹ celebrations. There we visited with her healer (*bhagat*). The day we visited the healer, Pratima woke up at the crack

²¹ Annual festival which celebrates the return of Lord Rama and his wife Sita from exile.

of dawn and collected all of the required ingredients for a three-day *pujan*. As she put it, "I pray (*pujna*) to *matri* every year and *bhagat* organizes and communicates with my *matri* spirit". The second day we were there, Pratima broke into a dance (*khel*) and three hours later fell on the ground unconscious. The last night we spent at the *bhagat*'s house, the *matri* "played" (*khel*) again and this time "spoke" and made some demands. She (the *matri* spirit) wanted to hold a seven-day *pujan* before *Bisu* (a harvest festival held in mid-April).

This demand, Pratima pointed out, put her in a very "compromising position." If she were to go ahead with the *pujan* as desired by the *matri*, her affinal family would be upset, as a seven-day *pujan* would cost a lot of money and not to mention the labor time lost. Moreover, harvest season is the busiest time of the year. On the other hand, were she to ignore the demands made by *matri*, she would have to face the wrath of *matri*. She returned to her affinal home, dejected.

Seeing Pratima's face on her return home, Vimla knew something was the matter, but she ignored her. Pratima knew that Vimla should be consulted about her return to her natal village in less than six months for the *pujan*, but she decided to wait until she returned (in March) from the winter home. But Vimla had already heard from the gossip in the village, about the demands made by the *matri*. However,

she did not say anything to Pratima or her husband.

In February, Vimla had to attend the marriage of her niece (her brother's daughter). She decided to take a long vacation. Pratima moved back to the village to look after the main house in Vimla's absence. While Vimla was away, Pratima broached the subject of her return to her *maite* to celebrate the seven-day *pujan*, and the money that would be required, with her family. Her fathers-in-law and her husband ignored her. That night, as she sat near the hearth, warming her hands, she entered into a trance. She started dancing wildly and yelling loudly as if she was scolding someone. The spirit spoke through her and again made the demands for the seven-day *pujan*.

When Pratima did not calm down after three hours of dancing, a *Bamon* was summoned from the neighboring village to make peace with the spirit. It was agreed with the help of *Bamon* that her demand for a seven-day *pujan* would be met. But the *matri* was not appeased; now she wanted more. The *matri* wanted a ritual bath at Hardwar and a pilgrimage, both of which would cost more money. Besides, a pilgrimage would mean the loss of two people's labor for three days. Pratima could not go on her own; another adult would have to escort her.

For several days, the family debated this issue. And Pratima's possession spells became more frequent. Vimla found this very annoying and suspected that Pratima was

suffering from "hysteria." The day Pratima fainted while working in the field, Sham Sher promised the ritual bath at Hardwar and requested *matri* to give the family more time to organize the seven-day ritual. At first she refused, but on the family's insistence, the *matri* spirit relented. Thereafter, there were no possession spells.

A month passed by, but there was no indication that the pilgrimage promise would be kept. Pratima became very apprehensive and wary, because her experience of possession was anything but enticing. She said, "when *matri* descends on me, she does not let me go and when I wake up (from falling unconscious after the possession dance), I feel as if someone has beaten me up. My whole body hurts. It is very different feeling when I dance (*khel*) to the drumming and singing, then I feel light (*halka*) and at peace."

One evening, just before the harvest season, Pratima was feeding the horses and the mules. One of the horses pushed her over. She lost her balance and fell on the ground, hitting her face on a jagged end of a rock. She was carried to the local PHC where the doctor put 14 stitches in the side of her forehead. Pratima was convinced, beyond a doubt, that it was a "sign" (*praman*) that the *matri* spirit was angry.

The next day, Pratima got ready to go to the field to harvest. She had barely crossed the front courtyard when the *matri* spirit "descended" (*otri*) on her. She started

speaking loudly and dancing wildly. No one could hold her down. It seemed to me that she was writhing in pain. A huge crowd had gathered around her. The group seemed to sympathize with Pratima and their consensus was that Pratima was receiving the punishment for the total disregard of the *matri's* wishes by her husband and the rest of the family.

Pratima's brother was visiting at that time; he had brought a gift (*banta*) for his sister, as is the custom for the *Bisu* holiday. He was convinced that Pratima's behavior showed all the signs that the *matri* was furious. The family concurred; arrangements were made to take Pratima to Hardwar, and to execute the seven-day *pujan* on her return.

After the ceremony, Pratima says, she felt a lot better. In July 1993, almost three-and-a-half months after the seven-day *pujan*, Pratima continued to have no further complaints of physical ailments. Then in September 1994 I received a letter from Sham Sher telling me that Vimla had died suddenly of a serious illness. She was only thirty-two years old.

Discussion:

This case study is an excellent illustration of the household dynamics that are the consequence of polygynandry. The case highlights the stress and strain that polygynandry contributes to women's lives. This is a situation where both the co-wives are contending for the same husband. What is most significant is the fact that both women were

diagnosed as "afflicted." Vimla saw Pratima as her rival and the cause of her misery. It is thus not surprising that she was diagnosed as suffering from the handiwork of a daag. When she complained directly about the situation, she got no sympathy. But when she was diagnosed as being afflicted by daag, as evidenced by Vimla losing weight, neighbors became suspicious of Pratima and sympathized with Vimla.

On the other hand, everyone knew that Pratima was under the control of a *matri*. Emphasized in the majority of *matri* possession cases is the element that the *matri* chooses people who are pure. If the *matri* had chosen Pratima's body to inhabit, surely she was an unlikely candidate for daag? I must mention here that Pratima's *matri* possession episodes became more frequent after Vimla was diagnosed as being afflicted by daag.

In both the cases, given the timing, there was more than a hint that the *matri* possession of Pratima and the daag's attack on Vimla articulate the tenuous position of polyandrously-married women in their affinal households. *matri* and daag became the media for articulating their frustrations and their desires. The spirit enabled Pratima to assert a position in the family that is revered. Pratima, as I mentioned earlier, was a divorcee (*chut aurat*), and so a position of reverence could may well be something that Pratima desired. When she takes a ritual bath, her status is raised from a mere mortal (*nordei*) to a

holy woman (*nainu*). Of course, she is not the one who desires these things, they are demanded by the spirit. However, these demands amplified the tension between the two co-wives and Pratima's relationship to other members of the household. Such ambiguity of motivation exists in other cases as well. In this case, the recurrent possession episodes augmented the tension in the household. So we see that spirit possession is not a refuge, but, a space outside the home (social space) to confront the problems of everyday living and to enable the individuals to fight for what each one thinks she deserves. Notwithstanding, there was no definite future outcome in the case, and in fact, a year later, one of the co-wives died.

4. Vivek: (M2)

I have included this case study because women are, as is the case in other parts of India (Skultans 1988), considered to be the primary care givers and are held responsible for the well-being of their family members. In fact, a healthy family is one of the important indicators of a good wife and mother. This case delineates how women play this significant role and understand the cultural logic that underlies the conception of suffering and affliction and the structure of therapy.

Vivek, from the village of Bisoe has two fathers and

two mothers. His mother gave birth to five sons and three daughters, while his younger social mother's progeny included two sons. His family had seen the death of a number of male children. For instance, his four grandfathers faced the deaths of a number of their male offspring. Only two male children survived, his two fathers. Since they owned a considerable amount of land, the family hoped to achieve the status they once enjoyed by having more male offspring. Vivek's mother (age 34), a pale anemic woman often complaining of giddiness, loss of appetite and weakness, was the envy of many women in the village, having given birth to five sons, almost one child every two years.

Vivek for one whole year did not show any signs of ill health. Immediately following his first birthday, Vivek started suffering from loose bowel movements (*dust*). Believing, the *dust* to be due to heat so frequent in infancy, his family treated him to powdered cumin (*jeera*), sugar and opium. As his mother was still nursing him, she restricted her diet. They waited patiently for a few days but the child failed to show any signs of improvement.

Vivek grew weaker each day and the problem intensified. When the family realized that the child had lost a lot of weight, his mother asked her older husband to go to the nearby Primary Health Center to get medicine for loose bowels. The nurse at the Red Cross clinic gave him two

pills to be broken in half, and indicated that he should be given half of a tablet twice a day. The child showed improvement for three days, after which the same problem manifested itself. This was an indication that what Vivek was suffering from was not a somatic problem (*sharirik bimari*), but something in the line of *dosh*. A *Bamon*, their *kulBamon*, was consulted, who attributed *graha-dosh* to Vivek. This diagnosis indicated that the child had an inauspicious relation with the planets. This could be rectified by propitiating the planet Mars, which was in opposition with the other planets. An elaborate planet (*graha*) *pujan* was performed and a *bhujari* (amulet) was also prepared to be worn by the child for future protection from the *grahas*.

The child showed no improvement whatsoever and the condition had by this time become very severe. Some was *dosh* definitely at work. The mother remembered that the child cried heavily during his bath. Another *Bamon* who had a better reputation was summoned. The *Bamon* calculated a different *dosh* affecting the child. The position of the planets with the child were normal, he said but the child had "got" *matri*.

The *matri* was "calculated" (*anad-ganad*) and identified as being of the highest order of purity--*succhimatri*--requiring the family to observe purity rules. The specific responsibility belonged to his mother, who had to abstain from leftover food (*jutha*) and meat. Thus, Vivek entered

into the status of *khatri* and the *pujan* of *succimatri* was set up for the following Friday, the auspicious day for *matri pujan*.

No visible relief was observed. Vivek had by now lost half of his body weight; his mother was, however, convinced of the *succimatri's* association. Recalling the incidents that might have attracted *succimatri*, she said:

There was nobody in the house when Vivek was born. All the family members had gone to the field and I was lying on the ground floor. My *bohini* (co-wife) was looking after me. Suddenly, I started having pain and my co-wife went out for help. Before she came back with help, the child was already born. When the child's head emerged I screamed for help. This might have attracted the attention of a *matri* who came to my rescue and ultimately entered the child. We should have done a *pujan* for her; now she is hurt and this problem is actually a sign from her that she is upset.

But now that the *dosh* was taken care of, the medicine would be effective. This was in accordance with the local logic that the *succimatri* was the cause of illness and had hampered the treatment. As I mentioned in chapter II, *dosh* and *Bimari* are not mutually exclusive categories. If *bimari* persists despite biomedical treatment, Vivek's mother reasoned, the cause is attributable to *dosh*.

Having appeased the *matri*, the child was now taken to the doctor who prescribed the same medicine as the nurse had, which only gave temporary relief. As both the doctor's medicine and the *Bamon's pujan* proved ineffective, the family suspected a new association--*dosh* associated with *paap*. This time they consulted a *paboch* who assured them

that *paap* was not the cause, but who confirmed the existence of *succimatri--jal matri*. He performed a *bonth* ritual.

Discussion:

What is significant in this case study is the primary role played by the child's mother in decisions made about the course of therapy. At every stage of decision-making, she was trying to make links in order to decipher the probable cause of the illness. This case also clarifies the conceptions of *dosh* and *bimari*, highlighting the logic that underlies conceptions that shape and influence the structure of therapy.

5. Usha (F17):

I met Usha on the first day of my fieldwork. Usha, *dianthuri* of the village Bisoe, was in the tenth class in school and was preparing for her first public exam. She was born second in a family of seven. On my first visit to *Khati ki Matriya* (a week later), I was surprised to see Usha along with few other girls from the village Bisoe. They knew I was researching about *matri* and women healers, but had never mentioned their participation in *matri*-related rituals. In fact, they had actively denied any knowledge about *matri* and *matri* possession. Such a denial is not surprising since belief in possession is considered superstitious by many, and some (especially those with a

high school education) openly ridicule and mimic body movements associated with possession. I imagine that Usha, who was a high school student, felt that she should not be indulging in "backward" beliefs and customs.

Since our encounter at Khati, I had accompanied Usha to other such traditional healers. Usha opened up and narrated the reasons for her visits to the *Matriya* at Khati. She told me that once she was collecting fire-wood in the forests on the hill top (*danda*) when she fell off a branch. She was unconscious for a few hours. She was only nine years old at that time. Another time she was returning home after collecting firewood. As her load was very heavy, she was lagging behind her group. The sun was setting, so she started to walk faster, but then she fainted. She recalled another incident when she was cutting grass along with her friends from her village. When they were taking a short respite, she fell asleep while her friends were amusing themselves creating new songs. One of her friends screamed into her ear to wake her up. This frightened (*dorey goi*) her and she fainted. About the nature of her fainting spells she says:

Khati ki Matriya tells me that I have a *dosh* on me. *Succhimatri* has entered my body to protect me. My family believes that *succhimatri* enters bodies that are pure. This means I am pure and *succhimatri* will protect me against attacks from nefarious beings (*bhut-pret*). You see, in all of the cases that I mentioned to you, I fainted because I was attacked by "bad spirits." The bad spirits linger around the periphery of villages and forests. When I am returning from the forests

or after cutting grass they trouble me, and I faint. So I avoid going outside the village, only to go to school. Now I have a *succimatri* protecting me. She battles with them when they attack me. You know how I fling my arms and legs around. I am not conscious about what actually goes on.

Matriya tells me that when my body jerks violently, it is so because *matri* is waging a battle in my body against the attack by *bhut-pret*. When I did not have a *succimatri* protecting me, my whole body would go numb (*suun*), like people with paralysis (*adhrang*). I could not move any part of my body even if I wanted. People tell me that I start frothing around my mouth. My teeth clench up and I just lie there rigid. Only when someone forcefully puts a spoon of water in my mouth do I wake up.

I probed if her symptoms were signs of epilepsy (*mirgi*). She said even though the symptoms might look the same, in her case the jerking movements were resulting from *succhimatri* trying to drive the bad spirits out of her body.

Later on, she told me of her encounter with a *Pir* (a muslim healer) that suggested a different interpretation of her fainting spells. According to the *Pir*, she was afflicted by *mirgi matri*. The *Pir* suggested that someone, possibly a *rianthuri* in her family, was unhappy and her angst (aha!) was the cause of this affliction. Usha thought it was her youngest mother who was unhappy. After all, she has no children of her own and she has to bear the brunt of being branded a *daag*. I inquired if this diagnosis had any effect on her younger mother. Usha thought that to a certain extent it did, although no one teases or harasses her about her situation to her face.

A few months later, on a visit to see her brother who is in a school in Dehra Doon, she was shown to a physician who gave her pills (*buti*) for her fainting spells. Usha pointed out that the doctor had lamented that her illness could not be cured. I asked her if the physician had diagnosed her with epilepsy (*mirgi*), but she did not answer me and left the room.

In the months that followed, Usha avoided any encounters with me. Then one afternoon she knocked on my door. She was visibly very upset and asked if she could speak with me. She told me that what she had feared all along had come true--she had failed her public exam. She said:

I never find any time to study. All day long I collect fire-wood or cut grass for cattle. Who will want me now? I am useless. Nobody can leave me to do any work on my own. If only I had passed my exams, like *bablididi*, I could have studied further. Now this. No one will ever want to marry me. I am of no use to anybody. I cannot look after children, not knowing when I might have a "fit" (*dohra*).

This was the first time she had ever used the word "*dohra*," the Jaunsari word for epileptic convulsions. She recalled her conversation with the physician in Dehra Dun who had informed her that her illness was incurable, and then she left abruptly.

The next day was Friday. I was getting ready to catch the bus to Makhti to document and follow up cases at the "Friday clinic." Usha was waiting for me at the bus stop.

Although she sat next to me on the bus, she said nothing.
Her older brother Dinesh was escorting her.

At the "Friday clinic," when Usha's turn came, the *Mali* looked at her nails and asked her if she was ever "frightened" (*dorey*). She told him of incidents that she had never told me. She said she was frightened when she was returning home one night from another village where she had gone to see Ramlila. *Hari Mali*, true to his divination style, made her breathe incense, and started drumming on a brass plate invoking the spirit to manifest itself.

Mali: jai Maharaj
 Hail Raghunath, Botha Mahasu
 omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient Raghunathji
 reside in the host (*dori*) and bring forth the
 truth
 remove suffering from humans
 pardon the mistakes and transgressions
 throw light on the truth
 through the mouth or the body of the host
 I am calling you devata, I am requesting you
 come in the form of devata and leave in the form
 of devata.

Usha: *Nahi* (NO).

Mali: Oh Maharaj! Please tell me what tortures you, I
 will do as you say.

Usha: I do not want leftovers, meat or oily
 food. I want ritual bath at
 Hardwar.

Mali: So Maharaj (so be it).

Usha opened her eyes as if she had just woken up from a deep sleep. Her brother noted down the suggestions made by the *Mali*--*perhej* (restricted diet), bath in the Ganga River and three more visits with him.

When I left the field, Usha was still on her restricted diet, and had successfully cleared her public examinations. She was making arrangements to move to Dehra Doon for higher studies.

Discussion:

Usha's story is narrated from different points of view, providing alternate readings of the same experience. It clearly indicates that no single point of view (religious healer, biomedical healer, or family) adequately renders her experience. This multiplicity of interpretation embodies the fact that possession experience cannot be represented from a single vantage point. This narrative structure, according to Good (1994), is the "subjunctivizing" quality of a narrative.

Usha's views about her experience radically change from one encounter with the healer to the next. This is revealed in the ambiguity inherent in her narrative and hence, as I have tried to show in this sample, there is no way to envision a definite encounter (Wolf 1992). The framing of the story using a different account of the cause of illness presents a very different meaning to the same experience. In fact, each interpretation casts doubt on the other, providing potential alternative interpretations. This contingent element of the interpretation of possession experience introduces a quality that is potent with creativity.

The creative aspect is clearly exemplified in this case study and the case study reported below deals with the stigmatizing nature of several diseases, not only for the individual but for their families as well. Usha knew that if her "fainting spells" were diagnosed as epilepsy, her family would have a hard time finding a groom for her. For if the label of "epileptic" was stamped on her, it would mark her for life, even after remission. Her seeking out *Makhti ka Mali* was a desperate attempt to escape the label and create a meaning that will help her cope with this situation.

At the same time, this case represents the stress of a young woman who is at the crossroads of her life, for what she accomplishes at this point will determine the rest of her life. She is torn between working towards the womanhood defined by her society versus those presented in images in the mass media of a working woman who achieves a good living through college education. Her anxiety about her future is intensified by the diagnosis of epilepsy by the physician.

6. Namita (F22):

I met Namita at the "Friday clinic" where she was getting treatment for *bis*²². Namita is a garrulous woman who was very open about the problem that was plaguing her.

²² Poisoning through sorcery

She told me that her illness was about three months old. The problem was discovered quite by accident. A *Mali* who had actually come to divine for her sister suddenly spoke of a *dosh* related to her. But at that moment Namita was quite normal, showing no signs of the effect. However, as a precautionary measure, she took a few rice grains (*motia*) given to her by the *Mali*. As she was in her parental house, her father became extremely worried for her because the *Mali* had divined *bis* as the cause of her *dosh*.

There was no sign of *bis* for the next three days. But when Namita visited a doctor with her son who was ill, she vomited blood in the clinic. She at once realized that the *bis* had shown its effect on her. The doctor gave injections and glucose to her, and he clearly declared that the symptoms were very severe. He advised Namita to go to a better place (a hospital). Namita listened to the suggestions of the doctor but was thinking otherwise. She was convinced that she had an affliction of *bis* which needed to be calmed immediately. She hurriedly returned to the village.

At home, she again vomited blood; everyone was convinced of the *bis* effect now. A *Mali* was immediately called who confirmed *bis* as a causative factor. The *Mali* gave her a few rice grains to be taken the next morning.

Her condition was gradually deteriorating. She was becoming weaker due to vomiting. At this juncture, it was

decided that the patient should be given "power" medicines. Here the choice of the healer's prescription had nothing to do with the treatment of the illness but was made to help her overcome weakness. She was taken to the nearby Primary Health Center where the nurse immediately put her on glucose. Her vomiting stopped, but only for a short period. As soon as the effect of the glucose wore off, she vomited profusely.

There was no improvement in Namita's symptoms. She was in her parental house, so her father decided that she should first be handed over to her husband's family, who should be shouldered with taking care of her. At her affinal home, it was decided that she should be taken to the military hospital.

On the way to the hospital, they met a very famous *Bamon* named Bheru, the electrician, who is a *bis* specialist. Namita's father was once cured of *bis* by Bheru, so he recognized him. Bheru "found" (*khojna*) the *bis* and prepared an amulet for Namita. However, he instructed them that the amulet should be worn only when Namita returned from the hospital. He considered the environment of the hospital to be highly polluted, which could defile the sacred amulet and make it ineffective. It was also suggested that the amulet be kept away during menses, death and birth.

Namita received the hospital treatment for thirteen days. There was considerable improvement in her and she

felt strong. However, she considered that the hospital's treatment had only helped in regaining the lost "power," but believed that the actual cause of the illness, *bis*, was still lingering. She wore the amulet as soon as she returned home.

Namita remained normal for one full year, but started vomiting blood after that time. She correlated it to the act of defiling the amulet. She recalled that she had visited her co-wife whose son had died. In such a situation, she reflected, she should have kept the amulet in a safer place. But she forgot to abide by this purity rule, and so the amulet became ineffective.

A *Bamon* was asked to calculate *bis* for her. Namita's condition once again started deteriorating. Although someone was immediately sent to Bheru's village, she was immediately taken to the PHC, owing to her severe condition.

At the Primary Health Center, "power" medicine was injected into her. Namita was puzzled when the doctor at the Health Center diagnosed her illness to be tuberculosis. She knew the doctors were wrong. She only hoped to get the "power" medicine, and once discharged, she would wear the new amulet made by the *Bamon*.

Discussion:

In Namita's world, spirits, *dosh* and *bis* are responsible for suffering. Unable to localize the source of suffering in terms of her cultural model of the world, her

suffering remained ambiguous and invalidated. She had made a conscious attempt to find the meaning of her suffering in *bis*. Namita's case also illustrates the fairly common situation in which people's problems were uncovered quite by accident.

In this region "tuberculosis" is highly stigmatized and feared. So it is not surprising that a conscious effort was being made to find alternative meaning to this experience which would help "remake" her lifeworld. Her insistence on wearing the amulet was an attempt to, what Good (1994) describes as a bid to "authorize the self." She was describing events along with the meaning she wanted to craft for herself and hence imagining a culturally appropriate solution to her predicament.

Conclusion:

In all the narratives of spirit possession, we discovered the multiple layers of meaning that were attributed to various events. In considering the unfolding of events in the sufferer's life, one observes that there were several themes in a story. With each new turn of events, there is a concern for a potential outcome. Interactions with different healers also help in shaping how the story may turn out. The actors themselves are engaged in shaping their activities and forming their world. The therapy management group has an agenda of its own. In the

quest for a desired outcome, the narratives resist a closure. This also opens up possibilities and potentials for multiple interpretations for the possession event and alternative ways to seek therapy.

There are certain aspects of narratives that help maintain this subjunctivity, which permits alternate thematic structures without a definite closure. The Jaunsaris have access to "pluralistic medical systems" and this facilitates a hope--a potential for cure. Within each healing system, different healers have access to different *shakti*. Each "reading" presents the sufferer with a different interpretation and a different meaning which opens up more possibilities, providing alternate thematic structures with a desired outcome. Each interpretation draws on a particular concern making available unlimited thematic structures. People draw upon them all at the same time, stretching and molding to accommodate multiple readings which make sense of their experience. Even organic diseases (*bimari*) have "supernatural" explanations (e.g., tuberculosis and epilepsy), and this further opens up possibilities for cure without the stigma associated with these diseases. Also ambivalence towards traditional beliefs sends people to biomedical arenas where many more stories are created to understand their experience. So we see, each narrative, embodying contradictions and a multiple network of perspectives, has a creative potency to recast

reality.

The concepts used in these possession narratives uncover the indigenous explanatory model. For example, talking about *perhej*, ritual bath, *jutha*, *bis*, and *doli* is a part of an indigenous model of the well-being of the self, emphasizing closure, mixing, balancing, channeling, purity, etc. For Usha and Namita and others encountered in this chapter, the association of a stigmatized illness with *dosh* provides, through spirit possession, an alternative interpretation that helps to escape the dishonor and disgrace associated with these diseases.

These self narratives, rampant with ambiguities and contradictions and enriched with metaphors, proverbs and allusions, go beyond individual experience. They expose Jaunsari women's desires and frustrations, their memories and their fantasies. Within the space provided by spirit possession, women discuss, articulate and make sense of crises and of the unattainable objectives of womanhood and, invariably, tell us something about gender relations, household dynamics, and their existential dilemmas. By tapping into the imaginary world (cosmology) and in dealing with the harshness of the realities of their everyday world, they strive toward healing with an openness to change and to healing. Herein lies the creative potential of spirit possession.

Chapter 8

Closure

Shared images and metaphors are conventional mode of organizing the structure and meaning of spirit possession. In the next few paragraphs I discuss the central metaphors of body, *dosh* and the spirits, and link them to the local landscape, healers lives, women's experiences and religious meanings. They reveal not only aspects of spirit possession, but also the relation between culture, narrative and experience (Narayan 1989).

As an object of analysis, the "body" condenses a network of meanings. The body is, first and foremost, the locus of senses and feeling. This relates to the affective dimension of experience. The body is also the locus of personal, social and political strife (Scheper-Hughes 1994). Symbolically, Jaunsari notions of the body help us in understanding these meanings in revealing the person-body-experience relationship (Low, 1994).

The "body," Csordas (1990) informs us, is the starting point in the study of culture and self. It is the "existential ground of culture." He directs us to ideas put forward by Merleau-Ponty (1962), who considers the body as

the ultimate medium of experience and therefore an essential consideration in describing and understanding the phenomenal world. Scheper-Hughes and Lock, in their several articles written together (1987, 1990) and separately (1980, 1994), have suggested the body as the central object of analysis in anthropology. The body is seen as the "ultimate medium" that connects the personal, the social and the political, thus creating a space where social truths are contested, negotiated, invented or reproduced.

When the body (*pind*) in Jaunsari communities is possessed by one or more spirit, it becomes a space for interaction with the spirits. The body becomes the vehicle for the spirit; it is under the control of the spirit. The narratives of healers' lives and women's possession experiences highlight how the body emerges as a locus where issues of struggle and suffering are inscribed.

When one examines the body's meanings and metaphors, one observes a gender distinction related to the issues of power and struggle implicated in spirit possession. I have already pointed out, that while *Malis* evoke a gift from the divine (*vardan*) as an essential part of spirit possession and as a key to healing, narratives of *Matriyas* and the women possessed by spirits typically concern issues of struggle.

While women healers were anxious about their ability to fulfil their role as a mother, wife, and field laborer, the

narratives of *Mali* lacked such considerations. In her narrative about her fainting spells, Usha (pg. 183-189) expresses her understanding of this experience as a "struggle" between *matri* and *bhut-pret*--a struggle between good and evil. Rani vocalizes about her predicament as a "tug-of-war" between her loyalty towards the family and her desire to be a healer. Thus we see the experience of possession and its consequences mirror the power differential between the two genders in Jaunsari society.

This emphasis on the body draws our attention to the cultural understanding of suffering. Suffering is often seen as a divine experience in Hindu culture (Fuller, 1992). In the case of possession, the body as possessed and controlled by another spirit becomes the locus of suffering, yet another prevalent theme. The healers were quick to point out that becoming a *Matriya* or a *Mali* is not automatic after having been "chosen" by a divine spirit. The habituation process transforms the body as a locus of suffering to a body which serves as a temple (as the spirit resides in it) capable of healing people. This habituation process can take months and sometimes years. During the habituation process, I was told that the host loses a lot of weight. Women healers also pointed out that considerable labor time was lost as well. Recalling her memories of her *bawala* state, Rani Devi (*Kandoi ki Matriya*) told me that she would go into uncontrolled possession and when she came out

of it, she felt as if she had been beaten over her entire body. Like most healers, Rani rationalizes her suffering as a test given by the divine to judge her capabilities (praman) as a healer. "One needs to be strong morally, ritually, and physically to be a vehicle for the divine." Here, she is alluding to suffering as a meaningful and purposeful emotion, a significant part of religious experience.

These notions of body and suffering draw on religious metaphors rich in shared images and symbols from popular Hinduism. For example: Roshni described her experience of spirit possession and her physical symptoms (violent jerky movements) as a consequence of the goddess battling with a demon for her soul and winning. Here, she is referring to a very popular legend wherein goddess Durga had waged a battle against the buffalo demon (Mahisasura), vanquished him and saved the world from annihilation. Pratima, who "swallows her pride" and returns to her affinal home to face humiliation, wishes that the "earth should split open and swallow me." Pratima is drawing from a popular episode from Ramayana in which Sita, the heroine, humiliated by her husband, calls upon the mother goddess to open up and give her shelter.

Finally, concepts of dosh form a primary organizing feature in Jaunsari understanding of affliction and suffering. In fact, many of the spirit possession

narratives explicitly ordered their experience in this form. *Dosh* is particularly a significant metaphor around which the people's narratives were built and gained coherence.

Jaunsaris perceive and classify affliction in terms of its causes. Affliction refers to a disorder or disruption in the relation of the sufferer to his or her overall context. According to the ancient Indian Medicinal tradition--Ayurveda (also mentioned in Charaka and Susrata Samhita, 1,800 years B.P.), the *tridosha* theory (humoral theory) is based on the basic tenet that ill-health is caused by an imbalance of certain elements in the body. According to this theory, the body is made up of five gross elements (*dhatus*): ether (*Mahabhuta-Akasa*), wind (*Vayu*), fire (*Agni*), water (*Jala*), and earth (*prithvi*). For the well-being of the body, these elements must be kept in balance. The food we take in generates *dhatus* and refuse. The *dhatus* are invested with subtle qualities (*gunas*), and their imbalance effects the *dhatus*. Clearly then, disruption is caused by inappropriate intake. In order to bring the person back to his or her initial state of balance, counterbalanced intakes are prescribed. Balance, then, characterizes the logic underlying the healing approach in Ayurveda.

The logic of the maintenance of balance, and hence of carefully guarding what one "takes in", is extended to include interactions between an individual and his or her

group. A disharmony between the individual and his or her group will, it is believed, cause suffering. This logic reflects, McKim Marriott has suggested, the dominant theory of personhood in Hindu India. The Hindu person is said to be individual, open, more or less fluid, and to derive his or her nature from interpersonal interactions. Kakar sees Ayurveda as "the principle repository of the cultural image of the body and the concept of person" (1982:220). This type of cultural imagining of the body and the person is clearly seen in the Jaunsari conceptualization of suffering.

The Jaunsaris recognize several causes of suffering (*pira*):

- (a) *Bimari* - an imbalance in the elements of the body.
- (b) *Dosh* - an imbalance in the body's relationship with the "behavioral environment" resulting in divine punishment.
- (c) Sorcery (*jadu-tona*) and witchcraft (*daag ki shakti*).

In this research, I have focused on *dosh* as a central organizing metaphor in shaping experience and making sense of the world. Both *bimari* and *dosh* reflect the disruptive relations of the sufferer to his or her overall context. However, *dosh* and *bimari* are not mutually exclusive categories. *Bimari*, if it is persistent and fails to respond to biomedicine, is attributed to *dosh*. *Dosh* has multiple meanings. The Jaunsaris consider *dosh* to be a "curse" that is "given" or "attached" by supernatural forces

when an individual fails to maintain certain cosmological prescriptions. *Dosh* brings suffering (*pira*), the symptoms of which are evaluated by the sufferer, his or her therapy management group and the healers.

The healing process primarily involves identifying the cause of the suffering at various levels:

- (1) If the cause of the suffering is natural or supernatural
- (2) If supernatural, which particular force or spirit is causing the suffering
- (3) The reason for possession by the spirit
- (4) If any humans were involved in this process

Then, through a process of transaction and transformation, the causes are addressed.

Dosh as a diagnostic category reflects how Jaunsaris tend to explain or understand the problematic of everyday life and suffering. It reflects and symbolizes the change in the "behavioral environment" and in the individual's body and manifests itself in the transformations that are internal and external. A change in the behavioral environment or the proportions of dhatus that form a body has a tremendous impact on the constitution of the self and personhood. That is to say, *dosh* is the central metaphor that is related to the Jaunsari understanding of spirit possession, self and personhood.

The Jaunsari believe that possession by a spirit can

also be symptomatic of the "divine call" or "divine selection". In either case, intrusion by a spirit into the body of a human entails transformations in the life of the host. In the former case, depending on the context, there are 2 contrasting responses:

- (1) Exorcism (*jhar-phunk*) - which involves "driving out" the spirit
- (2) Adoricism (*bonth*) - which involves "accommodating or integrating" (*bonth*) the spirit and cultivating a viable and enduring relationship between the host and the spirit.

In reality, not all cases of spirit possession fall into one or the other category, and in situations where more than one spirit enters the human body, both of the strategies are implemented. The healing process is a continuous and persistent attempt at providing meaning to the experience of possession. It involved making sense of the individual's experience in the everyday world. And in the Bakhtinian sense, possession reveals the subversive and latent meanings inherent in the shared experience of routine life and everyday activities. I see the recourse of patients to healers as an example of what James Scott (1986) calls "everyday forms of resistance."

Spirit possession is not just a culturally meaningful construction of suffering but also the focus of remedial and redressive action. By using this concept, Jaunsaris are not

merely struggling to give a clinical name to a person's pain and misfortune, they are drawing our attention to a complex network of metaphorical association to which the terms are meaningfully connected. Condensed in the concept of spirit possession is a semantic network that links individual distress to a social world where inequality and injustice are an integral part of social relationships. Spirit possession aims not just to alleviate symptoms but to address the vulnerability of women--a core experience. As Bijma so poignantly articulates this experience: "This is our fate as women, everyone controls (vas) us, we (our body) do not belong to ourselves."

The social-structural forces supported by a cultural ethos of polyandry create tension between the genders and sustain a gender hierarchy. And this manifests itself in the healing seances. The narratives poignantly express the centrality of gender conflict to their suffering. I see the healing rituals as providing women with a strategic means by which they hold members of their family responsible for any injustices or abusive behavior. This interpretation of spirit possession in the context of gender politics permits an analysis that accommodates the creative aspect of spirit possession.

Spirit possession explicitly questions the very essence of identity, self and personhood in any society. What happens to the person who is de-possessed of herself and

controlled by another spirit? How does one attain a new identity? Does it challenge the notion of Indian self as socio-centric, as constituted by social interactions and the environment?

By taking into consideration the process of spirit possession, I have chartered the recasting of identity of the healers and the recasting of reality in the lives of the sufferers.

Spirit possession can be comprehended analytically as an example of embodiment through which everyday life and action become subjectively meaningful to actors themselves. It is also a critical commentary and evaluation of the trials and tribulations, frustrations and desires, sentiments and feelings of the people concerned. This commentary is an objective evaluation which is articulated and mused through language. As Boddy has pointed out, spirit possession, like anthropology, is a reflexive discourse (1988:22). It is a medium through which one can step outside of one's life world and gain a perspective on it. In this sense, spirit possession is a metacommentary about society, disclosing, orchestrating, revealing what is implicit in it.

APPENDIX

Table 1.1

**POPULATION OF RAJPUT DOMINATED VILLAGE BY CASTES AND HOUSEHOLDS
VILLAGE BISOE**

CASTE	HOUSEHOLD N	M	F
Rajput	14	74	87
Married		34	43
Unmarried		40	44
Bajgi	6	34	36
Married		15	19
Unmarried		19	17
Dom/Kolta	3	19	16
Married		10	7
Unmarried		9	9
Total	23	127	139
Married	23	59	69
Unmarried		68	70

Table 1.2

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION BY GENERATIONS, VILLAGE BISOE IN 1993

No. of generations in households	%	N
one generation	-	-
two generations	30.4	7
three generations	60.9	14
four generations	8.6	2
	99.9	23

Table 1.3

DISTRIBUTION OF MARITAL ARRANGEMENTS IN 1993
VILLAGE BISOE

	%	N of marriages
Monogamy	39	15
Simple fraternal polyandry	7	3
Fraternal Polygynandry	38	14
Polygyny	15	6
Total number of couples = 38		

Table 1.4

**MEN'S AND WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF MARRIAGE
VILLAGE BISOE**

	M	F
MONOGAMY		
N	15	15
%	25.4	21.7
SIMPLE FRATERNAL POLYANDRY		
N	8	3
%	13.6	4.4
FRATERNAL POLYGYNANDRY		
N	30	37
%	50.09	53.6
POLYGyny		
N	6	14
%	10.2	20.3

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